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**Abstract:** Manoel de Oliveira's *Non ou a Vã Glória de Mandar* (1990) is a landmark in Lusophone cinema's revisitation of the history of Portuguese expansion and colonial conflicts. This article aims at analysing the film's political import by extrapolating from Jacques Rancière's meditation on the 'aesthetic regime' and from Manoel de Oliveira's references to Derridean deconstruction. *Non* and Oliveira's filming praxis both exceed and disrupt the filmmaker's personal logocentric and teleological theories of history and cinema.

**Keywords:** Manoel de Oliveira – Portuguese Cinema – Portuguese History – Colonialism – Colonial Wars – Jacques Rancière – Jacques Derrida – Luís de Camões – António Vieira – History and Cinema – Cinema and Literature – Aesthetics and Politics – Aesthetic Regime – Spectrality – Deconstruction

**Resumo:** *Non ou a Vã Glória de Mandar* (1990), de Manoel de Oliveira, é um marco na revisitação da história da expansão e conflitos coloniais portugueses. Este artigo visa analisar a relevância política do filme partindo da teorização de Jacques Rancière relativas ao 'regime estético' e às referências de Manoel de Oliveira à desconstrução derrideana. *Non* e a praxis cinematográfica de Oliveira acabam simultaneamente por exceder e romper com as teorias de cinema e história logocêntricas e teleológicas expressas pessoalmente pelo realizador.

**Palavras-Chave:** Manoel de Oliveira – Cinema português – História de Portugal – Colonialismo – Guerra Colonial – Jacques Rancière – Jacques Derrida – Luís de Camões – António Vieira – História e Cinema – Cinema e Literatura – Estética e Política – Regime Estético – Espectralidade – Desconstrução

An *Apocalypse Now* of philosophical ideals, *Non* is no typical war film, but a work grappling with the concepts of war, history, and empire in their entirety.

Jason Sanders

Fairly recently, Francisco Bethencourt has pointed out that Portuguese contemporary historiography is yet to catch up with art and literature in questioning the imperial mythology, pointing out the 'carácter estruturalmente conservador da historiografia' (2003: 81). It is pertinent to pose the question whether Portuguese cinema accompanies art and literature or contemporary historiography when addressing the imperial imaginary.

Concerning the wars of liberation in the former Portuguese colonies and Portuguese cinema, one had to wait until 1986 (coincidentally the year when Portugal joined the European Economic Community) before the theme was addressed, in the now classic *Um Adeus Português*, by João Botelho. Four years later, Manoel de Oliveira addressed the theme again in *Non ou a Vã Glória de Mandar* (*Non*). The comprehensive historical revisitation which the film addresses cannot however be said to accompany the endeavours undertaken in literature and art in putting in question the Portuguese imperial mythology. The historian Carlos Fabião, when questioned about the vision of the past presented in the film, claims that it has ended up, paradoxically, reiterating the *Estado Novo* discourse through the historical narratives introduced by the main character of the film, Alferes Cabrita (Fabião *et al.* 1991: 172).

As vulnerable as the film may be to such criticism, more or less simplistically formulated, I believe that the real critical concern is not the reiteration of this historical discourse, denied and repudiated from the start via the formula of the 'pedagogia das derrotas' (Fabião *et al.* 1991: 173), which lead the *Comissão Nacional dos Descobrimentos* (officially responsible for celebrating the discoveries, and the producer of official discourse on the matter

during the 1980s and 1990s) to condemn the film's defeatist vision (172). One should rather be wary of the rehabilitation of a 'tempo português' which preserves and reverberates a mythical identity and that precedes and outlasts its specific formulation under the *Estado Novo* regime (Lourenço 2004: 108). What is of concern in the film is the presentation of a historical vision which, by ignoring historical tensions and contradictions, harmonizes differences by, as Richard Rorty would term it, 'going transcendental' (Norris 1985:10). A false opposition is established between the 'dádiva' of fifteenth century discoveries and the expansionist 'conquista', with the inseparability of both being ignored in favour of an equally conservative (if less triumphalist) and depoliticizing teleology.

By juxtaposing the analysis of the film with Oliveira's interviews, the film will be read taking into account the (claimed) shift in perception originated by the Revolution of the Carnations (25 April 1974) without which it could not be thought. The cinematographer's transcendental view of the event as 'inaugurating a new status in the History of the world' (Oliveira 2001) does not 'deconstruct' (to use Bethencourt's term) imperial discourse nor does it inscribe an alternative historical narrative. On the contrary: it is consistent with the mythologizing of the 25 April revolution (and decolonization) (Lourenço 2000: 48-62) and it depoliticizes the revolution and neutralizes the event as yet another 'gift' of the Portuguese to the world, inscribing it within a teleological view of Portuguese expansion, with a 'sentido último que tudo explica', as Lieutenant Cabrita repeatedly puts it. This analysis, however, will attempt to demonstrate how Oliveira's cinematic practice contradicts his teleological and logocentric vision of history and thus renders accessible to the spectator aesthetically and politically affirmative readings. The spectator thus exploits rather than falls victim to the constrained vision of history being represented, operating on selection and exclusion.

In the context of Manoel de Oliveira's work, 1990 is a turning point, since it is the start of the most productive period of his career; Oliveira will film at least one film per year since then. *Non* was exhibited in the Cannes Film Festival, giving continuity to the process of internationalization which the period comprehending the long lasting partnership with producer Paulo Branco, from *Francisca* (1981) to *O Quinto Império* (2004) (Johnson 2007: 39) consolidated. *Non* is also a landmark in that it sees the filmmaker approach Portuguese history and historical figures *per se* for the first time, although the image of Portugal was always very specifically present.<sup>1</sup> It inaugurates a trademark Oliveirian addressing of a eschatological reimagining not only of Portugal, but also, through Portuguese history and figures, of the world.<sup>2</sup> *Non ou a Vã Glória de mandar* anticipates both the extensive discussions on conflict, war, and the possibilities for peace and harmony between civilizations and peoples which are to come in the next films as well as providing an initial addressing of relevant Portuguese historical events and figures such as António Vieira (1608–1697) and D. Sebastião (1554–1578), in this case in articulation with a Portuguese literary and prophetic tradition explicit in the references and the enacting of episodes from the national text *par excellence*, the epic poem *Os Lusíadas* (1572), by Luís de Camões (c. 1524–1580).

*Non* considers the fate and destiny of Portugal using the Colonial Wars (1961–1974), waged between Portugal and the nations under Portuguese colonial rule aspiring to self-determination, as a backdrop. It can be said to place the filmmaker's work and Portuguese society on the same wavelength, although in very Oliveirian terms, as in 1990 Portuguese society was still reflecting on the passage of Portugal from an imperial nation famously 'orgulhosamente só'<sup>3</sup> to a member of the European Economic Community. As a matter of fact, after the Revolution took place, the release of *Benilde, a Virgem Mãe* (1975) adapted from a 1947 play by José Régio, and the adaptation of Camilo Castelo Branco's book *Amor de Perdição* (1978), had brought criticism on Manoel de Oliveira for a lack of political engagement with the

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<sup>1</sup> Through the adaptations of books by Portuguese authors, or through biographical reminiscences which originated films such as *Aniki-Bobó* (1942) or *Viagem ao Princípio do Mundo* (1997), just to offer two examples in very distinct periods.

<sup>2</sup> This vein will be complemented by works so diverse as *Um Filme Falado* (2003), set aboard a Mediterranean ship cruise where a History teacher takes her daughter to visit the remnants of the ancient civilizations while around a table in the ship every night a nationally diverse collection of characters converse harmonically in different languages about their cultural legacies; *Palavra e Utopia* (2000), recording and celebrating the life and work of the Portuguese and Brazilian 17<sup>th</sup> century figure of Father António Vieira; and *O Quinto Império - Ontem como Hoje* (2004), the filmed adaptation of José Régio's 1949 play *El-Rei D. Sebastião* about the eponymous character ill-conceived and immeasurably ambitious plan to expand Christianity and the Portuguese kingdom which resulted in tragedy.

<sup>3</sup> The expression appears in the first dialogue. Cabrita reiterates this notion when claiming that the Portuguese are alone against the *turras* (the independentist fighters in Africa) as once Viriato (Portugal's pre-nation hero) was against the Roman invaders. Portugal is a new Rome that is weak and isolated.

social events of the time and for its 'disengaged' aesthetics.<sup>4</sup>

He visto que las cosas/  
cuando buscan su curso encuentran su vacío  
Federico Garcia Lorca, '1910 (Intermedio)'

Thus wrote Federico Garcia Lorca in New York, more or less about the time young Manoel de Oliveira (now the oldest active filmmaker) was filming and editing his aesthetically groundbreaking *Douro, Faina Fluvial*, released in 1931. This reference aims to draw attention to the longevity of a uniquely prolific career, the vitality of which is certified by a consistently high-quality output which has slowly but surely gained widespread critical recognition and international acclaim. Oliveira's career itself underwent a similarly slow rise. Its first phase is marked by long intervals between films, mostly documentaries, with a resurgence in the years just before the April Revolution (the so called 'Primavera Marcellista', from 1968 to 1974). Because of political and financial reasons, Oliveira could now film more frequently without the constraints of the conservative, reactionary regime of the *Estado Novo*.

I have also begun with a reference to a poem because this essay, among other things, departs from the ways in which he has been perceived as one of the masters of transposing the word into the screen, of bringing words into presence conveying philosophic ideals and a meaning behind and beyond. His ontological view of cinema as a synthesis of all other arts may have played a part in this, as cinema is, according to him, the only art which simulates real life and provides a memory 'histórica ou ficcional' which 'repõe as coisas como se fôra a própria vida' (Cakoff 2005: 57). Writing provides the function of intelligibility while the image provides the flesh to thought and a means to *eidos* (cf Rancière 2007: 46):

Kiarostami falava que a câmara de vídeo lhe permitia filmar com a mesma facilidade que escrevia com uma caneta. [...] Mas nada há com maior riqueza para a tradução de um pensamento ou de um sentimento do que a linguagem escrita, porque não havendo imagem direta (sempre limitada e circunscrita àquilo que se vê), a imagem que a palavra guarda é cativa da letra e sugerida ao pensamento' (Cakoff 2005: 58).

The filmmaker's meditations on cinema as simply an audiovisual means to register theatre (Lopes 2001: 67; Costa 2005: 119) and on '*palavra visual*', after Peter von Bagh had written on the extraordinary capacity of his films to read literature cinematographically (153), have led his work to be seen as 'filmed theatre', where the word takes centre stage. In the case of *Non*, which is presented by Oliveira in a testimony in the DVD edition of the film (Oliveira 2001) as the negative (but no less metaphysically infused) supplement to the expansionist enthusiasm of *Os Lusíadas*, this has led the film to be described, significantly, as an *Apocalypse Now* of philosophical ideas. *Non* 'makes flesh' and 'gives substance' (Rancière 2007: 45, 46), to conflicts and defeats, to the particular literary references which are extracted and enacted: the episode of the Island of Love and the quotations from the Old Man of Restelo in *The Lusíads*; the extract of António Vieira's sermon, which becomes the *Non* monologue when anachronistically inserted as the monologue of a character after the battle of Alcácer-Quibir (Ksar el Kebir) (1578).

After all, as Oliveira would say, quoting Aristotle, 'Não se pode pensar sem uma imagem' (Cakoff 2005: 71); or, when reflecting about film and being, 'através do que se vê, há o que não se vê' (Cakoff 2005: 71). One will return to this notion, and to Oliveira's teleologies which seem to agree with Lieutenant Cabrita's mantra that the 'verdade inacessível possui um

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<sup>4</sup> When, for example, he released *Benilde ou a Virgem-Mãe* shortly before the 1974 Portuguese revolution, the film was accused of 'having nothing to do with the country's political situation and of being antiquated in theme and form' (Johnson 2007: 33). João Lopes mentions how *Um Amor de Perdição*, released in 1978 and aired in national television, gave rise to a cultural witch-hunt (2001: 68).

sentido último que tudo explica'. According to Oliveira, *Non's* focus is anti-traditional, in that it addresses defeats rather than victories and anti-triumphalist by focusing on the gift rather than on conquests:

O *Non* baseia-se nas derrotas. As derrotas são mais ricas que as vitórias. [...] Enquanto que toda a história repousa e enaltece o herói, aquele que vence, o *Non* põe o acento noutra ponta, que é o da dádiva. Não é o da conquista, mas é o da dádiva. Digamos que em oposição aos *Lusíadas*, o *Non* é o inverso. Quer dizer, o *Non* é o 'velho do Restelo', que é tomado por um homem — geralmente é tomado por um homem — velho, já não viril, antiquado, e não é. É o homem da sabedoria, do conhecimento e que vê muito longe. E o que o Camões vê ali é todo o desastre que viria a seguir, toda a inutilidade desse esforço. Portanto é dessa parte que o *Non* foca a história de Portugal. (Oliveira 1991)

*The title Non ou a Vã Glória de Mandar* is a juxtaposition of references to part of a sermon by Padre António Vieira, extracted from the *Sermão da Terceira Quarta-feira da Quaresma (pregado na Capela real, no ano de 1670)* and to a verse in *The Lusiads* ('Ó Glória de mandar, ó vã cobiça'). The film, a major European co-production between Madragoa Filmes (Portugal), Tornasol Films (Spain), Gémini Films and SGCC Films (France) (Johnson 2007: 165), was first planned in 1976 as a response to the April 25 and the process of decolonization, and it ambitiously aimed at a negative history of Portugal, with a vast scope. As soldiers embark on a voyage through the African continent, fighting for the control of African colonies, they reminisce, guided by the discourse of their officer, a History graduate, on the several obstacles (*nons*) that Portugal encountered when in the course of its history it attempted to expand unreasonably and against its due and proper course. The film acts as a historical and metaphysical reflection upon the colonial experience and expansion. According to Oliveira, it acts as the opposite of *The Lusiads*, in opposition to the glorious maritime expansion, the mythology of which, however, is left untouched. As the following section will explore, the contentment with the film providing (non-) meaning in the constant reiteration of an ultimate truth shrouded in mystery (by Lieutenant Cabrita) beyond that of earthly conflict provokes indifference to the ways in which an imperial nostalgia endures through the film, albeit reformulated as a sort of spiritual experience through the exercise of the gift (of the discoveries). In the first dialogue between characters, when discussing the violence perpetrated by the different parts in the conflicts in Africa, Cabrita intervenes after a soldier mentions the genocide perpetrated by white colonisers: 'Está bem! Quer dizer, está mal... É o lado mau do Homem. Não há nada a fazer, quando é assim, são piores que feras'. Cabrita then supports another soldier's claim that Portuguese colonialism 'quebrou o ódio entre as diferentes tribos' and created 'perspectivas para a criação de uma pátria, ou estado multirracial' by emphasizing the important role of the Portuguese language in the process.

As a spectator, one need not accept this erasure of history, politics and conflict, however tempting and ideologically neutral this sublimation may appear in this confrontation of perspectives which leads to consensus. One need not accept the binary opposition and clear separation (conquest vs gift; utopia vs conquest) where the utopia of world domination provides a fruitful drive for Humankind and the gifts of discoveries make up for the atrocities of colonialism and territorial expansionism. It if could be argued that *Non* does not glorify war, it no less presents a dignified view of it, mostly through the legitimating of the discourse of Alferes Cabrita, the History master, as he narrates several episodes in Portuguese history. Many of these episodes are but common 'tableaux' of Portuguese heroism (Fabião *et al.* 1991: 173), which would not look out of place in a New State history manual. The same actors navigate through space and time in the guise of different historical characters who testify to the bravery and nobility of some glorious few no matter what terrible fate awaited them given the ever present ambition and greed. They receive from Cabrita the revelation of the historical gift of the fifteenth century discoveries, leading to cultural development, thus somehow lending credibility to the throwaway remark, which reinforces a Portuguese colonial exceptionalism, that 'Isto não é o Vietname!':

Os descobrimentos portugueses, por exemplo, estão no mesmo pé, ou seja, o da dádiva. [...] Sim, da dádiva. Não é o que conquistamos ou dominamos que vai ficar. Isso se esbaterá com o tempo, como vai acontecer ou aconteceu já a outros impérios, por maiores que fossem ou sejam. Mas o que é dádiva, o que, por

exemplo, os portugueses trouxeram com os descobrimentos, dando ao mundo novos mundos, novas gentes, novos mares e novos céus, isso ficará.

Oliveira repeats in an interview of 2008 the Eurocentric commonplaces that Jacques Derrida analysed in the same year that *Non* was released, in *L'Autre Cap* [The Other Heading]. The Western cape of Europe as a vanguard of innovation and discovery insemminating the rest of the world (with a view to recovery) (Derrida 1992: 19-20; 24-25) is a strong reminder that universalism is the strongest of *ipseity*. This interview also highlights the luso-tropicalist<sup>5</sup> echoes of the cinematographer's considerations regarding how Iberians, through discoveries, did 'in practice' what further North in Europe 'the humanists did in theory' (Gardnier 2007: 158, 159):

The people from the Iberian Peninsula discovered new people, new parts of the world. The explorers did not want to dominate, it was not an act of conquest but an act of giving life, bringing these people into the rest of the world. Even Captain Albuquerque would invite his sailors to marry with the natives, with people of other races, other colors. (Rapfogel 2008)

History is a lesson, and one to be taught by the accredited Historian (Alferes Cabrita) and to be learnt by the soldiers, and the viewers.<sup>6</sup> A historical lesson which is certainly open to criticism for partaking in what Christopher L. Miller terms an 'Africanist discourse' (Blackmore 2009: 14), where Africa is but a blank space and slate on which to project past and/or future utopias. It is a lesson about the end of empire and a new beginning:

Sebastian and Cabrita both represent the end of an era: Sebastian the end of Portugal's period of conquest in the name of Christ (thus the bloody, inverted sword), Cabrita the end of modern Portuguese colonialism. The Revolution of 1974 dramatically brings the latter to a close and points towards a different future. (Johnson 2007: 69)

A different future, but a future already conditioned inevitably by the projection of a present (and past) meaning to be achieved. If, according to Oliveira, ('my vision' of) 'History' is the ordering principle of the narrative, could one accept that 'history' is itself outside the narrative? In other words, is there a History (historical consequence, but results from a reflection) beyond and behind the storying of the Portuguese past?

O filme é uma consequência histórica. Resulta de uma consciência, de uma reflexão histórica. Não é uma coisa inventada por mim. Não é invenção, é apenas uma visão, através desses factos. A minha visão, que julgo acertada. E a História não é o que podia ser, mas é aquilo que é. Portanto a História foi aquela e é sobre a História que fala. Portanto não tem nada que alterar. A História é que pode alterar as coisas daqui em diante e devia. Eu não. (Oliveira 2001)

All conflicts and tensions can ultimately be (hi)storied, they can ultimately be explained, as there is a meaning there beyond to be revealed. In other words, is there a History (an ultimate meaning for history) behind and beyond narratives? Or, in this case, are histories and stories jointly structured around the promise of an ultimate meaning to be revealed?

In other words, what Derrida has identified as a typical movement of a metaphysics of

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<sup>5</sup> see Luís Madureira for a concise criticism of luso-tropicalism and its ideological appropriation by the Estado Novo (2006b: 138-145); Hilary Owen's recent work, presenting an intricate analysis of the episode of the Island of Love in *Non*, teasing out the sexualized imagining of the nation is a an insightful contribution. For a reading which associates the episode in *The Lusiads* to Gilberto Freyre's theory, please see Anna Klobucka (2002).

<sup>6</sup> Although there are many voices and many distinct opinions voiced in the dialogues by the soldiers, it is easy to subsume it all under the references to the 'truth' which an 'ultimate meaning' will render accessible. Alferes Cabrita presents not *a* but *the* historical vision (Fabião *et al.* 1991: 173); Rui Ramos confirms the role of Cabrita as a History teacher in uniform, highlighting the characters' plausible indoctrination by the regime's propaganda (173).

presence (represented in the 'ultimate meaning') consubstantiates a teleology which both de-historicizes and depoliticizes the conflicts of war, colonialism and expansion. Submitting to the 'presence' of 'History' ('it is what is') is not only to overlook reality in itself, but also the ways in which the perception of reality, as objective as a historical 'reflection' or 'vision' may purport to be, is always already itself affected by historical events and itself part of a construction.

The above is an expression of the obsession with logos, or the 'metaphysics of presence' to which Cabrita falls prey: 'Deus sobrepára acima de tudo isto', says the soldier. Moreover, and most significantly if one is to defend an active interpretation of *Non* against the filmmaker's statements and the traditional criticism of the film, to resist such a teleology is of the utmost importance because the *telos* inscribed by the promise of an ultimate meaning behind the historical vision of defeats of the Portuguese nation cannot be read separately from a logocentrism implied in the analysis of his cinema which naturalizes the philosophical and transcendental content of the film to be found in the unveiling of its form (revelation). Oliveira's voice-over pointing to the significance of the date of Cabrita's death (as well as his signature and dedication to his grandchildren (cf Fabião *et al.* 1991: 172; 174)) is a performance which allows for a presentation of a vision of History (as prophecy) and the justification for a historical vision. This historical vision is not one which 'is what is', but one which is dependent on taking April 25 as a point of focus and articulation outside history. April 25 is at the centre and, at the same time, outside history, always already structured albeit naturalized as hors-texte and hors-champs:

Depois do 25 de Abril, eu pensei logo no Non. Porque o 25 de Abril trazia essa visão. O 25 de Abril consciente ou inconscientemente, desfazia toda a História que estava para trás. O 25 de Abril é um estado e um movimento profundamente fecundo. Consciente, mais inconsciente que consciente, mas profundamente fecundo. Tirando lados políticos que perturbam sempre, porque começamos a ver que o Homem ou a Humanidade têm na verdade dois grandes inimigos: um é a política, outro é a religião. É com fundamento em políticas e em religiões que se processam muitas guerras. É estranho, mas é assim. O 25 de Abril é um movimento pacífico, de paz e de harmonia e de reconhecimento. Portanto, cria um estatuto novo na História do Mundo. (Oliveira 2001)

This focus is not anti-traditional. In fact, it is the consensual way in which Portuguese art and historiography has dealt with April 25, which Luís Madureira has identified in some works as the 'desire for the absent of history' (Madureira 2006a). Eduardo Lourenço has noted, on the other hand, how the historical conflicts and complexities of the event have been sublimated by the myth of a 'exemplaridade revolucionária' (Lourenço 2000: 50), a new exceptionality which supplements the 'Atlantic exceptionalism' (Vecchi 2010) and has April 25 as the imagination of a centre.<sup>7</sup> As Oliveira puts it in an interview to Jean Gili recorded in 1992:

*Non ou a Vã Glória de Mandar* is a reflection on Portugal's history. The history of each country is not just the specific history of a certain country, it is also part of world history. To put it in another way, it is a fragment of the history of humanity. One can say therefore that nothing happens without a reason, that everything has a meaning. How? Everything occurs in relation to the end, an enigmatic but absolutely essential end, an end that is very important for man himself. (Gili 2007: 145-6)

This is a fundamental delusion: to equate a constructed history with meaning and presence, or more so with a movement towards its revelation/unveiling ('sentido' means both meaning and direction) beyond historical events and their storying. This leads to the illusion of a presence (present or absent) which provides logic and necessity to the teleological unfolding which takes place.

Cinema, then, has no political function according to Oliveira; fiction and history are based on memory and historical observations:

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<sup>7</sup> I am paraphrasing Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, who coined the notion of the 'empire as the imagination of a centre' (2002) to describe the attempt of Portuguese writers and intellectuals to come to terms with Portugal's position in the imperial hierarchy after the British Ultimatum of 1890.

A função da arte não é ensinar, dizer como se deve fazer o futuro. Esse é um sentimento político. A arte repete o que já aconteceu e o que já foi feito na vida: não o futuro, mas o passado. Nos filmes de atualidades, registra-se o acontecimento presente, que logo se transformou no fantasma de um passado próximo. A arte fala do que aconteceu, não fala do que vai acontecer. Essa previsão compete à ciência e à política. Enfim, a arte funciona sobre observações históricas. Isto é, sobre a memória. Esta é a base fundamental para a composição da história e da ficção. (Cakoff 2005: 42)

Is such a historical proposition viable without this teleological model of reading (*eidōs* to be appropriated by the effacing of the phantasms of representation)? Are history and stories not jointly structured around the promise of an ultimate meaning, which will sublimate conflicts and incidents, harmonizing differences in politics, in religions, in power?<sup>8</sup>

Other meanings and historical visions can be teased out if one chooses to countersign the historical vision which is being enacted.

porque para se ver verdadeiramente em profundidade a riqueza de um filme deve-se ir também, de certo modo, à desconstrução. Através do que se vê há o que não se vê. (Oliveira *in* Cakoff 2005: 71)

Oliveira is not without responsibilities in the logocentrism present in the analysis of his cinema, that is, of *image, thought, idea, meaning* taking a determining place over and above, beyond and behind the materiality of film and history. If I have been using a term by Jacques Derrida, it is also because Oliveira's misinterpretation of Derrida provides a point of entry into his thinking:

Tive a ocasião de conhecer pessoalmente Jacques Derrida [1930–2004], o filósofo da desconstrução. E ele fazia uma distinção, por exemplo, entre o 'ente' e o 'ser'. O 'ente', digamos de uma forma simplória, é o físico, e o 'ser' é o psíquico, digamos, corpo e alma [...]. Na desconstrução, ele separa as partes, mas uma parte não existe sem a outra — não sei se me explico bem. Não existe uma parte sem a outra: quando se tira uma, desaparece a outra. Se eu tirar o espírito, desaparece o corpo; se eu tirar o corpo, desaparece o espírito. Por isso é desconstrução: constrói-se na união das partes. (Cakoff 2005: 70-71)

It assumes that, somehow, there is (there must be) a presence above and beyond, to be unveiled through representation ('there is what is not seen'):

De maneira que a desconstrução faz-se na construção. [...] Embora seja um bocadinho mais difícil de compreender, existe, no cinema, o ser e o *être*. A gente vê o ente mas está a mostrar o ser, ou a gente está a mostrar o ser para dar a visão do ente. É difícil explicar essa suposição de que vemos o que não se está a mostrar, transpondo-se para idéias formadas com imagens. (Cakoff 2005: 71)

When, by the end of his reasoning, Oliveira quotes the familiar Aristotelian motto of the impossibility of thinking without a picture, one should not be surprised. Image imparts 'flesh and substance' (Rancière 2007: 46) to the textual linking that has taken place throughout the film and dialogues. What Oliveira, *contre* Derrida, never conceives is that there is no *eidōs* except in representation, in the articulation which does not simply disappear before presence; as there is no history except in the *storying*.<sup>9</sup> That there may not be a pure or ultimate

<sup>8</sup> Oliveira claims that April 25 is the most important event in the twentieth century: 'It was an extraordinary moment. The people who acted on that day did not want to take power, they simply wanted to give power back to the people. That was a rare moment, perhaps unique in our time' (Euronews: 2008)

<sup>9</sup> With this neologism one seeks to emphasize the articulations that create an effect of presence. This presupposes that

meaning which can ideally justify everything, contain all incidents and signs, is never considered a possibility.

The above-mentioned idea of the ends (objectives, *telos*) of art, and cinema in particular, brings to mind how, according to Jacques Rancière, 'a certain idea of fate and a certain idea of the image are tied up in the apocalyptic discourses of today's cultural climate', which has led Rancière to consider art's role in the 'problematic alignment' of the 'several functions' contained under the term 'image' (Rancière 2007: 1). In the specific case of *Non*, this provides a productive point of entry into considering how the teleology implicit in the mimesis of the *eidos* and an imperialist teleological *imagery* are alive and well in the culture of what we presume to be the age of deconstruction, post-colonialism and globalization. Therefore it is indispensable to scrutinize, as Rancière does, the implicit political assumptions that seemingly neutral conceptions of image put forth. And, as a consequence, to resist going transcendental regarding the 'symbolic' (Oliveira 2001) and Eucharistic aspects of the ending of the film, even if this implies reading against the filmmaker's reading.

To avoid simplistic and naïve readings of the image and the relation between text and image one must read against the 'common measurement' of history as the 'assemblage of actions' which, since Aristotle, had defined the rationality of the poem', 'according to a schema of ideal causality' (38). One should begin by putting into question the presumed role of *Os Lusíadas* (or of its inverse in the gift and the condemnation) in providing 'textual intelligibility' (38) to *Non* particularly because Oliveira's meditation on cinema and the written word seems to involve a hierarchical relationship between text and image. This hierarchical positioning is very restrictive in aesthetic and political terms:

This ancient measurement of the poem according to a schema of ideal causality — connection by necessity or verosimilitude — involved also a certain form of intelligibility of human actions. It is what established a community of signs and a community between 'signs' and 'us': a combination of elements in accordance with general rules and a community between the intelligence that produced these combinations and sensibilities called upon to experience the pleasure of them. (38,39)

Of course the aesthetic regime of art, which has been in place for two centuries, implies the distancing from that common measurement and the hierarchy between text and image, leading to the autonomy of the arts (Rancière 2007: 42).<sup>10</sup> The reference to the composition of poems both illustrates a resistance to ontological readings of cinema as exceptional in relation to other arts and also both questions and undermines definitions of Oliveira's of cinema's 'palavra visual' (Costa 2005: 153).

The abolition of this aforementioned hierarchical order has aesthetic, and therefore necessarily political, consequences. As one is reminded by Rancière, the political and the aesthetic cannot be easily separated, as both are connected to a certain 'partition of the perceptible', to a disruption of a 'common measurement' (Rancière 2007: 38) (what established the community of 'signs' and 'us') and to the assignment of places and functions, 'parties and lots' (1999: 58). Oliveira's 'resistance' is illustrative of his seemingly paradoxical stance. Although claiming not to be related to politics, it originates from a political situation (restriction and censorship) and its effects impact on Oliveira's cinema political utility in resisting the banality of images (Lopes 2001: 69) as well as the objectification of the spectator (Gardnier 2007: 158). His 'primitivismo cinematográfico' [cinematographic primitivism] and his 'heterodoxia formal' [formal heterodoxy] (Lopes 2001: 69) cannot be simply neutralized as formal curiosities. His cinema, as Lopes states, can be a useful weapon to combat the overflow of images in our day to day, but that should not lead to a simplistic view that correlates this with an ontologization of the image in and of Oliveira's filmmaking. Perhaps one should take these creative aspects as a partitioning of a perceptible which allow for a differentiation and a deferral of meaning(s), thus prompting a distancing from 'a certain form of measurement —

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representation does not 'suddenly encroach upon presence' but is part of its 'enjoyment' (Derrida 1997: 312).

<sup>10</sup> Autonomy between arts does not mean separation. As a matter of fact, not only its forms become analogous, but the materialities are mixed (Rancière 2007: 42). Authonomization does not lead to simple 'self-referentiality': 'the authonomization of aesthetics means first freeing up the norms of representation, and second, constituting a kind of community of sense experience that works on the world of assumption, of the as if that includes those who are not included by revealing a mode of existence of sense experiences that has eluded the allocation of parties and lots. (Rancière 1999: 58).



that expressed by the concept of history' (Rancière 2007: 38).

Oliveira's cinema can thus be seen as aesthetic in this sense (necessarily political) in that it disrupts, as above-mentioned, the 'general rules' and the 'community between the intelligence that produced' art and the 'combinations and sensibilities' of readers, spectators, etc. Oliveira's films are not political in the sense that they illustrate or aspire to conflict between classes, but they are nevertheless political through and through because they are aesthetic and the aesthetic and the political are inseparable from a determined reconfiguring or shifting of borders of the consensual 'partition of the perceptible' (Rancière 1999: 57-58).

Oliveira is proud of keeping to his own path and of not having attempted to please the post-revolutionary regime despite strong criticism for not making militant art and for being seemingly indifferent to the 1974 revolution. Oliveira is strongly critical of *art engagé* (be it marxist or catholic-inspired (Cakoff 2005: 36)) and on 'revolutionary' films which presumed to capture reality and project it. According to Oliveira, these film are 'atrasados em relação à própria Revolução. Já iam no seu rasto' (Cakoff 2005: 81-82). He goes to the extent of defining himself as a 'resistance filmmaker' after not being able to film due to the censorship and constrictions under the *Estado Novo* (Rapfogel 2008).<sup>11</sup> One must note that when Oliveira uses the term resistance, he is not using it in its common political sense,<sup>12</sup> but in cinematic terms, by characterizing how this hiatus has stopped his filming style to be influenced by trends and led him to reflected profoundly on the 'act of filming', acquiring a 'deeper consciousness of cinema' (Rapfogel 2008). Resistance equates to maintaining a certain degree of aesthetic autonomy (as there is no engaged art, there is no purely aesthetic art). Regarding the much criticized release of *Amor de Perdição* in the post-revolutionary period, which obviously did not refer directly to the Revolution, the filmmaker states: '[...] que melhor referência à Revolução do que o filme ter sido realizado ao tempo dela?' (Cakoff 2005:78).

One must then look again at the role of the image in the conveying of an idea (an *eidos*: o 'indizível') through the workings of shared rituals, says Oliveira:

É um jogo de artificialismos, mas que é de um realismo total. É o jogo desses elementos que dão sentido ao cinema: são rituais entre imagens, palavras e sons. O som pode servir para mostrar o que não está visível. Ou, em outras palavras, esse é um jogo onde a imagem serve de máscara para mostrar aquilo que não se pode mostrar, como a alma, como os sentimentos, como o espírito: estes não têm corpo, não podemos filmá-los. E, quando a gente deseja ir além, serve-se desses elementos, desses símbolos para dizer outra coisa, para dizer o indizível. Uma posição pode simular uma outra, fazendo passar de um ponto a outro. (Cakoff 2005: 70)

The contradictions in Oliveira's text are as noticeable as they are telling of a hierarchy in place. Teasing out the tensions in this text, it becomes clear to an attentive reader and spectator that the promised and aspired passage is but simulation, its reality enacted only in the play of artificialisms. The 'unity of the parts' is not meaning, and there is no history (as ordering principle) but in linking. *Logos/eidos* is always already haunted by structurality, it is spectral.

One requires a different kind of reading in which image is not subjected to textual intelligibility but is a sign to be (emphasis) recombined:

The power of the sentence-image can be expressed in sentences from a novel, but also in forms of theatrical representation or cinematic montage or the relationship between the said and unsaid in a photograph. The sentence is not the sayable and the image is not the visible. By sentence-image I intend the combination of two functions that are to be defined aesthetically — that is, by the way in which they undo the representative relationship between text and image. The text's part in the representative schema was the conceptual linking of actions, while the image's was the

<sup>11</sup> see interview to Leon Cakoff for Oliveira's general feeling towards the New State regime (Cakoff 2005: 73-74).

<sup>12</sup> 'My films are not political films. They have a deep human character, in its different phases. And these human preoccupations--hatred, jealousy, passion, vengeance, love--take the same shape for all different classes' (Rapfogel 2008).

supplement of presence that imparted flesh and substance to it. The sentence-image overturns this logic. The sentence-function is still that of linking. But the sentence now links in as much as it is what it gives flesh. (Rancière 2007: 45-46)

One will then read images as being open to recombination rather than being closed off. So we can read the syntax (or montage, not in a strictly cinematic sense) as the point of entry for a reading which takes into account articulation and play rather than a schema which guarantees purpose and meaning (*telos* and presence).

Esta é a ditosa Pátria minha amada. Não  
Jorge de Sena, 'A Portugal'

I would like to attempt a different reading of the final scenes of *Non*, one which takes into account the particularities of Oliveira's cinema, namely the long shots (objective, where the director disappears (Oliveira 2005: 29) and the effect of distance created by the actors, who by looking into the camera create a sense of estrangement and stop the objectification of the spectator, who is not objectified and drugged as in modern American cinema (Gardnier 2007: 157,158). This active role of the spectator ('The spectator needs to complete the action he sees in the film' (157)) allows us to move beyond the reading of a hierarchy between text and image and of a meaning revealing itself. Not being transformed into a 'plaything', manipulated as if having 'taken drugs' (158), as Oliveira puts it, is to reject a 'community of signs' and a community between 'signs' and 'us'.

Therefore, one aims to demonstrate how Oliveira's cinematic practice allows for readings which deviate from prescribed teleologies of critics and the filmmaker's theories. Because accepting the historical reflection and vision and to look at (an inaccessible) meaning and or philosophy is to be a passive, duped spectator who overlooks the materiality of events and the textuality of forms. Thus, reading Oliveira's films against Oliveira's views is an affirmative act which re-politicises and re-historicizes Portuguese past expansion and contemporary existence.

The final sequence of scenes, in which there is a tracking shot of several wounded soldiers in the bed before Cabrita steps into his morphine-infused delirium in which D. Sebastião appears reversing his sword, signals both more and less than the 'end of an era' and the pointing towards a different future, as Jonhson (above) has it. The final scene in the film, Cabrita's delirium, fantasmatically both 'sonho e realidade' (Oliveira 2001) must not be restricted to be interpreted as a transcendental (symbolic) unveiling in which the stories and histories of D. Sebastião and Cabrita converge (through editing) and are converted under the 25 April myth.

Oliveira's pronouncement on Sebastião's inverting of the sword (2001) implies an ideal scheme of causality, and takes a reading which reads this image as being formed to 'take the thoughts and feelings through which the causal connection was displayed to their highest expression' (Rancière 2007: 39): the king turns his sword during Cabrita's delirium into a crucial symbol of harmony and gift by inverting its position. Oliveira's reading of the sword in this position as a cross is a good illustration of Oliveira's theorization on the image's ability to transcend the visible and the sayable and of the subordinate relation of thought to image. It thus renders visible 'a certain form of measurement — 'that expressed by the concept of history' (Rancière 2007: 38), which involves 'a relationship of subordination between a ruling function — the textual function of intelligibility — and an image-forming function in its service' (39).



Figure 1 D. Sebastião and the inverted sword.

Thus, both Cabrita and Sebastião are reduced to 'vanishing mediators' (Žižek 2008: 57-58), the two sides of a same end which lead us into presence by their own unveiling, their own apocalypse, as flesh behind the word. *Non* restores meaning to historical events by re-storying them within the teleological movement inscribed by the promise of a 'sentido último'. In this sense, history (the film's and Portugal's) is a product of this structuration. *Non* supposes but a detour, a deviation, a diversion of Portugal from a due and the proper spiritual course (the 'utopia' of a Fifth Empire) which can still be recovered, by achieving a sort of spiritual imperialism based on gifts rather than on conquests.

Oliveira's signature in the opening can be countersigned by an emancipated spectator who is distanced and aware of the artifices of the film, intent on deciphering the signs aesthetically presented to him/her and to see history as a product of textuality itself. As abovementioned, history and *storying* are inseparable. This is an 'aesthetic' narrative in which signs are presented and deciphered, and signs always disseminate meaning. If regarding the historical reflection and vision in *Non* the filmmaker says 'Eu não', the spectator can affirm a different recombination of signs and address differently the traces of history rendered accessible in the film.

Bearing in mind that presence is but a product of representation, there can be no 'there is' beyond and independently of what is seen: to invert Oliveira's saying, in film 'vê-se o que não há'.<sup>13</sup> Since meaning (present or absent) cannot be filmed, one can choose to read in this final montage what is selected and excluded, what is not there. After all, images work as much as signs of presence as signs of absence.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, one needs to consider whether the ending of the film is an end, if it does not present, rather, another limit, a point of opening (*fines*). The 'ultimate meaning' is but a deferral of meaning, its deferral is its meaning (as history is but the linking). Cabrita's mumbled and incomplete sentences break the mechanic narrative repetition, and instead what one has is incompleteness being supplemented by the last scene, both 'sonho e realidade'.

Rather than identifying the several *nons* (literary and empirical) simply as obstacles to

<sup>13</sup> A very important distinction when it comes to film what cannot be filmed can be noticed when one addresses the 'spectrality', or 'phantomality': 'something becomes almost visible which is visible only insofar as it is not visible in flesh and blood' (Derrida & Stiegler 2002: 115). Oliveira's thinking seems to postulate the visibility of the invisible, with a presence behind and beyond. Derrida's thinking is quite distinct.

<sup>14</sup> see Derrida's meditation on spectrality, which exceeds oppositions by inscribing 'a trace that marks the present with its absence in advance. The spectral logic is de facto a deconstructive logic' (Derrida & Stiegler :117).

be sublimated in a spiritual and teleological narrative which selects and excludes reality one must rather tease out the contradictions and tensions which were always already at work, such as the apology for the conquest of Africa implied of the speech of the Old Man of Restelo, which makes the inseparability between condemnation of conquest and utopia impossible to hold. Conflict and conquest are found not to be containable, justified or explained by an ultimate meaning. Cabrita does not hesitate to kill, ponderously eyeing the combatant in the tree. He is as ease at war as he is in discourse, because the impulses to war, to 'se sobrepor ao outro', 'são de natureza poética' (Oliveira 2001). It is another excessive image, that of the enemy's scream (even more so than the image of the enemy holding his bowels as he runs) which breaks ideal causality via its own exaggeration, disrupting and estranging the otherwise poeticized act of warfare. The disruption of speech and of narrative after Cabrita is shot by an unseen enemy will open the way to the representation of what cannot be seen, the appearance of which is its disappearance (D. Sebastião).

The final sequence, however, does not permit (filmic) textuality to be erased before the image of the unsayable, the inaccessible. The spectator is alerted by the gaze of the wounded soldier and rendered immune to an identification with the final scene. The gaze, unexpected, repeated, unnecessary, breaks with the schema of causality and heightened affect: the setting and the identification between Cabrita and Sebastião as well as the communion between the soldier, the king and the spectator, both under the sign of the Eucharist and the apocalypse. The spectator is alerted both to the drops of morphine which mirror the drops of blood, and to the *fio* which is repeated both in the sword and in the pen which inscribes the death of Cabrita and its date (25 Abril 1974). It enhances, by mimicking, the distancing effect that the actors' gaze into the cameras during Cabrita's narratives had already provoked, where the same actors, disaffectedly, play different characters in time and space.

In this sense, the shots of the actors in the lorry, addressing the camera/ the spectator leads to an estrangement which defers an all too easy identification.



Figure 2 Portuguese soldiers in the Colonial War.

The theatricality and the breaking of realism are not, therefore, an exclusive feature, on the one hand, of the episode of *The Island of Love* and, on the other hand, of Sebastian's appearance in Cabrita's delirium. Those evocations act not as 'present' visions of a 'past' or 'myth', but as an enactment of what is neither past nor present, what is not. The actors playing different parts leads not to an identification between the characters and different historical figures or to an identification with the spectator, but to a further disidentification. These scenes

thus do not oppose the final ones, but are its supplement to be recovered by the double and inward-folded narrative and economy of 'meaning' and 'gift', which are rendered inseparable.

The image of the gaze of the wounded soldier presents an explosive power which breaks with both the continuity established (sentence) and while holding together (through distancing and separation), syntactically, an oblique point of resistance which allows for a recombination of signs from part of the spectator, which is thus not restricted to a mimetic and logocentric approach which lives off the promise of a meaning to be revealed *hors-texte* and *hors-champ*.



Figure 3 The wounded soldier's gaze.

The closing inscription of the date, rather than unifying under an authorial aegis, merely points out to the metaphysical nudity of the act. This performance reveals by excess what was already there, if not visible, throughout the film: that there no history except its linking, which 'constrói-se na união das partes'. O 'que se vê', therefore 'há', is nothing but the simultaneous materiality and vacuity under the wraps of performance, which the gaze of the soldier, isolated and explosive, displays so well. To accept the telos implied in the death of Cabrita is to overlook the hollow and the horror of a reality that is only visible if one looks at what is not being shown (telos, meaningfulness), if the community of 'signs' and 'us' (community between 'signs and us' has been long lost) is disrupted by the estranged gaze.

The song accompanying the end and the dates of April 25, with the verses of the Island of Love episode as lyrics, enhance the emptiness behind the acts which attempt to establish an economic relation between the gift and the rewards of discoveries and the high price paid in territorial conquest (Cabrita mentions this as he is shot). April 25 is equally, in the term one has been using, a storied (hence de-historicized and depoliticized) gateway to the future, but merely as a point of departure to a reinterpretation of Portuguese history in a new light. It merely allows Portugal to unveil its new significance in history, in a new exceptionality, rather than address the metaphysical nudity of a constructed teleology (and *arkhe*). This supplementation of 'inaccessible truths', erected around the promise of an 'ultimate meaning', acts as the supposed search of a deeper meaning.

Seemingly paradoxically, this 'political' reading is possible not because of Oliveira's political views, but of his aesthetic practice. His acknowledgment that history and fiction share the same fundamental basis ('memory', 'historical observation'), as above-mentioned, acts as a reminder that there is not a 'history' which does not imply a cut and a separation from reality, which is not itself fictionalized, or historicized. His consideration of film as the

'fantasma' of a reality, 'vívuda ou ficcionada' (Oliveira 2005: 170), underlines the structural possibilities of cinema images to disrupt and exceed the representation and containment of realities and discourses. Cinema's aesthetic and political power derives from this spectrality (Derrida 2002: 115), being both less and other than reality, both less and more than meaning. Cinema, contrary to Oliveira's claims, does not 'simulate life', repositioning historical or fictional memory as if it were life. As Marian Hobson reminds us regarding the duplicity of repetition, '[t]he *eidos* springs from the same possibility as the phantasm' (1998: 69).

What predicts and restricts the future is not, against Oliveira, 'sentimento político' but rather the 'sentido último'. The promise of a transcendent meaning and telos is not ideologically neutral. As Lorca reminds us, the promise of a sentido último (ultimate direction, ultimate meaning) leads to recognize the metaphysical nudity of such an entity. The cinematic image is both the possibility and the impossibility of *Non* as the filming of 'o Sentido' (Fabião *et al* 1991:173).<sup>15</sup> Finding its own emptiness does not lead to paralysis or nihilism, but is the condition to set in motion the messianic promise (against a Portuguese messianism in which 'o Messias é o próprio passado' (Lourenço 1994: 10)) and the opening to a future which advances by emphasizing negativity and addressing difference and otherness. It is up to the spectator to point to a future, to create a 'sentimento político' that bypasses the 'sentido último' assigned to art and history. To invert Oliveira's reading: 'construction takes place in deconstruction.'

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<sup>15</sup> As Rui Ramos states: 'Oliveira não filmou realidades, mas também não filmou mitos. Por isso, o seu método não é naturalista nem épico. O que ele filmou foi o Sentido – ou a falta dele, pouco importa agora a distinção.'

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