

## **'L'AMOUR N'EXISTE PAS': 'LIGHTS OFF' ON PEDRO COSTA**



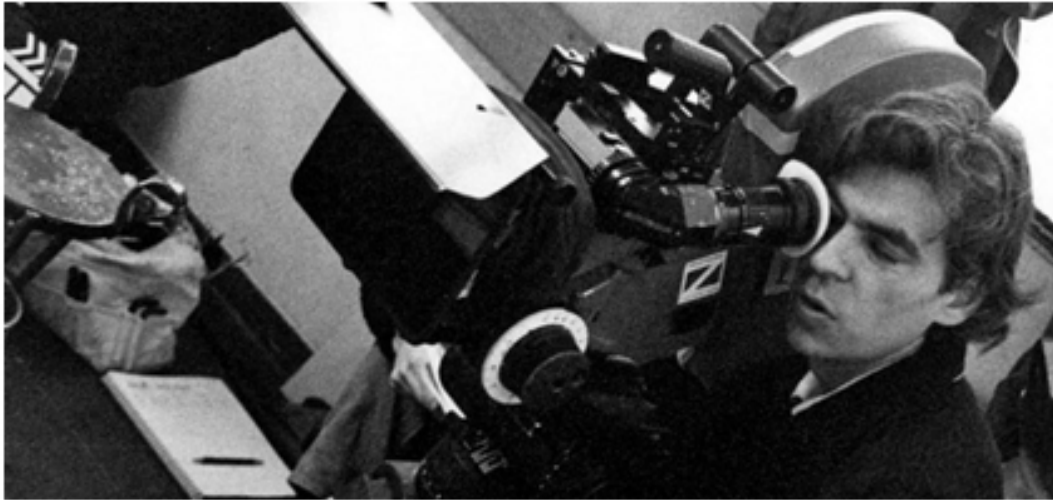
*'Je voudrais que le lecteur ne crût rien sur parole et sans l'avoir vérifié, et qu'il se méfiât de tout, même de cet itinéraire. Croire sur parole est souvent commode en politique ou en morale, mais dans les arts c'est le grand chemin de l'ennui'* (Stendhal, Promenades dans Rome, 25 Janvier 1828)

**On the occasion of University of Cambridge's CRASSH conference: *Filming Transnational Interiors* in September last year, Portuguese film director Pedro Costa was invited to present his pivotal film NO QUARTO DA VANDA (IN VANDA'S ROOM 2000) at the Cambridge Arts Picture House. Irrupting onto the film scene with the visually mesmerising and oneiric O SANGUE (BLOOD 1989), Costa's artistic vision enmeshed with the life and, eventually, the death of Fontainhas, the**

**neighbourhood in the outskirts of Lisbon, now no more. The humanistic poetic of his camera-"I" resonated through the suggestive walls of Trinity College's The Old Guest Room in our conversation about aspects of the aesthetic and thematic preoccupations undercurrent in O SANGUE, and The Fontainhas Trilogy, OSSOS (BONES 1997), IN VANDA'S ROOM and JUVENTUDE EM MARCHA (COLOSSAL YOUTH 2006).**

Loreta Gandolfi: What is cinema, for you?

Pedro Costa: You shouldn't ask me.... for me, it is still a way of confronting some things that I am not brave enough to confront in real life. So in films I can do things that... that I am a bit weak at. And this confrontation is always with reality, so I would say that films are always a way of not avoiding some very, very difficult problems, as you see in most of the films, even the film that I gave you now, NE CHANGE RIEN (2009), which is just apparently a musical film about music. It is really a film about the courage of singing, for instance, a courage I don't have, like singing in the street, as one should probably do, sometimes (laughs).



L: You work with digital cameras, yet you strike me as a person whose sensibility, and not just the cinematic-artistic, is nostalgically rooted in the early days of cinematic practice.

You mentioned having attended a school of photography - watching *COLOSSAL YOUTH* (2006) and *IN VANDA'S ROOM* (2000) in particular, I wondered how you relate yourself to it. Why cinema rather than photography; what is it that, at an expressive level, cinema gives you?

C: The course in photography was a rather short one, and what I wanted to learn was a bit of the technical aspects. I did a Film School (course) too, and one of the reasons to get into that school was to learn the practical side of these things, about the different cameras, film stock, or how to edit a film in the old ways, and so on. I like things of this kind - this is because somewhere in my head I believe that that the films I admire were a little bit made like that, people were very handy-crafted. Like Rohmer, for instance, and also Jean Rouch; even the classic Americans, like John Ford, I think he knew a lot about lenses for instance. I did not want to be a photographer, I cannot be a photographer - it is one of the most difficult jobs.

L: I find that your cinema is charged with the statuary attribute of photography.





NO QUARTO DA VANDA



JUVENTUDE EM MARCHA

C: I am not sure... if you stop, it doesn't work. I could not be a photographer. It is really difficult to have this kind of freedom – I am talking about the really big artists of photography – in my case, I can almost only photograph with film or video when there is the human being. If there is nothing, or if there is the so-called nature, like just landscapes, I feel like an idiot.

L: This idea in some respect reminds me of François Truffaut when he said he was not interested in places, only in people.

C: I think in my case it has to do with this idea of fight or confrontation with reality... and for me, we lost so many things I think - humanity -and one of the things that is lost forever is our relation to, not even to one another, but for instance to the world, to the sea, trees, clouds. I think in life in general it was different, and in art it was really different, because again, for example, in Ford's films you see that a man is not more important than a mountain, a cup of coffee, the horse, everything is the same in the film. Apparently he was a complex man - in his films there is this equal status of things, there was a relation between things and forms. The form of a word, of a man or a woman, their form was not more important than the bigger form, of everything. Some of these guys were religious, others had strong political convictions. That is lost today - for me, all of that is lost. When I stand in front of a mountain, or a river, something very beautiful, the sun coming down, the shadows and that stuff, I say no, because it is too easy; and everybody does it, just the youngest inexperienced person in the business will do a lovely shot and then will put a little bit of Beethoven and 'it will be great'. It is no use doing that again, and again, and again, because that relation is lost, and that is bad. It comes like a bad photograph inside the film moment, and so the person will say 'Look, I am also an artist, not just a movie-maker.' So it is about this kind of relations, it is more complex. It is not just movement, not just time, it is everything. But for me if there is no one in that shot, I ask myself 'how can I be critical, how can I be and how can I hide myself in that shot?' I cannot see a way, because I don't know how to face a mountain, or a forest, I have no relation to these kind of things.

L: Earlier you talked about the idea of confrontations: from the outset *O SANGUE* (1989) spells out its thematic embedment in the confrontation between generations: between Vicente (Pedro Hestnes) and his father (Canto e Castro), and little Nino (Nuno Ferreira) – relationships embedded in images that I found strongly evocative of the painful, complex familial relationships in Bergman's *WILD STRAWBERRIES* (1957) and *THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY* (1961).





The continuous interplay between present/absent fathers and mothers, and the constant presence of surrogate parental figures, made me wonder what are fathers in your cinema, and mothers? In *O SANGUE* the father tells Vicente to tell Nino he is dead, and later on Nino questions Vicente about the durability of their fraternal ties. The complexity of such a motif shows in *OSSOS* (1997) with the relation between mothers and daughters as well as between the father (Nuno Vaz) and his son; it is in *COLOSSAL YOUTH* where Ventura (Ventura), the protagonist, is the biological father of several children, if I understand correctly, but we never get to properly understand what kind of father he is to them. In *IN VANDA'S ROOM* there is a significant interaction between daughter and mother, at some point movingly remarked by a friend who tells Vanda (Vanda Duarte) with regret 'For me too, there is no one like my mother. You only have one mother, you can call anybody father. That is why I left – so I would not hurt her more': here I felt that the Mother's figure fills the epidermis of the film.



#### NO QUARTO DA VANDA

So, what I saw emerging powerfully in these films as a persistent and undercurrent preoccupation is the rapport one has with his/her father and/or mother as well as between parents and their offspring, which seems to be founding of the characters' emotive texture.

C: Even if I try, more and more, to avoid biographical things from me, probably some things do come from me thus, from my own family, my own relation with father and mother – and perhaps this is not very interesting, but because I was living more or less alone, apart from family, very early, very soon, very violently alone, probably this has to do a little bit with that. So, that explains a little bit the first films; and then I probably searched for a substitute for a family, and I found that probably, in that community, perhaps in some people, in that neighbourhood that I found which was and is a very big family, very violent also, very complex. Yet, there, it was possible to see that there were very strong ties, and now it is over also. COLOSSAL YOUTH is a little bit about that: he (Ventura) is the father of all of them and none, and he tries to find out whether one is ok, another is happy, and fine... I don't know how the idea came... it came from me, but it also came from the actor – well, he is not an actor. He has the stature, he has the *physique*,



and it is real, he was one of the first men, one of the founders of that place, one of the first who built the house, he was one of the first to come from Cabo Verde (Cape Verde), Africa, and so he is a kind of father, one of the father-pioneers. And I always liked these kinds of stories in films, so it is good to have a figure like him... and at the same time he is also a very, very sad man. He is one of the pioneers, but he is also a guy who failed, became a bit strange and crazy because he worked too much for nothing, and accidents, and alcohol, a classic trope of this class, so there is this double side. But, again, even in a simple love story I cannot see how to avoid these kinds of stories and things, because everything goes back to *mama*... 'I dismembered Mama' is a film I would really like to do( laughs)

L: The initial shots in COLOSSAL YOUTH gave me the impression I was not dealing with a film, or to put it differently, surely there was a camera, but one filming a segment of a stage, a sort of theatre-stage-cinema. This is a unique feeling I got from this film only. Did you have at all this impression when you watched them?









#### JUVENTUDE EM MARCHA

C: No one ever told me that, but it is possible. I don't know... well, with *IN VANDA'S ROOM* I had that impression, and with *COLOSSAL YOUTH* also... but I never watch the dailies, and today one doesn't really do that, because so many shoot in digital and what you see is almost what you will have, you are seeing the film already. I also don't watch them because I don't want to correct things. I prefer to move on and if something isn't right, I am sure I will go back to that, because I have time for it. In time, if something is not quite right, I will say 'Let's do it again'. But in *IN VANDA'S ROOM* I shoot all the film because I knew more or less what I had, but it was all difficult once I got to the editing stage. It was funny because I had just an idea, not really rules or principles, but just an idea about how to build a film. I started imagining -more than that, even - in fact, confirming that the room, Vanda's room, and the house, because it is a house of women, it is very much like theatre. Everything has to do with theatre and when we are with the boys, it is more like film, more like film was in the past. The boys are more... more like *poseurs* they assume some positions. Every time I see the boys sitting down, putting their hair, trying to think I see James Dean, James Mason, Gary Cooper...



#### NO QUARTO DA VANDA

C: I don't know... I also say this because I was more comfortable with the boys, and this comes I think from the difference between sexes which is one of the most important things in the cinema I was formed with, from Hollywood, classical Hollywood films, where it is as simple as 'men are men, and women are women', here synthesized - a simple idea of gender differences. When they meet it is great, or it is not. But this is the story, so the construction, the building of these meetings is in every American film - that meeting or the separation. But the difference is very clear in the characters and their characterisation, in everything. And IN VANDA'S ROOM, because of a special thing, heroin, which in particular makes one a bit, let's say... non-sexual - rarely, or not at all does one have that desire: one has other desires, another fantasy, indeed fantasies, but not really the concretisation of these fantasies. So, perhaps because of the drugs, one can see this more clearly. I saw it IN VANDA'S ROOM - the boys and the girls, they avoid each other. Somewhere in the film, also, one of the girls, Vanda's sister, Zita (Zita Duarte), was really very radical in that, she didn't want... (I know this is personal conversation between me and her)... she did not want a man, never. She was young, she was... she died. She was twenty three and really beautiful, very gifted in lots of ways, but I could see there was a refusal, and a strange refusal. It came from drugs perhaps, from a lot of this violence and things... but, I think it expanded to the film; there is a sort of separation in the film, which is very clear to me, this separation. In fact, the boy is expelled from the girls' world; he is there, he talks, he comes to cry, a little bit, makes his poetry, then says 'Ah, I am so sad, I am...' and Vanda says 'No, no, no, this is not the truth, this is our life, you have to face it', and then she goes away. So... actually it is a funny story, because this is the scene - and I had prepared the scene, we did a lot of takes - with



the idea that Vanda was in bed, listening, eyes closed. We are not sure if she is sleeping, and then she talks, and she sleeps (perhaps?), she hears the boy... the idea was that the boy would talk and she would listen staying in bed like that silently. And then it was on that scene, on that take, that I told Vanda to leave, because I thought something was happening. He was mourning, and she was serious, and so she couldn't stand in that shot. So she got off, and said something which was not planned, she said 'Listen, I am off, and I don't want to hear you no more'. Afterwards she told me 'if you did not tell me to leave, I would have had the same idea, I cannot stand this kind of creep' – that's what she said. So, at that point we don't know if she is acting, when she said 'this creep', about the real boy or the situation, e.g., 'I don't like men who are so'. Thus, I have the impression that in this film women and girls are more in theatre: for me, they speak louder. In general, all the girls I know speak louder, while the boys I know are a little bit more open, less obscure, and less vague

L: What you have just said is interesting if I think about the portraits of the relations between women and men that you have been filming since *O SANGUE* (1989). In this film, for instance, I found there emerged an unsettling quality to the relation between Vicente and Clara. Despite the evident caring attitude towards her, Vicente also conveyed some sort of passivity and distance.



When three quarters in there is a passionate encounter, it is through Clara's initiative that this happens, and after all it remains partially thwarted, as he remains unmoved, his all body statically lifeless.



I then think of *COLOSSAL YOUTH* which begins with Clotilde (Isabel Cardoso) threatening Ventura verbally and with a knife in her hands directed at him while departing from him.



In OSSOS (1997) there is this relationship, that as it transpires, isn't any longer, between the newly born infant's father (Nuno Vaz) and his (the infant's) mother (Mariya Lipkina).



Hence, my impression that, one film after the other, I was watching a cinema of failed relationships. Having said so, this impression was less so strong in O SANGUE, because it is a film that could easily

be, I think, all but 'just' a dream. The atmosphere is so oneiric throughout, and the eventual resolution of the (Oedipal) 'romance's trajectory at the end could easily be 'unreal', as unreal as those in the classic Hollywood American films you earlier mentioned in relation to gender representation, which end, most often than not, would end with the staging of an idyllic union. Do you think that like the confrontation between parents and offspring and vice versa, the idea of failed relationships might be regarded as another recurring thematic preoccupation informing also romantic relations?

C: I am not sure, I don't really analyse this, I try not to think about it too much... I don't want to go there. I am unlike the other filmmakers, those who stage 'romanticism' everywhere. Again it is like the landscape story, you can always do that kind of thing, and you can always reverse the romanticism, make it very dark.

L: Yes, sure, I understand that you don't do that, but what I wondered while watching those films was whether you have a defined vision around this question?

C: For instance, OSSOS was a film where apparently romanticism and love were a little bit absent - in fact I knew it would be absent. Well, OSSOS is a film made as a copy of some of Chaplin's films.

L: OSSOS is?

C: It is the same situation. I say Chaplin in general, I put Chaplin as our very father, but there were also during his same time a few others, three or four, filmmakers less known who did the same thing - it is always a little community, the village, the barber, the little shop... also it is a bit that kind of world, that neighbourhood, and then it is a boy and a child in the streets begging, and then there are dogs, and cars going very fast, and then, the women, there are women around these figures. Love or that kind of affection is a little bit absent, in the way in which it is absent in some of Chaplin's films. OSSOS is a very cruel film, violent, and what happened in it was in part conscious, and in part unconscious... I had just this very simple story of a baby being exchanged - everybody wanted the baby, the baby may be almost dead, and then reborn. But almost all the people who circulate around him could be father and mother, and sometimes the father is more the girl than the boy, and as such he is much more of a mother than a father to the baby. So again, for the sexes there is this kind of - I don't know how, but it happened - asexuality in the film, because for me in the middle of the film, the faces of the people... it becomes very trans-something ....

L: When I watched the film I found what did strike me in the first sequence was how, through details like Vanda Duarte's hairstyle and so the baby's father's hairstyle, and the particular angles from which both are initially seen - whether from the back, the profile and front - I felt confused by the fact I was failing to understand who was who, and that took me by surprise.







OSSOS

C: When I realised that I was...

L: Merging the characters?

C: Not merging. When I saw that I was... – well I did not rationalise that – I said that we should go even more into this kind of almost hypnotic route. It is interesting, a film with these kinds of situations is not new really - everybody has done that, that kind of story, this kind of problematic. But in this way perhaps it was a little bit different because the father became really a mother – with everything feminine in him as a person also – to the newly born.

L: There is a moment when he is holding him when one get the impression of looking at a painting *Madonna con bambino*



C: To everybody in the crew, even the girls, it was obvious that the boy was much more... perfect - in a way they felt they could not do. There is a shot where the nurse picks up the baby, and after the take, she said 'I can never do this the way he does it. He knows how to hold a baby'.



Charlie Chaplin knew how to hold a baby, and that's magical; and when a boy can hold a baby in a film, it is great. So I had this perfect situation where the boy became a mother with beard... and it works, it works. And these girls became very masculine. I am not saying there is not a kind of

hardness, toughness in their faces, and they are all very strong girls, but suddenly they all became the opposite of that gentleness, of that femininity.



So it worked and it even became funny; with talked about this during the shooting, and the crew was not getting it, and asked 'so now, what is she, who is this girl, with this hair and where is she going, and where is the baby'. So, the baby got lost in this dance of faces. I like about this film that the sexes merge

L: While watching OSSOS I also kept wondering what was the relationship between this father and his son. Initially it seems as if the father brings this vulnerable innocent into the streets with him as a cheap expedient to beg on people's good heart and give him money, money he straight away spends into drinking.



While I ask this, I also should say that, overall, the impression I gather from the films we are discussing is that you don't decide... your cinema does not try to constrict in any way the continuous flowing of life in its so many varied manifestations, instead it seems to emphasise its forever-in-progress nature, in a *moto perpetuo*, and this mirrors the flows in the emotivity of its inhabitants.

Yet, in *OSSOS*, I could not help trying to figure out things between the father and his son; I said to myself 'it is not clear to me what this guy feels for his son: at points they look like a *Madonna con bambino*, but in another occasion, after having slept with a girl, he asks her 'how much will you give me for the child?'

C: I can tell you that one of the successes of the film for me and the reasons why it did more or less the way it did was because of this boy especially. I found him in the streets; he was a junkie, more or less sleeping in the streets. I found him one day and I proposed to him to play in a film. He thought



that I was a cop. Thus, I had to go back to him because he was very suspicious, and then we began a kind of nice relationship, and became, I think, friends. I am telling you this because he disappeared after the film, completely. It was not only me, other people in the crew liked him - he is a bit like in the film, very gentle, a little bit passive, always a little bit down, but not a bad boy

L: He was not a bad boy...

C: I thought he was a poetic boy, and it was not only his figure that I liked, but things he told me. He told me two or three things that could make hundred films. He made this one – not a script that I had. Firstly, he asked me the title of the film, of course; I told him I thought I was going to call it OSSOS, which means, bones. And he said, I see, that is the first thing that people see in a poor guy, in a poor person. And that was not a thing I had thought, but it is so obvious really.

L: As when takes off his shirt and the camera from behind evidences all his bones?



C: I did not have in mind that; the idea came when I was reading the poems of a German poet I like, and that word came about quite a few times in his poems. Then, the place where we were in this neighbourhood, you know bones are very tough and at the same time it is dust... and death also. But the first thing he said was a very poetic thing. Then, we had to rehearse with a baby and he clearly had problems because of the drugs, he was many times a day injecting himself with a dose, so it was very difficult to shoot a scene when he was injecting in the bathroom. So, there was a slight fear for all of us that when he had the baby something could happen. If it was a close-up it was ok, but otherwise we had three or four guys in suspense. But what he told me when I said 'you'll be in this film with a baby, for a long time with him, and perhaps you'll want to sell him, or perhaps you'll want to kill him, or perhaps abandon him, I don't really know, we'll see' was 'Ok, but I don't know... when I have this baby I feel weaker than the baby, when I have him in my arms I feel much weaker than the baby.'



And this made the film, of course; he felt it, so perhaps this in an answer, I don't know. It came because I saw lots of things I did not understand in this place. If you go to India, for example, people say, one can experience things that are described at times as the end of the world, the apocalypse; but they come and they go. If you stay you will have to see things, and whilst wondering how certain things can happen, then you will be angry, and then angry against yourself, angry against your class and the world, and then you will see something else, and there comes a point when you say 'that's why, I understand a little bit now' and then you accept some things, you accept some awful things. That's what I was telling you about the potential for sordid things behind the doors - I saw a lot of extremely difficult things. It is not because they are bad people, it is not because of the witches and the devil; I think it is because of something else, because of money, and why this evil thing called money got to this point - the way that money instils relationships, the way in which we decided to organize ourselves. So, I don't know about love, really. I did one film about love, well not about love, but where love is present, completely, absolutely, forever, and in the strongest possible way ever. It is the film I made with Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet. Because they are the people that I knew were in love, always, every microsecond of their lives. And the most amazing thing is that they could be in love with each other and everything and that makes them the filmmakers that they are, and really classic, in the sense I was earlier talking of John Ford, I mean, their films. They lived a state of permanently loving state, and more than that, exaltation - they were always very exalted about things, very intense. And that simple film I thought I was going to make - WHERE DOES YOUR HIDDEN SMILE LIE?(2001) - a didactic film about filmmaking, about editing another film called SICILIA (1999), and about them, because they were the filmmakers that they are... they are a couple - people say Straub - but it is two of them. And so I succeeded in doing a romantic film, and there is perhaps not any other, well, there is perhaps first Chaplin's CITY LIGHTS (1931), but then mine is the second most romantic film ever made. I take money bets... because it is! It has a happy end. But that's enough. I don't want to deal any more with love, as I don't know... I don't know about love - there is a degree of fakery when you talk about love in films that is for me unbearable, you begin making a monkey of people and feelings, it is really unbearable, nowadays especially.

L: According to what you just said, the only film in which there is a love story you haven't had difficulty in describing is because you encountered it, you have been standing face to face with an experience of love that you recognised as authentic.

C: Yes, of course.

L: while in your other films you found yourself in front of realities where...

C: *L'amour n'existe pas!* There is a title of a film by Maurice Pialat *L'AMOUR EXISTE* (1960), a very nice film actually... but yes, my experience is that love does not exist. This is not coming from me, this is what I saw. Sure, there are in films sometimes these things, one can feel in films, in a scene sometimes, when somebody looks at something... but in general, there is no love in that place, unfortunately that's the truth. I was very much attacked when the film *IN VANDA'S ROOM* came out on that basis, because they (the characters) seemed too full of hate, not rebellious, but full of something very... deadly. The attack came on the very basis that nobody can approach them, not even you (referred to me), the director, and said 'they have no joy, appetite for life. Those people are not like that' because, they said, 'these people, Africans, are not like that, they are singing and dancing all the time, and they have parties and couscous.'

L: Rather ludicrous comments

P: Yes, a little bit, but that's what people expect in films, that's what they want to see, that's what they offer them in films - if there is a Black guy there will be some funky stuff; if you have drugs you will have the camera like this – a Dutch angle for example; if there is a junkie, he will kill his grandmother for twenty pounds to buy heroine. So if you see a junkie who talks perfectly sanely about mother, father, the neighbourhood, memories and seems very focused, if you see African people who are suffering the same pain that white people suffer in all the sad white films, then...so I was attacked because of this. Or, otherwise attacks came on the basis that the film was 'too' beautiful, whilst as they say, there aren't/cannot be 'too' beautiful things in places like that.

L: This is rather out of the context of this discussion, but well, I thought that comments as such could be 'made up' for the sake of humour in films only – I am thinking of Milos Forman's *AMADEUS* (1984) when the Emperor Joseph II (Jeffrey Jones) says to Mozart (Tom Hulce): 'There are simply too many notes, that's all. Just cut a few and it will be perfect!'

To watch *IN VANDA'S ROOM* was a very unique experience for me, because while the film depicts a reality that is objectively very difficult, simultaneously I developed an awareness, step-by-step, of the fact that you avoid all the strategies that often cinema uses so to satisfy and create pleasure for the person who will come and watch the film. My impression is that you do what pleases you - there is a love that emerges from your films, one that I rationalised as the one you must feel/have when you are there and do these takes. And I don't find this a contradiction or form of imagined reality at all (as intended by the critics you above mentioned). There is a beauty despite, and in face of the unexpected story and its events, and notwithstanding what, we might say, the abject cruelty of the reality of these places – I talk of ugliness with reference to the fact that watching those people I find it painful to see them in such circumstances and also I would like to add that I do not mean that I pose the idea of ugliness as an absolute in relation to their condition, as I don't feel in the position to judge what and whose life is 'bad' or 'good'. You have somehow rendered 'normal' these facts of the



real. In some of your films, and in this as well, it appears, as I view it, that the poor, the desperate don't ask for anything, she/he isn't there to beg the spectators. Saying this, I recall that scene in *LADRI DI BICICLETTA* (*BICYCLE THIEVES*, 1948) by Vittorio De Sica, when in the restaurant scene there are close-ups of the little boy (Enzo Staiola) first showing fear or shame he won't be able to eat as the others do, then eating with thorough joy and pride unconcerned with anything but his own little moment of respite in a history of unrest - either in a moment like that or in the circumstances that you depict (with of course the due acknowledgement of differences between De Sica's and your cinema), I see a reality that is totally freed from the 'grammar' of 'how one ought to speak' of realities so called 'different'. What is conveyed and showed is instead beauty, or fragments of it, that come through as naturally intrinsic to any life, rather than alien if not impossible or unrealistic. So, to enter into a little bit more technical discussion of how you render such 'facts' of life and stimulate the reactions, like the one just described amongst the many, let me ask you about one aspect of *mise-en-scène*, namely, the lighting and the colour of your films: you enter in rooms which are fragments of a semi-destroyed house and adopt the natural light of the place or alter it?

C: I don't like electrical light, as you can see – [*we began the interview at around quarter to six under natural light through darkness, as he mentioned he preferred to go by the natural light of the day*] I understand it is an invention we have to live with, but it is not a good thing... it hurts the eyes... you see much more like this, I can see much more not only at this moment but always if we lived with this kind of schedule, we'd live with this light - this light is and will always be until the end of times. With electrical light you can do, can play. I cannot play with this, things you cannot play with make you afraid... I am a Capricorn, I am very serious, I was born very old and I tend to like very old things. Light for me is very old, I am not talking about painting, of course painting is something where you can see how old and precious light is, or new - when I say old is new is the same thing. But recreating this, for instance, is extremely difficult, with electrical lights, even for the great masters, and there are great masters of photography of course, but for me, hating so much money as I hate it, not wanting to have that kind of relations in the film crew that I don't want (any more), being almost alone with the people I am filming, it is really about knowing exactly where the things are every day and how long for and how. So, it is more about patience and observation and non-observation, as one can be distracted, but being there distracted smoking, reading is also work. So, (the light) is always different IN *VANDA'S ROOM*: there was a small window, and when I couldn't shoot with that light, when there was sun and clouds, I brought some mirrors; but this film is very strange, because it is a film that really made itself, it is very magical. It is the only film I made that I felt had a life of its own, and a light of its own even - the light of the film is the light of their faces, of Vanda's and the others, as they have a special energy – and we have – and Zita in particular, she had an incredible light in her face... and this is probably love, of course. Like Straub, he had this special light, an intensity. So sometimes, even in the film about Straub, I don't have light, just like I am seeing you now. If I had a camera now and was a filmmaker from a particular cinema 'family' I would probably say 'no, no, no, let's put some things, do this, change that, add this and that', but I probably belong to the family where I would do something but, most of all, I just would take the materials that life gives me, I would take the chance of doing the shot, so as to say 'We will see something, and perhaps it is not the thing that we wanted to see or expected to see but we will see something,' and I hope... I am hopeful. With *IN VANDA'S ROOM* I was more hopeful than in other films. I thought 'This will be something'. And you know, there was nothing, the camera was just a small size one,

there was no money, there was no faith, there was nothing - and it is the strongest thing I have ever done, and for them too, I think.

L: Do your protagonists watch the films?

C: Since OSSOS the films have been shot in the same area and with the same people; it is not just about the people who are in the films as actors. It's about that place, the community, and they like to see the film(s). Especially with OSSOS, IN VANDA'S ROOM and COLOSSAL YOUTH there was even a sort of progression. In the beginning their responses and criticism has been changing a lot. With COLOSSAL YOUTH we got to a point where they – and here I am talking about a lot of people, but saying this I don't want to sound mystical about it, because there are a lot of people I do not like there and they do not like me, thus this is not like in a slogan like 'we are the world', but it is the community, the idea of it that I like and they like me sometimes, or amongst them, probably a minority - think it is important to have the films. The majority thinks it is fun to have the film, also they also like the idea that 'they have the film' and not the neighbourhood next door – it is like football! In COLOSSAL YOUTH there was a friend of mine from the neighbourhood, a young black guy who said a most beautiful thing - at the end of the film's screening (and this is what I need, as well as I do need the papers, the symposiums... or rather than needing I am interested in them) he got out and turning to Ventura, who was there, said, 'This is amazing, because I see you everyday, Ventura, and I am very angry with you every day because you drink too much, you are a mess. You were 'one of the guys' and now see sometimes the state in which you are, and then, I see you up there, and really this is what we are, and how can you do that?' So that is very important, because it is not that it changes anything in their lives – for example, it doesn't change in the sense I don't give them money, I give them money, of course, they are paid, but their pay is like that of people in real life, not like in films. Nothing changes, they do not have a new house, a new car... they are not stars. But it is not really important, there are other things... but nothing changes in their lives, so apart for this pleasure and joy. And now I have perhaps this kind of pride I feel a little bit, but I always say that if I am shooting there with a camera, lots and lots of times some guys come round, raise their hands and say they have to talk to me, and I stop... so the shots can be stopped – this is not an absolute masterpiece I am doing – I am used to this now. Before I thought I had to bear in mind the concept of money. As you know, in filmmaking one has to constantly think it is about the money, the film stock and respecting schedules. Now it is not so. But for example with IN VANDA'S ROOM and COLOSSAL YOUTH the idea of a schedule as classically conceived was totally gone. I'd stop the shooting if some guys showed up and asked for help, and if I thought my involvement could make a difference I'd stop filming and help resolve their urgency. This for me is what replaces Hollywood. I would be in Hollywood everyday from nine to five, but if not, I prefer to do the things like this, and not imitating Hollywood in ways that do not serve the cause, not for me at least.

L: In the film IN VANDA'S ROOM and COLOSSAL YOUTH one often sees these people who talk and in the room and its background there is a radio on that incessantly goes on while they do not listen to it, or a television, which made me feel 'invaded' by those sounds whilst the characters converse. Is there any comment that you wish(ed) to make in relation to this, or is it simply that each time they have a TV or radio on but do not watch/listen to it?

C: I think that TV is always on, but I don't think it is only there, as it might be a phenomenon everywhere in the world today, also if you go to a restaurant or a coffee shop.

L: do you think that this fastidious – at least I sense it as fastidious – sound contributes to help you, even indirectly, to convey this form of violence intrinsic to the texture of these characters' circumstances?

C: It depends. In the case of Vanda, for instance, sometimes she actually watches the TV, but she only watched things about animals, like when she is watching a crocodile, and cartoons. I joked about that with her and said that this is because she is an animal and a cartoon. She is the best of possible girls, a cartoon and an animal at the same time. She likes watching that and that was the moment when she had her child. So, she was always watching these cartoons. It seemed right not only because it was there, and it would seem fake to take it off or make some sort of camouflage, but it seemed funny to have Ventura and her there and these cartoons going on. But, in general, yes, there is something violent going on

L: With the sounds, strongly, I feel

C: It is not only TV: in those kinds of neighbourhoods, for example in Africa, it is very much like that - people can have very personal and intimate discussions with a lots of things going on around. They speak loud, they are loud; it is a loud world. The meaning of that, I don't know, you can think of lots of things, it is just like it is; it is because they like sound to be loud, because they like certain colours to be bright, and perhaps for the ears it is the same thing. I don't really want to place a meaning on that, but for sure it is difficult. For instance, In Vanda's, there is a scene with the little girl doing homework in the middle of five millions TVs and radios and guys yelling. That is an important scene, I felt it was very important and it felt very nice because she is a little girl, it felt very right. I told her to practice a few more words and to not look at the camera. She did it and the sound is there. When the community saw the film one of the guys in the neighbourhood told me to have found that scene very important. Indeed he specified that that was the most important thing he saw in the three hours and it is twenty seconds, because this shot tells how tough a little girl has to be when she is six, and she has to study and work ten times more than a rich kid or a kid from other neighbourhoods.



L: After COLOSSAL YOUTH, and IN VANDA'S ROOM and OSSOS that at least from the aesthetic values differ neatly from O SANGUE, for example, I wonder how do you relate to it?

C: It was the first film: I think all first films are like this, more or less, and not only first films – if one is a serious and not a pretentious filmmaker, he/she knows it takes a long time to find your own voice, know what you have to say, unless you are a complete genius, and there are some geniuses. But in my case, and for lots of people I guess it is the same - this film was made when I was very young and it was made with that energy, with young people who were my friends, and it has the romanticism, that moment of poetry, the music, the black-and-white. And in my case the films and the people I liked are there, so it was a kind of mass, like being in the church or a cathedral, trying to invoke all the people that I like – you can see Nicholas Ray, Fritz Lang

L: And F.W. Murnau's *SUNRISE* (1927)



And Robert Wiene's *THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI* (1920) too.



C: So, in that sense it is a film... that is a 'film- film', it is a film that comes from cinema, and not really, from reality, let's say. This 'thing' with reality was not yet very obvious for me. I had to go first through this moment of 'film' first, and there are a lot of first films like this. But I like the film... I tend to have some affection for all of them

L: How does Vicente's father die?

C: How? I have no idea.

L: You have no idea... It seems nearly ambiguous... one could think of patricide, just potentially.

C: In the film there is a moment you hear Vicente talking, apparently to his father, with a very low voiceover – he is not in the shot – saying things like 'What are you doing? Why are you not here? Why don't you take care of us?' I can't remember precisely, but, overall, 'Why are you so absent? Where does this money come from? Who is this woman?' It is a lot of things and in the middle of this, there is 'and what about this sickness?' 'I don't believe in this illness.' It is a *cliché* for a son to not trust/disbelief of the weaknesses of the father or mother – even if she or he is going to die, the idea is 'it is not real; I don't believe that you are going to die, don't fool me', and then either, though, die. This happens every day, it happens now. I think it is cancer, or... he stacked a knife !... in the style of 'I dismembered *mama*'! (laughs).

What I wanted to do, and the actors especially, was the scene in the cemetery, when they bury – really, we don't see the body. I wanted to do this scene of a girl and a boy, lovers, burying a body... you see, I thought this could be the ultimate romantic scene, at least for me! The best love scene for me is when the lovers bury someone, at that moment they are really in love.

L: Nino, at the end of the film, leaves on his own, whilst, though, speaking with someone: who does he speak with?

C: I don't know... why do you bug me with these kind of questions?

L: My sense is that the boy defeats his contexts and decides to leave it behind it, as if in his own company he feels stronger and more reassured than with anybody else so far.

C: Who knows, who knows... when you do not see someone in the shot... well, but there is a voice: the voice says 'are you ok?' or 'can you handle things?' He is in a boat, we saw that they live close by the river, so Nino will probably go home, or he will just go up river... it is again a film's thing. It is cinema, imagination a little bit. But the voice says, 'can you handle this, can you do it,?' and then 'If it is ok, I'll just take a nap.' This voice for me was supposed to be, again, a poetic thing. For me, films, if there is this kind of boys, a strong boy, because he is a strong boy and is a great actor in the film, and the film ends like that 'you are in good hands,' that is what I wanted to say. We are in good hands when films end like this. It is nothing more than that.

L: What about the editing process, do you look after it once you have got all the shooting done?

C: In a sense, yes, I am always there, every day, every second, and I decide most of the things, of course, but I never do it alone. I like editing a lot, it is a moment of the film, in fact, I really enjoy,

although it can be very painful sometimes. But it is too tiring and for my films it can take a very long time, for example IN VANDA'S ROOM it was nine months almost.

L: What about the choice of working in digital?

C: Of course it is cheap, but there are for sure many reasons. IN VANDA'S was the first I did with this small camera, and I guess that film was one of the first - Godard had used that in the seventies already, but it was the big video – and then the first guys really were Lars Von Trier and those guys, around 1995. I bought my camera in 1996 and my reasons were that I wanted to change everything in my life - I wanted to change my life. I was perhaps in a bad moment or a good moment, actually, it was a good moment. I felt like it was not working for me to have a kind life where I had six weeks of absolute luxury, with a *chauffeur* picking me up in a car, being chaperoned all day long and asked what I wanted to eat, drink and where/when do you want to put the camera and so on. That was absolutely outside of everything of my life. My life was not like that and I had to go through those moments when people, all worried, apologised 'I am sorry', 'are you feeling ok?', 'are you ok this morning?', 'do you want an aspirin?' So, something was wrong and I was not happy with a shooting apparatus like that. The balance between what was happening behind the camera and what was happening in front of the camera was missing. It was not there for me. Sometimes there was nothing in front of the camera because of me, probably, because I was not strong enough to forget about all that. One has to be very strong to make a film, because one has to forget a lot about... for example, that guy talking to a girl, the assistant, about 'tonight, the party and later,' and I am trying to think about my shot and that guy there is chewing-gumming something... it is a mess. But it is much more than that - it was the money, of course, and how people keep addressing 'where is the money, where is the good money?' So, I saw a lot of more things behind the camera than in front, and in front I was doing what everybody does, more or less, and I wanted to do something else, in a different way. I decide to change more the production side of things because I do not really like to think of these things as art – and when one is shooting a film, in general one thinks about the art of the things or the artistic things – and I really do not like to think about that. The more I avoid these things, the more I know how to do them. It is like the good old man Berthold Brecht who said once that, 'the important part of the job is the organization of the job' or the production side, how one should proceed to do this and that... it is not the artistic. I absolutely agree with that and everything great that happened to me and all the shots in all the scenes in all the films comes from this principle, how do we plan.... and then things will come. It all depends on that. Thus, the small camera was the simple way, very economic. Initially I did not believe in that of course. I was used to the big camera, 35, light, and with a camera like that I thought, 'this will be very poor and small.' Then, slowly, what happened was that neighbourhood, that camera, then Vanda - it cannot be just one camera and an idea, but a camera an idea, a girl, and a boy, and a house and a lot of people, it is this kind of support, like... it is a little bit like desire. You don't desire the girl or the boy, you desire the girl who reminds you of the boy who reminds you of the girl because of a colour, because of some day twenty years ago. And when I was doing the other films, it was that girl, so it is very limited, it is that boy; it is that story. Now, it is all more serious - serious in a good sense – not heavy – simply serious.