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DE OLIVEIRA, MANOEL

PAULO BRANCO  
PRESENTS

**“NON”  
OR THE VAIN GLORY  
OF COMMAND**

A FILM BY  
**MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA**

STARRING

**LUIS MIGUEL CINTRA - DIOGO DORIA - MIGUEL GUILHERME - LUIS  
LUCAS - CARLOS GOMES - ANTONIO S. LOPES - MATEUS LORENA  
LOLA FORNER - RAUL FREIRE**

**WITH SPECIAL GUEST APPEARANCES BY  
RUI DE CARVALHO - TERESA MENESES**

**AND  
LEONOR SILVEIRA**

**ASSISTANT DIRECTORS JAIME SILVA - JACQUES ARHEX  
MANUEL JOÃO ÁGUAS**

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**SOND GITA CERVEIRA  
EDITING MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA - SABINE FRANEL**

**MIXING JEAN PAUL LOUBLIER**

**MUSIC ALEJANDRO MASSO**

**PHOTOGRAPHY ELSO ROQUE**

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**R.T.V.E. AND TELEVISION ESPAÑOLA S.A.**

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COUNCIL (PORTUGAL), MINISTRY OF CULTURE (SPAIN), MINISTÈRE DA LA CULTURE ET  
DE LA COMMUNICATION, CENTRE NATIONAL DE LA CINÉMATOGRAPHIE (PARIS), and  
EURIMAGES (FRANCE)**

**PRODUCED BY  
PAULO BRANCO  
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY  
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# NO, OR THE VAIN GLORY OF COMMAND

*Non, ou a vã Gloria de Mandar*

Undisputed master of Portuguese cinema, Manoel de Oliveira (*Cannibals*, SFIFF 1989) always offers audiences an intelligent and challenging experience—he never disappoints. In this latest (and perhaps most accessible) opus, de Oliveira moves beyond the interior realm of emotions to cast a ruminating eye on History—the birth of a nation and its hidden destiny. Angola, 1973: as a transport truck rolls through the bush, a Portuguese lieutenant (Luis Miguel Cintra) passes time by regaling his troops with heroic tales from Portugal's past: the dawn of their civilization, the deeds of Vasco da Gama and other great explorers, the battles with Spain, the Moors and Africa. Intercut with the learned officer's discourse are lavishly mounted tableaux, illustrating key episodes in

Portugal's rise and fall as a colonial power, as well as its mythological antecedents. All of which leads us back to the present and final debacle of a gasping empire. Inspired by the revolution of 1974 which triggered profound changes in the Portuguese psyche, *No, or the Vain Glory of Command* is steeped in the historically accurate epic poetry of Luis de Camões. De Oliveira counterpoints passages of lyrical exoticism and historical pageantry with the gritty realities of war to offer a timely and moving contemplation on History—how we make it and at what cost. —*Laurie Thielen*

PORTUGAL, 1990 110 min.

DIRECTOR/SCREENPLAY: Manoel de Oliveira PRODUCER: Paulo Branco CAMERA: Elso Roque EDITOR: de Oliveira, Sabine Franel ART DIRECTION: Luis Montero, Maria José Branco SOUND: Gra Cervera CAST: Luis Miguel Cintra, Diogo Dória, Miguel Guilherme, Luis Lucas PRINT SOURCE: Portuguese Film Institute

SFIFF Program Notes

# CONVERSATION WITH MANOEL DE OLIVEIRA

*How do you place this film in your work?*

This film is like the result of all the other films I made before.

I think it can maybe make the position I hold clearer or at least that which I develop in my films. That's important, important for me. In my opinion, the whole of my work would be incomplete if I hadn't made this film. I have come to think it may be my last achievement. While I was making the film I was totally immersed in it and couldn't think of anything else. Now that I have finished I feel the need to try and go beyond. There are certain relationships between thought and matter which are occupying my mind. Therefore I want to say more about that.

*One has the feeling that this film is something you have been nurturing for a long time.*

This film goes back to «Benilde ou a Virgem Mãe». There was the revolution of the 25<sup>th</sup> of April which took place and after that, a change occurred in people's mentality as well as the way Portugal was making its History. I thought about this and it brought me to the idea of making a film on the subject. A historical film about the way everything went and then the way everything completely changed directions at the time of 25<sup>th</sup> of April events. This film would be «NON», the latin «NON». Also because there is a speech by father Antonio Vieira, who was a major figure of portuguese literature in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century. (Fernando Pessoa called him «the emperor of portuguese language»). This speech is all about «NO». It says:

«Terrible word that 'NON'. It has neither front nor back. Whichever way you take it, it remains forever 'NON'».

I was impressed by that and found it interesting. *No or the vain glory of command.*

The second half of the title comes from the poetry of Camões in *The Lusíadas*. Part of which is in the film under the title «Island of Love». Camões says «Oh glory of commanding oh vain desire».

With these two elements I made up the title of the film. So it seems to me that already the film takes on a historical dimension.

*In all of your films there is a great sense of values. Which one is dominant in this film?*

I think that is a research the spectator or the critics should do. I believe the spiritual values are those which should dominate. Today these values are receding. The rational way of thinking and the immediate profits which this way of life induces in terms of consumer attitudes and production are leading the world to a dead end. This is the case for example of pollution, whether it be atomic or not, pollution of water, of the earth. And also the competition which comes from superproduction, etc.

However as the problem of death is still ever present, I think that maybe, if spiritual values return, then tragical aspect will stop.

*There is an interview in which you are quoted as having stolen from portuguese literature.*

*Today it is portuguese history then?*

I have stolen much from portuguese literature and also from french literature for *Le soulier de satin*. Claudel also «stole» from peninsular history for sources for *Le soulier de satin*.

Artists always steal from life and the masters they had. Well... Art is like a tree which spreads its different branches. Each artist adds a leaf, a little personal touch which is not however independent of all roots, whether it be History itself, those of nations or that of personal itineraries through life's fiction, feelings or men's reactions. That is why I am particularly conscious of that which is historical, whether it be based on history itself, on culture, or history of art, the artistic evolution of fiction, which is also a way of saying what is the way of life, what the different periods mean, and ways of being in the world.

The richest writer is the «biggest thief»...

*In «Amor de Perdição», «Francisca», «Le Soulier de satin», the idea of time is very present.*

*Now you are really speaking about time in this film.*

Yes, in fact it's a historically based film: it is the birth of a nation and its hidden destiny. It is also a film with action and that brought me to the use of more rapidly edited frames. The action takes place in different periods of history and in different places whereas in my other films there are emotional situations which are beyond time and therefore take up a lot of more time.

*In «Mon Cas» there was a study on language.*

*Have you continued this study of language in this present film?*

The «*Soulier de Satin*» was the end of my esthetical thinking about movies, about my own movies, about where I thought that the evolution of the cinema was leading. I realized then that I could not go much further on, or even that I couldn't go further at all in that direction. I was incapable of taking another step in that direction. I went through a crisis which led again to research. That research is heavily cast over «Mon Cas».

At the time I was saying that cinema was tied up with its creation means, and that it would be necessary to go back to a certain form of virginity, of purity.

But as I have said earlier I realized that I personally had reached certain limits. I felt then that in «NO» it would be necessary to have a new strategy, especially considering the fact that it's an action film. With this frame of mind I let my self go as if I were a beginner. In fact I really feel like a beginner each time I start a new film.

I have thought a lot about the movies in the 1920's which is considered as the golden age of silent movies. That era of cinema really fascinated me.

This is how «NO» was born and it is also a «NO» against my former esthetical convictions.

*The title seems to imply that power is vain if it is not bequested by God. Is that a concept on man's inevitable destiny?*

Well these thoughts are developped in the film itself?

I don't want to repeat them. Man was created free by God. Man has to fight against his destiny. And in terms of religious thinking man has to fight even more for his soul's destiny. There always is the problem of life and death.

*You say that God created men free but I see in your film a certain idea of predestination in as much as God opposes a «NO» to man's various attempts.*

This is a problem to which I am not qualified to answer. But I can say at least that man did not appear on this earth by his own will, at least not the first human being. But if man is the result of God's will then we owe Him thanks.

In the *Book of Job* when Job calls out to God, God answer by saying «Who were you, millions of years ago, to now dare ask me the slightest questions»?

*But that seems to be a denial of man's freedom.*

Not of this freedom. At least, nobody keeps him from killing himself. We celebrate freedom. «Liberty, equality, fraternity..., those are beautiful words but what could man do whith this liberty if it weren't given by God? We are free to go here and there, to accept or not to have faith in God, to accept or not the concept of freedom...

*Is your film optimistic or pessimistic?*

I do not have any preconceived ideas on the subject. My vision does not tend either towards optimism nor towards pessimism.

My vision tends towards reality or historical reality and I try to present this reality at the same time leaving a large question mark as to what will became of History because I am not a medium and nobody knows what the future will be.

*Could you talk about Luís de Camões?*

Luís de Camões is an author who is very important for portuguese litterature as well as litterature and culture of the world in general. He is a classical author and his poetical work is magnificent. His most famous book is «Os Lusíadas» which tells the story of Portugal according to the heroic feats. It's in that book that there is the sentences «Or glory of commanding! Oh vain desire!» This book which is a book of epic poetry is extremely important because it was written before the defeat of Alcácer-Quibir.

Camões himself read his epic poem to king D. Sebastian much before the king departed for battle.

This book is full of premonitions and it accounts historical events which really took place. That is the difference of this book versus classical epics, in this book the events are not imaginary or drawn from legends. The events are absolutely historically true. This book was the first example of this kind of treatment in classic epics. Also it includes, in a certain christian light, all of that period's culture. But here are different levels because Camões also includes the gods, the mythology, the war heroes and the great discoverers.

The base for «Os Lusíadas» are the great discoveries of the XV<sup>th</sup> century. «No or The vain Glory of Command» is a sort of contrary vision of «Os Lusíadas», or for there to be no misunderstanding possible, a historical continuation of «Os Lusíadas».

*Could one say that your film is a historical lecture?*

No, absolutely not. It's not even a historical film. I certainly don't have that pretention. What I have made is a fiction film where certain moments of History are represented by military men during the colonial war and the events are described with historical acuteness.

# Portugal II: Manoel de Oliveira

Ten feature films and just over a dozen short documentaries seem a small output for an 82-year-old filmmaker, but Manoel de Oliveira, like Robert Bresson, has only chosen to make those films which needed to be made, without compromise, true to his vision. Haired in Europe as one of its finest filmmakers, a doyen to many, and certainly an inspiration for the new Portuguese filmmakers of the eighties, de Oliveira is virtually unknown in North America. Fiercely individualistic, for some highly rarefied and remote, de-dramatised and cold, for others formally innovative, subtle and challenging, de Oliveira's work will probably divide audiences. The statements are so strong and personal, the form so rigorous and unwavering, that they will either immediately convert and overwhelm you with their brilliance or elicit opposite reactions. Like the great iconoclasts and formal innovators of the cinema — Godard, Bresson, Antonioni, Snow — the films force you into the world of another personality completely.

Born in 1908 in Oporto, de Oliveira was the son of an industrial entrepreneur. He fell in love with the movies at an early age, excelled in track-and-field and car racing as a youth and bought his first camera when he was 22. Turning his camera on the work which surrounded the river which passed through his hometown, he made his first film *Douro, Faina Fluvial* and had it shown at the 5th International Critics Congress held in Lisbon. Met with jeers and whistles because it dared show the impoverished reality of Portugal, it alerted critics to the birth of a new talent. A number of other documentaries followed, as well as an aborted fictionalized documentary about Port wine, before de Oliveira emerged with his first feature, the luminous *Aniko-bobo*, a neo-realist masterpiece which predated *Rome, Open City* by three years. Yet 14 years would pass before he would make another film. Finding his projects continually rejected by the Film Funding Council, he turned to agriculture, where he tried to introduce new methods of production.

In 1956, overcoming further odds (more rejections for funding grants), de Oliveira made another short documentary, *The Painter and the City*, which captured the attention of British documentary filmmaker Basil Wright in winning First Prize at the Cork Festival for Short Films. Other documentaries followed before de Oliveira embarked on his second feature film, *Acto da primavera*, made 21 years after his first! This cinematic interpretation of various Gospel passages provoked widely divergent reactions. It would be another eight years before he would make another feature, *O passado e o presente* (1971), the first of a tetralogy devoted to the theme of frustrated love. Described as his wittiest film, it is a black comedy which has evoked comparison to Buñuel and *Rules of the Game*. In the last two decades, de Oliveira has made another seven feature films and a handful of documentaries. With the 1974 revolution, de Oliveira found himself at the forefront of the Portuguese cinema and subsequently has found it much easier to finance his projects.

*Benilde*, the story of a young girl who claims her pregnancy is due to divine intervention, was followed by what many consider to be his masterpiece, *Amor de perdição*, based on the 19th-century novel, which uses carefully composed frames over its four-and-a-half hour running time to create what Elliot Stein has called its "shattering effect". Critic Dave Kehr wrote in the "Chicago Reader" of *Francisca*, the last film in the tetralogy: "de Oliveira uses modernist techniques to tell a story — a story of great subtlety, density, and emotional impact. Instead of murdering the fiction, as many modernists do, de Oliveira attempts to purify it, stripping away layer after layer of stylistic incrustation, finally leaving the fiction clean and glistening, like a tiny precious stone. And yet, for all of de Oliveira's drive toward the elemental and unadorned, the film retains a curling sense of the baroque, which rests in the incessant, meticulously observed emotional fluctuations of character. It is as if Jean-Marie Straub had collaborated with Max Ophüls: the refined mechanism of the materialist cinema is brought to bear on the most delicate mysteries of human emotions, on what can be described as an attempt to photograph and measure a soul."

1990 Festival of Festivals,  
Toronto



The late films show an increasing interest in history and the theatre. Both *The Satin Slipper* and *O meu caso* are centred around the theatrical, and *The Cannibals* is an opera. This fascination with the theatre allows de Oliveira to reflect on a host of issues, culminating in the masterful *Non, or the Vain Glory of Command*, an extraordinary work which acts as a revealing history lesson and introduction to the modern Portuguese spirit.

Manoel de Oliveira's work burns with a true love and passion for the cinema, for its potential as a means of visual expression. It is a cinema of intelligence, constantly demanding our attention, confrontational because it refuses the easy pleasures of reassurance to its audiences.

Piers Handling

## FILMS

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|--|--|
| 1931: Douro, Faina Fluvial (River Work on the Douro) (short docu).   | 1971: Sever do Vouga ... uma Experiencia (short docu) (supervised). O Passado e o Presente (Past and Present)                                    |
| 1932: Estátuas de Lisboa (The Statues of Lisbon) (docu) (unfinished)   | 1975: Benilde ou a Virgem Mãe (Benilde or the Virgin-Mother)   |
| 1938: Já Se Fabricam Automovéis em Portugal (They Already Make Cars In Portugal) (short docu); Miramar, Praia das Rosas (Miramar, Rose Beach) (short docu) | 1978: Amor de Perdição (Love of Perdition) (TV feature). <i>Doomed Love</i>  |
| 1939: Famalicão (short docu)   | 1981: Francisca.   |
| 1942: Aniko Bobo   | 1982: A Visita - Memórias e Confissões (The Visit - Memories and Confessions). Cultural Lisbon (docu).   |
| 1956: O Pintor e a Cidade (The Painter and the City) (docu)  | 1983: Nice... à Propos de Jean Vigo (TV docu).   |
| 1958: O Coração (The Heart) (docu) (unfinished)  | 1985: O Sapato de Celim Le Soulier de Satin (The Satin Slipper); Simposio International de Escultura (International Sculpture Symposium) (docu). |
| 1959: O Pão (Bread) (docu). As Pinturas do Meu Irmão Julio (The Paintings of My Brother Julio) (short docu)  | 1986: O Meu Caso (My Case).  |
| 1963: Acto da Primavera (Act of Spring). A Caça (The Hunt) (short)   | 1987: A Bandeira Nacional (The National Flag) (short docu); Os Canibais (The Cannibals).   |
| 1970: Porto 1100 Anos Inauguração Duma Estátua (short docu) (supervised & ed)  | 1990: Não ou a Vã Glória de Mandar (Non or the Vain Glory of Command)  |

1990 London Film Festival

# **CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF HISTORICAL TABLES IN THE FILM «NON»**

## **LUSITANIA 500 B.C.**

- Around 500.** Beginning of Iron Age.
- 237-206.** Carthaginian military supremacy in West.
- 218.** Arrival of Roman troops on the Iberian Peninsula.
- 147 B.C.** Viriato begins the fight against the Romans.
- 139 B.C.** Death of Viriato.

## **PORTUGAL II DYNASTY (AVIS)**

- 1385.** Reign of John I begins.
- 1415.** Conquest of Ceuta.
- 1432.** Birth of Afonso V.
- 1434.** Gil Eanes rounds Cape Bojador.
- 1438.** Afonso V comes to the throne.
- 1444.** Voyage to the coast of Portuguese Guinea.
- 1452.** Chronicles on events in Guinea by Gomes Eanes de Zurara.
- 1460.** Death of the Infante Henry.
- 1471.** Arzila and Tangiers taken.
- 1475.** Afonso V leaves the Regency to his son before leaving for Castile in defence of the rights of the Beltraneja.
- 1476.** Battle of Toro.
- 1481.** Death of Afonso V. John II comes to the throne.
- 1483.** Discovery of the River Zaire by Diogo Cão.
- 1487.** Bartolomeu Dias rounds the Cape of Good Hope.
- 1490.** Marriage of crown Prince Afonso (18 April). Death of crown Prince Afonso (25 August).
- 1492.** First voyage of Christopher Columbus.
- 1494.** Treaty of Tordesillas.
- 1495.** Death of John II. Reign of Manuel I begins.
- 1497.** Vasco da Gama's voyage to India.
- 1500.** Discovery of Brazil by Pedro Álvares Cabral.
- 1502.** First stone laid in Jerónimos Monastery.
- 1568.** Sebastian comes of age and assumes responsibility for government.
- 1572.** The «Lusiads» published by Camoens.
- 1578.** Battle of Alcácer Quibir. Henry becomes King.
- 1580.** Period begins in which three Philips of Spain rule Portugal (III Dynasty).

## **COLONIAL WAR (1961/1974)**

- 1961.** Start of war in Angola. Goa, Damão and Diu, occupied by Indian forces.
- 1963.** Start of war in Portuguese Guinea.
- 1964.** Start of war in Mozambique.
- 1974.** 25 April. End of Former regime (New State). Recognition of the principle of self-determination for the peoples of the Portuguese colonies.