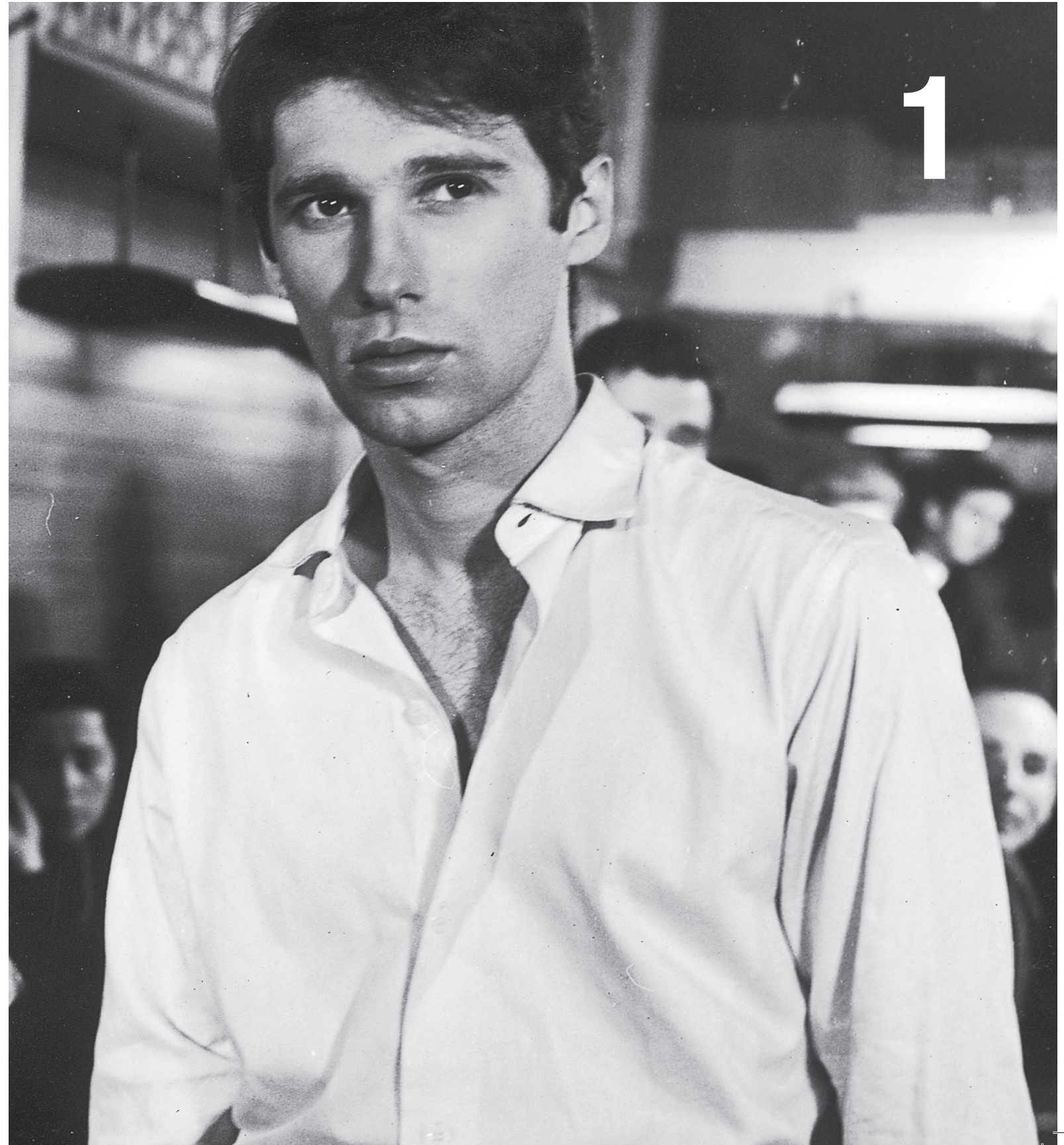


*I even imagined a delirious script, in which, by day, a naïve boy dated a modest girl who worked in an old ammunition factory, but by night everything changed. He was the factory's night watchman; she was a feline thief, dressed in black, gliding across the rooftops, disappearing into wells and caves. He lived in the dark, obsessively chasing her; she made fun of him with her mean laugh. He would never catch that wretched night temptress, who fled through his fingers like a Fantômas or a Batman in skirts.*



**editorial** **1**

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**essays**

---

**skin and stone, body and city** **3**

Abílio Hernandez

**sans souvenirs, sans projets** **11**

Francisco Ferreira

**face to face** **27**

João Mário Grilo

**reviews**

---

**cinematic spaces** **31**

François Penz

**the illegal window** **33**

Luis Urbano

**the city is...** **35**

ARQFILMFEST / JACK

**dossier**

---

**open letter to paulo rocha** **39**

António-Pedro Vasconcelos

**os verdes anos** **41**

Eduardo Prado Coelho

**green valleys** **43**

Paulo Rocha

**coinciding city** **47**

Luis Urbano

**o sangue runs through os verdes anos** **55**

João Rosmaninho

**interview**

---

**taking over the power through criticism and films** **67**

with António-Pedro Vasconcelos, by Luis Urbano

**contributors** **83**

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# hi jack,

JACK was born from the academic research project *Silent Rupture, Intersections between Architecture and Cinema*, Portugal 1960-1974, that set out to explore the overlaps between the production and criticism on architecture and cinema in the Portuguese cultural and political context of those years. But JACK wants to broaden that experience, to go back and forth in time, far and close in place and beyond the academic sphere.

Drawing from a range of diverse disciplinary approaches, JACK will look at how architectural and urban space, real or staged, are fundamental to cinema and the way in which film, in its multiple dimensions, may become a key instrument within the creative process and the perception of architecture. JACK will explore this juxtaposition of filmic discourse and architectural design, to propose a spatial reading of film and a filmic take on architecture, crossing and diluting the boundaries between the two. This is, therefore, a journal in which architecture and cinema are never to be taken separately. In fact, as the aforementioned research project evolved, the belief emerged that a clear boundary between architecture and cinema may not even exist. There's no line, but a borderless yet identifiable territory instead.

Whatever is learned from that common ground where architecture and cinema meet will only potentiate them both in their mutual purpose of generating spaces and places.

In delving into the vast and intriguing topography of such a symbiotic landscape, there will be, however, no attempt to define any limits, for that would create an imposed and artificial conscience of unnecessary outlines. In the end, JACK would like to have a part in the construction of that landscape.

*this is a journal  
in which architecture  
and cinema  
are never to be taken  
separately*





— *Ai Minha Senhora...*

— *Oh Milady...*





# coinciding city



by Luis Urbano

Paulo Rocha's first feature film, *Os Verdes Anos*, premiered in 1963; the following year, François Truffaut directed *La Peau Douce*. This article will focus on the city's central presence in both films, particularly with regard to the opposition between rural and urban space, but also on the way architecture, and some of its interiors, serves the narrative. I will also address some similarities between various aspects of the two films: they share the same producer, António da Cunha Telles; the city of Lisbon plays an important role in both films; the filmmakers' own homes are used as sets, critical to the narrative; the theme revolves around the impossibility of marriage; both films have a tragic ending in a cafe; and both stories are based on newspaper reports. In *Os Verdes Anos*, Paulo Rocha included in the script a story he had read of a maid's murder by a shoemaker, on the Estados Unidos da América Av., where he himself lived; Truffaut used the news of a woman who killed her husband in Rue de la Huchette with the hunting rifle he had given her.

I will start with Truffaut's fourth feature film, shot between October and December of 1963. *La Peau Douce* was both a box office flop and a failure with the critics (Paulo Rocha himself said that he received *La Peau Douce* with great sadness and that Truffaut was *all wrong*). But after almost 50 years of relative obscurity, there was a re-edition in a new 35 mm copy, and the film is now considered one of Truffaut's and the *Nouvelle Vague*'s masterpieces. The synopsis is quite short. A family man, Pierre Lachenay, whose profession as an editor in a literary magazine keeps him constantly on the move, flies to Lisbon, where he will give a lecture on Balzac. In this trip he meets Nicole, a flight attendant who becomes his lover. Pierre's wife finds out about her husband's betrayal, and he ends up leaving her to marry Nicole, who, however, does not share his intentions. Humiliated and alone, he tries to go back to his old life but is killed by his betrayed wife in a cafe he usually goes to.



Filming *La Peau Douce*, François Truffaut, 1964



Filming *Os Verdes Anos*, Paulo Rocha, 1963



In the early stages of the script writing, the city Lachenay travelled to, and where the romance with the flight attendant would start to unfold, was Milan. The location was later replaced, for production reasons, with Lisbon, a decision no doubt influenced by Portuguese producer Cunha Telles. Truffaut's renowned distaste for touristic, picturesque settings is easily noticeable in the film. The shots of the restaurant in Lisbon where the two lovers meet are taken against a backdrop wall and he reduces filming in the outside to a bare minimum: there is only a brief shot of the airport, when Lachenay arrives in Lisbon and is welcomed by António da Cunha Telles himself; we witness his arrival at Hotel Tivoli, on Liberdade Av. with only a brief shot of the hallway; we watch the lovers leaving the restaurant, at the top of Santa Justa Elevator, heading towards the ruins of Convento do Carmo; or strolling in the Travessa das Laranjeiras, with the Bica tram passing behind them, as they head for the hotel.

With the possible exception of the corridor and the hotel lobby it is very likely that all the interiors scenes that take place in Portugal were actually shot in a studio in Paris. Truffaut's choice to display some posters of Portuguese tourist attractions in the backdrop walls of the restaurant (from the Algarve, Douro or Nazaré), and even the typical Barcelos rooster, has more to do with informing the viewer of where the action unfolds than with any desire to show picturesque images of Portugal. There is almost a refusal to show the spaces, or at least to make them easily identifiable. And these are overly confined spaces, as if what lies beyond is more significant than that which one can see. An example is the whole conference sequence, where you just get to see the backstage but not the actual space where Pierre will speak; or the hotel interiors, with a profusion of corridor or elevator scenes; or, still, the nocturnal tour around the city, which is limited to the inside of the taxi.

*La Peau Douce*, François Truffaut, 1964



Perhaps the most impressive and distinctive feature of *La Peau Douce* is this transposition of the narrative to the constant movement in space. It is in a plane trip that Pierre knows Nicole, whose constant flying hinders their meetings; it is in a moving elevator that the first glances take place; it is in motion through the hotel's corridors that we become aware that this secret meeting is going to happen; unable to meet in their apartments, it is almost always inside a car that we see them in Paris.<sup>1</sup> The only place where they find some serenity, the only place where we believe this love to be possible, is a country house where they spend a full day after another of Pierre's conferences. Here they will take the photographs, with a countryside landscape in the background, that will dictate the tragic ending of the film.

Throughout the film, Truffaut's lovers are constantly under the pressure of the events and spaces around them, struggling with the unexpected obstacles and forced paths, which, ultimately, condemn Pierre to his unfortunate fate. The city is hostile to their relationship and pushes them out. This is quite clear in the subway accident that delays his departure to Lisbon; in the indecision about where they can be together in Paris, not wanting to be noticed by Nicole's landlord but feeling discomfort in the vulgarity of using a rented by the hour hotel room; or in the series of incidents that prevent their meeting in the provincial town where Pierre is giving a lecture. Or the scene in which the lovers meet one last time, in the apartment still under construction that Pierre is thinking of buying to begin his new life with Nicole but where he suddenly realises that this is not her will. The apartment, that still has no exterior walls, can be read as a space of hopes and ambitions for the future – it could still become whatever they wished – but also as a prospect of ruin, both his and his family's. It is also a boundary space, suspended over the city, in which they are for the first time above and away the perpetual movement that made their romance possible. The scene ends with Pierre, powerless on the rooftop, watching Nicole resume her place in the bustling city.

---

<sup>1</sup> Maximilian Le Cain, 'Love in Flight: François Truffaut's *La Peau Douce*' in *Senses of Cinema*, issue 33, 2004.





The city is also the place of the impossibility of love in Paulo Rocha's *Os Verdes Anos*, which premiered in November of 1963, when *La Peau Douce* was still in production. The film marks the beginning of the *Novo Cinema* but also the emergence of a new space in Portuguese filmmaking, refocusing on the urban landscape and abandoning the predominantly rural vision that had marked Portuguese culture. From then on the city became a character in itself, like other elements in the script. In *Os Verdes Anos*, behind a disturbing love story between two young adults, there is the story of two provincial newcomers to the big city. Júlio, whose eyes guide the viewer, is coming to Lisbon to live with his uncle and work as a cobbler, but he feels he does not belong in the city. On the day of his arrival he meets Ilda, a maid who works nearby.

In *Os Verdes Anos*, Paulo Rocha films the desolate landscape of a Lisbon under construction, in between two seemingly contradictory spaces: an urban periphery, with its new boulevards and neighbourhoods, where the two main characters work; and a rural periphery, where Júlio lives with his uncle, a place already threatened by the expanding city. The dichotomy between rural and urban areas is conveyed in the very first shots of the film, in a panorama of the countryside with Lisbon in the background. It is a border place, not yet urban, but also no longer rural. This introduction is representative of the conflict depicted in the film: the inability of a country man to adjust to his new life in the city, an inadequacy that marked many other Portuguese who migrated to the cities in search of better living conditions.

The characters in the film play distinct roles in the narrative and represent different levels of integration in urban life. The girl, Ilda, lives fascinated by the new trends in music and fashion, and acts as a mediator between Júlio and the city. With her, Júlio is introduced to the new boulevards, the new university campus, the new airport. His uncle, on the other hand, is the image of a man who has surrendered to the bohemian nightlife and the decadence of the city. In one sequence uncle and nephew confront

*La Peau Douce*, François Truffaut, 1964



*Os Verdes Anos*, Paulo Rocha, 1963



each other at the Texas Bar – later also filmed by Wim Wenders –, and Júlio is saved by an Englishman who takes him through the dark streets and alleys of Lisbon, with both of them ending up in the company of two prostitutes, a scene that earned the Censorship's disapproval and was removed from the film. Ilda and the uncle are quite at ease in their new urban identity but Júlio feels a foreigner in the city and seeks comfort in the safe idea of marriage. Ilda, however, turns him down. Although he is doing his best to fit in he is incapable of dealing with his girlfriend's refusal and ends up killing her.

This apparently innocent way of telling the story deceived the Censorship, and this is the very essence of the silent rupture that this film represents, contrasting with the official films in the way it portrayed the social division in the '60s in Portugal and the conflicts between antagonistic spaces. Parallel to this questioning of the moral values that dominated society at the time, Paulo Rocha also challenged the traditional idea of the city as a gated community, closed on itself, proposing a new vision of urban lived space, showing the periphery, the expansion of the city, the individuality of the characters, the multiplicity of places.

The presence of the city in *Os Verdes Anos*, and the new way in which it is represented, is one of the hallmarks of the Portuguese *Novo Cinema*. Unlike the comedies of the 30s and 40s, where all the characters were part of a tightknit community, the protagonists of Rocha's film are individuals whom the city marginalized. Lisbon is a metaphor for the social imprisonment of Salazar's regime and *the stage of a conflict that is expressed cinematically by the overt segregation of the protagonists, of the spaces and of the city life, portrayed by the Baixa streets, or by the new modern neighbourhoods of Roma Av. and the Estados Unidos da América Av.. In Os Verdes Anos the main characters find themselves in an oppressive city that constantly demeans and marginalizes them, exploiting their vulnerabilities and revealing, at each step, their dominated status.* With the 'new waves' in South America and Europe, which include the work of Truffaut,



*Os Verdes Anos*, Paulo Rocha, 1963



Rocha's film shared the desire to leave the studio and shoot on the street, on the actual places where the action was unfolding, to escape the conventionality of previous cinema, considered too distant from the vast social and cultural changes brought by the sixties.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the architectural interior spaces are also central in both films. In *La Peau Douce*, the remarkable scene in the hotel corridor is particularly emblematic of Truffaut's ability to convey mood and atmosphere through the visual language and the use of space. After the first encounter in the hotel elevator, Pierre walks along the corridor that gives access to the rooms, the camera in soft *plongé*, noting the shoes placed outside the doors – which Truffaut shot in short travellings – a pair of men's shoes here, of a woman's over there, two pairs, side by side, recalling the opening scene on the plane in which Nicole changes shoes behind a curtain, arousing Pierre's desire. The next scene is also exemplary of the use of space. In the dim lighted room, Pierre calls Nicole to ask her out, which she at first refuses but ends up accepting. Pierre's delight is captured through his movement across the room, from one space to another, opening doors and turning all the lights on.

The spaces of both films also share some similarities. First of all because both Rocha and Truffaut use their own apartments as a key element in their films. One can argue that this was the cheaper option and the spaces were available, but it is also possible that they did it because there is a clear autobiographical angle to both films. Rocha is telling the story of a man who, like himself, comes to the capital city and has some trouble fitting in; Truffaut records the end of a marriage, when he, himself, had just gotten divorced. There is also a quasi-theatrical feel to both spaces that can be perceived as a metaphor for cinema itself. In *Os Verdes Anos*, Ilda turns the master bedroom into a stage, as she tries on different dresses of her mistress to dazzle her boyfriend; in *La Peau Douce*, the Lachenay's family room is organized in two levels and has a curious movable partition that, like a stage screen, moves up and down separating the living room from the bedroom.

<sup>2</sup> Tiago Baptista, *A Invenção do Cinema Português*, Tinta da China, 2008, p. 83, 94.

*La Peau Douce*, François Truffaut, 1964

In *Os Verdes Anos* Ilda turns her mistress's room into a *passerelle*, highlighting the cultural differences between herself and Júlio: she, captivated by the charms of city life and the petty bourgeoisie; him, sitting in a small chair, clearly in uncharted territory, fascinated but at the same time disapproving of Ilda's futility. The way Paulo Rocha shoots the different spaces of the scene – the closet, the hallway, the bedroom – is also worth a remark. First, he films the corridor, as if an antechamber of the stage where the action will unfold. At the end of this corridor Ilda opens the curtains to enter the room, and inside, repeats the gesture, only this time, it is the windows that will light up the stage. And this scenic device, the constant opening and closing of curtains, is a metaphor for the cinematic display itself. In this sequence there is also an interesting game of mirrors. We see Ilda's reflection on various occasions, a device that allowed to expand the overly confined space of the room. The position of the camera itself, at times near the ground, shows this desire to widen the visible space, but also the limitations of filming in real places, where sometimes the camera cannot back enough to frame the space of the action.

In *La Peau Douce*, the way Truffaut uses the apartment space is also paradigmatic of how architecture can serve the narrative in cinema. In the house, one goes through the entrance hall and down a flight of stairs to the living room, which is on a lower level than the rest of the house. From that same entrance a small passage leads to the bedroom, which in turn opens to the living room through a window. This peculiar spatial organization is almost always filmed from above, with the characters moving from one level to the other. It is never a quiet space, there is a constant movement of bodies as if it were a theatre stage. In Truffaut's film this spatial metaphor is even more obvious since in the Lachenay family's apartment, the window that separates the bedroom from the living room is a screen, which separates a social space – the room where the family gathers and entertains guests, associated with order within the family –, from a private space – the bedroom where the couple's problems are revealed, and that one



*Os Verdes Anos*, Paulo Rocha, 1963



associates with the disorder of desire, which is, ultimately, the main theme of the film. Finally, one has to mention the curious similarity between the ending of both films. In *Os Verdes Anos*, Júlio, after murdering his girlfriend, who had refused to marry him, breaks the window of the famous Vá-Vá – meeting point to the *Novo Cinema* generation – goes inside and walks down the aisle with blood on his hands, to the astonishment of the restaurant's clients. Only then, when faced with the unexpected audience, does he seem to fully understand what he had done. When he runs outside, he is blocked by a number of cars, the city playing, yet again, the role of an oppressive force. In *La Peau Douce*, we see Franca, Pierre's wife, already aware of her husband's betrayal, speeding through Paris on the way to the restaurant where Pierre usually has lunch. She goes in, shotgun hidden under her raincoat, throws the photographs of Pierre and Nicole on the table and fires. The last shot is a close-up of Franca, and her expression of pain that morphs into a very subtle, enigmatic smile. As if, like Júlio in Vá-Vá, only then she realises the consequences of her crime but at the same time feels liberated for doing what was inevitable.

In these two final scenes there is an almost similar travelling shot at head level of the two characters that follows them along the cafe aisle, bypassing the waiters in their white uniforms, with the camera pulling back as the characters move towards their inexorable end.

One is left to wonder. Had Truffaut seen *Os Verdes Anos* while he was filming in Lisbon? Was he influenced in some way by Paulo Rocha's first film or are these just coincidences? It is not too far fetched to think that, being in Lisbon and sharing the same producer, Truffaut may have been interested in Rocha's film. Either way, it does not really matter. More than establishing whether Rocha influenced Truffaut or not, the coincidences in these films reveal the same willingness to film reality and, most of all, to use the urban and architectural space in an innovative way to tell a story.

## JACK

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