

Spectres of Today: The Fractures of History in *Horse Money* (2014)

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Abstract

It took Pedro Costa four feature films to get to *Horse Money* (*Cavalo Dinheiro*, 2014). In *Down to Earth* (*Casa de Lava*, 1994), a Portuguese nurse accompanies an immigrant worker in coma from Lisbon to his homeland, the Cape Verdean island of Fogo. *Bones* (*Ossos*, 1997), *In Vanda's Room* (*No Quarto da Vanda*, 2000), and *Colossal Youth* (*Juventude em Marcha*, 2006) form a trilogy in which a group of Cape Verdean immigrants who lived in the Fontainhas slum becomes central. First travelling to Cape Verde, then getting to know and working with people from that Portuguese ex-colony on the outskirts of Lisbon, Costa's films respond to the need for the voices of those who have been subordinated — the colonised, the discriminated, the exploited — to be articulated and valued. This article analyses the film style of *Horse Money*. It also pays attention to its thematic concerns and connections with other films directed by Costa, particularly those with Ventura, the central character in *Horse Money*. It argues that *Horse Money* tackles spectres haunting contemporary Portuguese society in a radical way, both politically and aesthetically. Its politics of representation are connected with the composition of a fractured history. These fractures emerge from the liberation of Cape Verde from Portuguese colonial domination as well as from the conflicting ruptures and continuities after the 1974 Carnation Revolution. In line with such an approach to these themes, the use of digital video, which has become common in Costa's cinema since *In Vanda's Room*, achieves hauntingly expressive qualities through mise-en-scène and image modulation.

Keywords: Carnation Revolution; Colonialism; Digital cinema; Pedro Costa; Portugal

It took Pedro Costa four feature films, between Portugal and Cape Verde, one in the other, to get to *Horse Money* (*Cavalo Dinheiro*, 2014). In *Down to Earth* (*Casa de Lava*, 1994), a Portuguese nurse accompanies an immigrant worker in coma from Lisbon to his homeland, the Cape Verdean island of Fogo. *Bones* (*Ossos*, 1997), *In Vanda's Room* (*No Quarto da Vanda*, 2000), and *Colossal Youth* (*Juventude em Marcha*, 2006) form a trilogy in which a group of Cape Verdean immigrants who lived in the Fontainhas slum becomes central. First travelling to Cape Verde, then getting to know and working with people from that Portuguese ex-colony on the outskirts of Lisbon, Costa's films respond to the need for the voices of those who have been subordinated — the colonised, the discriminated, the exploited — to be articulated and valued. This article argues that *Horse Money* tackles spectres haunting contemporary Portuguese society in a radical way, both politically and aesthetically. Its politics of representation are connected with the composition of a fractured history that cannot be made whole and that challenges the possibility of a single historical account. These fractures emerge from the liberation of Cape Verde from Portuguese colonial domination as well as the conflicting ruptures and continuities after the 1974 Carnation Revolution, which put an end to the fascist dictatorship of Estado Novo (*New State*). In line with such an approach to these themes, the use of digital video, which has become common in Costa's cinema since *In Vanda's Room*, achieves hauntingly expressive qualities through mise-en-scène and image modulation.

The fractures exposed in these films are really wounds, symptoms of a disease that reveal a history that can no longer be thought of as single and simple. It is consequently connected with historiography, the writing of history, that is to say, the acknowledgement of the history of colonialism as cracked or disrupted by the presence and discourse of those who were colonised. Such fracturing entails a new way of recounting history, one that

incorporates voices that have been ignored or erased. This assumes the importance of the real conditions in which discourse is produced, instead of concentrating on discursive textures or the intricacies of theorisation alone. To Gayatri Spivak's question "Can the subaltern speak?", Fernando Coronil (see 1994) and other scholars have answered that they have always spoken, but few were willing to listen. It may be argued that paying attention to their speech requires that the concept of the subaltern, key in postcolonial studies, is emptied and that to insist on its use is to leave the relations of subordination, subservience and dependence, which are the essence of colonial tyranny, untouched. *Subaltern* seems more fixed (see Sarker 2016 for an argument along these lines in favour of using "subalternised"). For this reason, the term *subordinated* that I have already used is arguably more appropriate, because it characterises these people and their situation through the process of what was and is done to them, the action of subordinating. Moreover, the unwillingness to listen to the subordinated is a result of relations that persist, in which those who have been colonised, discriminated, and exploited are seen as lacking human subjectivity as well as having no capacity to listen and nothing to say. Their place as dominated and subordinated is to be told what to do and simply to obey. They are the "*sans-part*", those with no voice and no share in the larger community, about whom Jacques Rancière has written (see 1999, p. 9). Such people are not recognised as political or social agents because their existence is basically erased. For Rancière, their gain of political participation depends on asserting their existence as well as "bringing off of the equality of anyone or everyone" (Rancière, 1999, p. 61). The French philosopher's claim that this equality is the essence of politics opens the door to a political interpretation of Costa's cinema (see, e.g., Rancière, 2012). His film projects post-*Bones* arise from a collective work in which this community of people is the heart, creating spaces for insubordination by making them equal, their presences visible and their voices audible. The films directed by Costa about immigrants from Cape Verde to Portugal show that, because of the historical conditioning of colonialism, they have spoken mainly among themselves in Cape Verdean creole. Most of the times, in *Horse Money*, they murmur, their muffled voices revealing that talking is still kept in secret, perhaps intimate. They speak within a community with a shared history that is also made of particular life stories; a community that is also somehow open, as demonstrated by the filmmaker's integration in it.

The April Revolution of 1974 in Portugal marked the beginning of the end of colonial rule, but it was not taken far enough to counter the racial hierarchies and power relations ingrained by the colonial domination of Portuguese imperialism. These hierarchical relations manifest themselves in economic and social inequalities and keep sustaining an unbalanced power and participation. Commenting on the trajectory of Portugal and other former colonial powers, Fernando Arenas recognises that "the postcolonial challenges faced by them are similar as far as confronting racism in its various manifestations and related socio-economic disparities and inequalities — all powerful legacies of colonialism at large" (2015, p. 361). The spectres haunting Portuguese society today are deeply connected with this state of affairs, most apparent in the social invisibility of black citizens and their still rare participation in political organisations, trade unions, democratic processes, public debates, higher education, and other spheres of public life. But also in the cases of police violence against racial minorities and racialised judicial decisions. A recent turn occurred with the sentences regarding a much publicised case of police officers accused of assaulting six youths from Alto da Cova da Moura, commonly shortened as Cova da Moura, who had been taken into custody on 5 February 2015. Seven of the officers were convicted of assault and

kidnapping with suspended sentences and one with an effective penalty of one year and six months for having a criminal record. Victims received a financial compensation of 70000 euros. Cova da Moura is one of the largest and oldest enclaves of migrant population in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, in the city of Amadora. It has been described as an island, for example in Rui Simões's documentary, *Cova da Moura Island (Ilha da Cova da Moura, 2010)*, thus similar to the islands of Cape Verde. It arose from the spontaneous occupation of private and public land, which began in the late 1940s with the construction of the first tents by small groups of rural immigrants mainly from Cape Verde, but also from Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. Fontainhas, the impoverished quarter demolished in 2005, from where the community seen in *Bones, In Vanda's Room*, and *Colossal Youth* comes from was also situated in Amadora. This community includes Ventura, the central character in *Horse Money*, who appears for the first time in the third film.

Framing the following analysis of *Horse Money* in 2010s Portugal is crucial in order to understand the context in which this film was made. This does not mean that Costa's cinema in general, and this work in particular, is somehow symptomatic of this decade, that it is a simple and direct cultural manifestation of this historical period. That would be a sociological reading that approaches artistic works and elements like any other extra-filmic signs, one that disregards the expressive qualities and poetic resonance of a work of art such as *Horse Money*. This is an important methodological point. *Horse Money* has a context, in fact a context that it does not want to erase, to conceal, or to distance itself from. Yet, in truth, this is not simply an immediate context, but a much larger context that is evoked far beyond immediacy. It reaches to the colonial past and also produces the possibility of a communal future. The analysis that follows incorporates these contextual aspects and it will focus on two subject matters that the film connects: disease and colonialism. Disease is depicted through distinct images of darkness. Colonialism is tackled through moving portraits of grief.

Dark Disease

In the opening scene, Ventura is a prisoner, first almost naked then dressed in patient clothes by a male nurse. His imprisonment and his disease are connected from the start. He roams through caves and gloomy places that resemble crypts, after he is released from prison. He and his friends from Cape Verde were confused during the military and popular uprising, scared of the COPCON - Operational Command of the Continent (see Costa, 2015, par. 3), a military special command created by the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) to protect the democratic process. Costa has explained that around that time Ventura had a "nightmare with birds flying over his shack and so, he ran out of the shack in his underpants and then got lost in the city" and "arrested by the militia" (2016, par. 39). In *Horse Money*, he is suddenly walking the streets of Lisbon at night, as undressed as in the first scene, when he is captured by soldiers and a military tank. This scene gives cinematic form to his unrelenting feeling of being a potential prisoner of the revolution. In the film, he is also a prisoner of history, unable to escape the jail of recurring time. As he makes clear in the scene in the psychiatry office, Ventura thinks he is living in 1974 and that the President of Portugal is General António de Spínola, a far-right figure from the fascist regime who survived the early period of the revolution. After leading an unsuccessful coup on 11 March 1975,

the day that Ventura says he is reliving, Spínola was removed from office. He later organised a political party, the anti-communist Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Portugal (MDLP), with close ties with the Army for the Liberation of Portugal (ELP), an armed group coordinated by ex-member of the fascist political police, PIDE/DGS. These organisations were responsible for numerous bomb attacks and the destruction of left parties' headquarters, particularly labour centres of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP).

This opening rhymes with the ending. When Ventura is discharged from the hospital in the end, the film provides a glimpse of a moment that is mentioned many times and re-enacted once: the knife fight with his friend Joaquim that cost him 93 stitches in the head. The last shot shows a set of knives in a shop window. He approaches the glass, but only his shoes and legs can be discerned in the reflection. The phantom of violence is always present in whatever time he is. Vitalina Varela, the widow of a Cova da Moura resident who came from Cape Verde to bury her dead husband, tells Ventura that he is "on the road to perdition"¹ by staying inside the hospital. However, the film suggests that walking outside will lead him to a similar loss — the loss of what he loves and cares about, but also of himself.

At one point in the conversation between Ventura and the psychiatrist, the doctor asks him: "How did you get lost? Where?" This exchange is about a temporal shift, or haunting, already hinted at in a previous scene in which Ventura is visited by close friends and talks as if the revolutionary process is happening again, once more, or perhaps for the first time. These two questions about him not knowing his whereabouts result in the spacialisation of time. The mise-en-scène and editing choices move him from space to space as if he is shifting from time to time. He is condemned to have neither place nor time. Nevertheless, while repetition, or reliving, governs *Horse Money*, it is also true that it is "a repetition that hopes, if only dimly, to encounter something for the first time, in order to get out of the cycle" (Fujiwara, 2016, p. 3).

Most shots are saturated in darkness, making extensive use of low-key lighting. *Horse Money* turns the Hospital de Santa Maria, Lisbon's main institution for medical and surgical care, into a sombre expressionist setting. The film style accentuates dark areas in the shots, often creating pockets that are pitch black. It is as if the dark of night has devoured the outside and inside of buildings, where people look like ghosts or zombies. The black is deep, a compacted substance where ghosts travel. In the night scenes, the hospital windows are transparent and the dark streets are visible, but faintly discerned. In the day scenes, the same windows are opaque and white, dimming the light from outside. The day becomes another form of night. The dark nocturnal images are an incessant expression of death. The end of life is a recurrent topic of conversation, for instance between Ventura and Vitalina. There is a risk that, if Ventura dies, the stories he carries with him and a significant part of the world passes away with his demise. It is from the night that Ventura emerges time after time to be frightened — for example, when he is stopped by the soldiers and military tank. By the moment when he raises his arms in surrender, he is trembling more than ever. When Vitalina consoles him at night in the hospital courtyard, he gives her two different reasons for the trembling: that it is due to his illness and then that it is caused by the pills he takes every day. The film makes it clear that "living in fear of violence" (Cole, 2015, par.

1. I have translated all quoted dialogue from the printed script, with a few adjustments considering what is actually said in the film (Costa et al., 2016, pp. 5-34).

4) is the root cause for the shivering. This fear is constant and it is sometimes heightened, as in the moment when he is captured.

I have discussed the opening scene, which introduces this atmosphere of fear, but the film actually starts before. Its first images are not of Ventura and his companions or Lisbon, but of the Harlem slums in New York City. The photographs were taken by Jacob Riis, an immigrant from Denmark. Costa calls attention to the deep connections between his photography and the film:

Riis's photographic work is deposited at the Museum of the City of New York, in Harlem, which inventoried the negatives and handled digitization. But I never thought of Jacob Riis as an American photographer, I always saw him as the emigrant he was, brother of those whom he photographed. He has a very moving, very chaplinesque life story, he roamed the streets penniless with a little dog that followed him everywhere... And he wrote, ruminated a lot what he saw, used the images as a complement to write notes about the life of misery in the tenements, the gloomy, overcrowded New York buildings of the day. That is, the photos did not end in themselves, they were a pretext to show reality to the men of power at that time, to denounce and protest. It is a very noble attitude: a photograph, a movie, must continue something. Making a movie just for making a movie shouldn't be enough, should it? (Costa, 2014b, p. 7, trans. mine)

The sequence of shots (fig. 1) that most resembles Riis's photographs comes right after Ventura desperately calls for Vitalina, apparently trying to escape from the hospital. In Riis's photographs and in Costa's shots, the pose of the subjects is identical, both acknowledging the presence of the camera and establishing a bond between those photographed or filmed and the man photographing or filming them. The song "Alto Cutelo" by Os Tubarões is used as a sound bridge between Ventura's shouting and the sequence of shots. The band was one of the most representative in Cape Verdean music in the process of transition towards independence and democracy. "Alto Cutelo" was released in 1976, that is, around the time that Ventura is reliving. The shots are from the inhabitants of Cova da Moura and the lyrics aptly describe their life: "Cheap labour no matter how hard you work / Mate / Cheap labour, shack without light, / Even more cheated than his white brother / Exploited... cheated... exploited..." Little has changed for them in 40 years. Between the photos and the shots there is a continuity that is both historical and artistic, the "everlasting present" as Costa calls it, in the sense that they capture "the tragedy of mankind repeating itself, over and over again" (2015a, par. 50).

Figure 1: *Horse Money*.

Ventura is aware that he is living and reliving this tragedy. This is the reason why he tells the psychiatrist: "I know my sickness." Joaquim, one of his long-time companions, the one who cut his head in the knife fight, replies to a question that Ventura poses during his friends' visitation: "What will those soldiers do to us?" (He is, of course, talking about the soldiers occupying the streets after the 25th of April.) Joaquim says in a lucid tone, preserving the plural from Ventura's question:

Nothing. Our life will still be hard. We'll keep on falling from the third floor. We'll keep on being sliced by the machines. Our head and lungs will continue hurting the same, we'll be burned, go crazy, because of those mould stains in the walls of our houses. We will continue to live and die this way. This is our sickness.

Depictions of ruins also recur throughout *Horse Money* and are the sister images of disease. What Ventura left behind in Cape Verde is now gone or decayed as Vitalina tells him: his house was burglarised, his goats run away, his donkey Fire Mountain Range is dead, his horse Money was torn to pieces by vultures. Since the film gives significance to his horse Money in the title, and the names of his animals reflect the local culture and his material worries, it also lends importance to the image of the horse left in shreds by predators. The scene in which Ventura visits the abandoned building of the construction company where he used to work resonates with these images and meanings. It is also an instance of his wandering around the deindustrialised Portuguese landscape in order to confront the viewer with it. He makes his way through piles of debris, disintegrated structures, and decomposed bodies. He picks up a dead phone and speaks as if he is talking to his past employers. His voice echoes in the emptied space. Later, he comes across with his nephew Benvindo who tells him his own story, just one among other similar stories. One story mirrors all the others. Benvindo has been waiting for his wage for more than 20 years. He had an epileptic seizure. The ambulance came, took him to the hospital and he stayed in a coma for three months. When he got back to the factory to collect payment for his

work, there was no one there: "Everything was in shambles. The engineer had run away with the safe, with the machines, left the firm bankrupt."

To sum up, their life is ruined. They live in a state of permanent sickness. Their disease seems inescapable. This means that the main narrative premise of the film — Ventura being treated in a hospital — is a concrete image of the unhealed violence done unto these subordinated, whose life has been marked by the destructive history of colonialism.

Grievous Colonialism

The centrepiece of the film is a very long scene that takes place inside a lift. It lasts more than 21 minutes. It is in this scene that the intersection between the historical and personal spheres culminate. In the prologue shot to the scene, the lift is surrounded by shady, fleeting figures passing through that create an eerie visual atmosphere. The striking light reflections on the metallic surfaces add to the desolated and cold mood. Yet the words Ventura utters, the stories he evokes, and the gestures he does inside the lift are overwhelmingly touching. The lift becomes a resonating chamber for history, as Ventura shares it with a living statue of an April soldier and two offscreen voices, one from an adult, the other from a child. The scene conjures up a vivid memory of the revolutionary process when the child's voice asks him if he is with the MFA and with the people, if he supports the revolution. His support seems clear, but so does his fear, because he had always lived in subordination to the dominating powers of imperialism and capitalism. The voices reify the exterior forces that are persistently and disturbingly present in Ventura's mind as the marks and echoes of domination and subjugation. Similarly, Amílcar Cabral, one of Africa's foremost anti-colonial leaders, wrote in his influential essayistic speech "The Weapon of Theory" that "the historical process of each of our peoples (or of the human groups of which they are composed) was subjected to the violent action of an exterior factor" (1966, par. 20).

Ventura and his oldest friends were part of the migration flow from the Portuguese colony of Cape Verde to Portugal in the 1960s, which is integral to the historical process of the African peoples subjected to Portuguese colonialism. As Pedro Góis explains, these Cape Verdean workers arrived "as hired laborers" for "the sectors of the economy which at the time were most in need of labor, namely in the civil construction and public works sector, and mainly concentrated in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area" (2008, p. 12). Ventura was an outsider caught up in a revolution for which he could not predict the outcome. Hence his feeling of imprisonment, not as if time has not passed because it has, but as if he still does not know what to make of that historical event, how to live it, how to participate in it, who to be in it. This becomes evident in the moment when the adult's voice claims that he has been locked in that space with Ventura for 38 years, since 1976, the year in which arguably the revolutionary process came to a halt with the approval of a new Constitution of the Portuguese Republic on the 2nd of April. The revolution was also a product of the political and armed struggle against Portuguese colonial oppression. Independence was not simply *given* by Portuguese authorities, but was "the result of a historical dialectic between events in Portugal and the successful campaign of national liberation movements" (Arenas, 2003, p. 66). Indirectly, *Horse Money* also values the fight of Cape Verdeans and other colonised people for self-

determination and self-governance and their active role in the revolutionary process, by placing them as the driving force of the film.

The adult's voice in the scene is identified in the film's printed dialogues as a soldier (see Costa et al., 2016, p. 23). But it cannot be the voice of the white soldier represented as a living statue that we see next to Ventura — a kind of monochromatic painted memorial of what has become the widespread, and innocuous, representation of the revolution. It cannot be that soldier's voice. It is the bass voice of a black man; a voice whose inflexions and intonations turn it into many voices along with the child's voice. The aural layers in this scene are as dense and complex as the visual layers throughout the film. In an essay about *Horse Money*, Rancière meditates on this intricate layering and mentions "the narrativisation of space by the noise of time. A noise of time that is itself multiple. There is the sound of the voices and footsteps of some individuals; there is the story of their life that they tell, revive or reinvent; there is the rumour of History with which their life has been mingled" (Rancière, 2016, p. 2, trans. mine). Near the closing of the scene, the soldier is standing up and Ventura is on the floor saying that he is paying attention, then turning his head according to what he is listening. This adult's voice that comes from another place and another time, but that for Ventura is with him in that space and time, condenses all the stories that the film weaves together as they have been woven in history:

Here the story of the young life is closed. And of the life yet to come. And of all things that will follow. Stay close to me, time will fly. The day will come when we'll be able to accept all of these sufferings. There will be no more fear, nor mystery. You have no destiny, nor horizon, Ventura. You have nothing and you are not. We'll leave this world together and they'll forget us. They'll forget our faces. Your voice will sing no more. This story is not over yet, Ventura. Our sufferings will be joys for all future men. They will say nice things about us. It won't be long before we know why we live and why we suffer. We'll know everything. Everything...

It is between the soldier-statue's silence and the soldier's voice (fig. 2) that a response from Ventura is made possible. In essence, he responds by telling and retelling his story. Accepting instead of denying their sufferings is a way of healing for those who have experienced psychic and social dispossession and dislocation — the marginalised, the abused, the racialised (see Fanon, 2008). Maybe by following this exchange, we, as spectators, can also gather our attention and react to this scene and to the film by recognising how our own story intersects and blends with Ventura's. The lift is a non-place, or a place that can be situated anywhere, which is why an even longer version of this scene, with a few different editing choices, appears in an anthology film on Guimaraes.

Figure 2: *Horse Money*.

Costa's short film for this anthology was grouped with works by his compatriot Manoel de Oliveira, Finnish Aki Kaurismäki, and Spanish Víctor Erice. *Historic Center* (*Centro Historico*, 2012) had been commissioned for the programme of Guimaraes, European Capital of Culture 2012, supported by the European Union. When he was invited, Costa was working on *Horse Money*. So his first reaction was to say that he was tied up with this film project and could not participate. The solution that the inviters proposed was for him to use whatever he was working on. His first reply to this proposal was: "It's an elevator, it's not Guimaraes." (Costa, 2014b). But, cinematically, a lift can be located anywhere. The fact is that this context suggests a new reading for the scene, which appears between an opening sequence in which people call for Ventura at night and a closing sequence in which Ventura dialogues with a boy in the daytime. The relative and constructed connection with Guimaraes adds a historical layer to the film. The city played a significant role in the foundation of Portugal, connected with Afonso Henriques, the first King of Portugal and the Battle of São Mamede in 1128, which ensured the independence of Portugal from the Kingdom of León. Costa's contribution to *Historic Center* is titled "Sweet Exorcist" with a subtitle in Portuguese that has not been translated: "Lamento da Vida Jovem" ("Young Life's Lament"). Ventura is his own exorcist, conjuring up and expelling his inner demons. The untranslated subtitle clarifies what is exorcised and how: his young life in the form of a lament. At the same time, he can be seen as an exorcist of the history of Portugal.

In "Sweet Exorcist", and to the fullest extent in *Horse Money*, Ventura is filmed as an exiled who has "died a thousand deaths". "What's one death more?", asks the soldier's voice. Dying many times, too many to count, generates a feeling of permanent grief. This intense sorrow permeates the film and it is inseparable from the darkness of images, the theme of disease, and the ramifications of colonialism. The association between death, resurrection, grief, and colonialism is made explicit in an intimate scene between Ventura and Vitalina. She is dressed as a doctor, a healer not unlike an exorcist, and murmurs the death certificate of her husband. Ventura lies down like a corpse, then slowly turns his head, raises his knees and torso, and finally seats on the stretcher. Given that the whole scene is about death, his staged resurrection is a sign of resistance against a difficult and exhausting life in which death lurks around every step of the way. She tells him that Cape Verdeans have lived

such a life. He agrees and adds: "There in the land, whites cracked their whip on our backs." The reference to the land evokes his and their belonging to Cape Verde, which is complemented by a description of everyday colonial violence. And Vitalina seems to continue where Ventura has left off, sustaining her low voice while moving necklaces on the table as if she is performing a ritual:

I lowered my face. He attacked my head with his razor blade, slashed my forehead completely. I tore his arm with my knife, paralysed him right there. I picked up an axe to kill him, but my brothers stopped me. The soldiers picked me up, put me in a jeep, and took me to the hospital.

Conclusion: Fractured History

The fractured history detailed in the previous analysis is stylistically shaped in *Horse Money* through a radical use of the expressive tools of digital cinema. Influenced by Stanley Cavell in the foregrounding of automatism in art practice, D. N. Rodowick reminds us that "the basic automatism of electronic imaging was not taking a picture but modulating a signal" (2007, p. 132). The modulation of sound and image in post-production are hallmarks of digital filmmaking. In his discussion of the digital event, Rodowick develops this idea and talks about "the composition of 'elastic' reality" (2007, p. 170). The possibility of separating components and layers is intrinsic to digital elements. Compositing, which always involves modulation, is consequently a practice more common than it may seem in digital film production, because cinema is an audiovisual art form. In other words, digital elements by their very nature are composite since they are based on algorithmic information. And in this sense, digital compositing is not just the process of assembling more than one image to make a single image, but the mere process of making a digital audiovisual composite in the post-production phase. As usual in digital filmmaking, the post-production of *Horse Money* was time-consuming and technically challenging, involving two film companies from Lisbon: Loudness Films for the sound and Irmã Lúcia Visual Effects for the image. But the way Costa connects the heritage of film with digital technologies is unique, as Chris Fujiwara perceptively points out:

Isn't Ventura's trembling — alternation, rhythmic beating, oscillation — also a sign of the movie camera and projector, with their regular alternation between exposure and darkness? A sign, in the face of the unblinking stare of the digital camera, of loyalty to another form of inscribing images, and a vestige of that form in the digital? (2016, p. 2)

As we have seen, the layers of time overlap in *Horse Money* because they are edited and composed together, but human presences never lose concreteness. Edmundo Cordeiro contends that the film presents a "portrait that moves across centuries of Portugal's history and world history, from the Fifteenth Century. It might be better to think of Ventura's portrait as a *landscape*, a mental landscape, a *landscape of time*" (2007, p. 35). When we consider Costa's body of films, this landscape seems to have been built at least from 1994, first in

analog and then in digital, with noticeable aesthetic differences. This is the reason why these filmmaker's comments on *Down to Earth* made in 1995 may be extended to *Horse Money*:

In this film the ellipse begins with the crosses of the Tarrafal cemetery in Cape Verde and ends in the hospital bed of a Cape Verdean worker in Lisbon. This is the work of *mise-en-scène*: groping in the dark, learning the way, and knowing the distance that separates two places where death has shown — and continues to show on a daily basis — its face. (Costa, 2008, par. 8, trans. mine)

This is the “death chain” that Costa has spoken about in interviews and filmed since *Down to Earth* (see Jorge, 2014, p. 45). As Nuno Barradas Jorge concludes: “Further developing the representations of migrants as individuals scared by the oppressive death chain, these recent works link Ventura to both contemporary Portugal and a limbo where ghosts of the past, in both a figurative and literal sense, constantly emerge.” (2014, p. 54). The feature and short films with Ventura — which also include *Tarrafal* (2007), “The Rabbit Hunters” for the anthology film *Memories* (2007), and *Our Man* (*O Nosso Homem*, 2010) — trace multiple stories that transcend him. These stories turned into films have the power to fracture history, because they reveal how the perspective and experiences of some of its most oppressed protagonists has been erased or simply omitted. There is an exchange that gives rise to the films. Ventura and his companions give Costa their stories, bodies, and performances. The director gives them his knowledge of cinema in return. In this process, Ventura and Vitalina have become characters because they have decided to construct them. As Costa explains, this “means that they have stepped outside themselves and they begin to look for a memory of the people they have known, of their pasts. For me, in the best cases, a character is many people concentrated in one body.” (Costa, Neyrat, and Rector, 2009, p. 82, trans. mine). *Horse Money* is built upon Ventura's story, but there are many other stories quite similar to his, with only a few differences.

Given the concrete and historical nature of the filmic elements underlined above, it is a mistake to read Costa's films symbolically. It is possible that this occurs because they are visually and aurally dense and the easiest way to tackle this density may be to project symbolic meanings onto its images and sounds. But that would be a failure of imagination, draining the human matter that these films imaginatively shape. The spellbinding and inscrutable qualities of *Horse Money* can be more productively engaged with by being attentive to what it shows and tells and how. Inês Gil, for example, identifies humility as a quality that the film underlines and a strong Christian atmosphere. Certainly, Christian references abound in the lift scene, in which Ventura prays to the Nazarene and the Virgin Mary. Gil writes that “this sacred atmosphere is only obvious through the aesthetic work of the image that projects the characters onto a space beyond the tangible world” (Gil, 2016, p. 159). In her reading, humility is connected with being uncontaminated by materialistic social tendencies and feelings of dominating power. Such an interpretation makes clear that humility does not have to be construed as a characteristic of those seen as having a low social rank, the subordinated, those who do what they are told by the ruling class. In contrast, the etymology of the word (*humus*) links it with the earth and the ground, with being grounded, which is fitting to describe Ventura and the community around him as well as the camera that films them.

Horse Money is strongly poetic, but not forcibly so. Its poetic composition is rooted in the subject matter, particularly the people, and it is not imposed on it or ornamental. As Rancière observes about the politics of Costa's cinematic forms, they are "not split off from the construction of a social relation or from the realization of a capacity that belongs to everyone" (2012, par. 15). Questions about the embellishment of poverty or the aestheticization of misery are therefore misguided, because the beauty of this film is often terrifying. Costa's cinema is an humanistic art that concentrates on the unseen and unnoticed peripheries of society; and if no beauty is to be found in there, then no humanity as well. Beauty reveals the human depths of these subordinated people. Formalism should not be confused with the delicate forms of an acute sense of empathy. Costa's films are guided by an "empathetic gaze" that "entails a highly self-conscious ethics of representation where subaltern subjects are not only allowed to speak, but are also seen in their full splendour and dignity — in this case mostly marginalized and voiceless poor black men and women" (Arenas, 2015, p. 360). In *Horse Money* this gaze becomes more imaginative than ever in his cinema. The appeal to imagining another Lisbon in the film opens the possibility for the writing of a "counterhistory of a country, the Portugal of the betrayed revolution" (Neyrat, 2010, par. 14). Perhaps "betrayed revolution" is too definitive, as if it is definitely lost, or even abandoned. The democratic gains and longings of the 1974 revolutionary impulse *remain* and its resume seems as imminent as delayed. *Horse Money* places itself as a piece of that which has remained.

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