

THE END OF HISTORY THROUGH
THE DISCLOSURE OF FICTION:
INDISCIPLINARITY IN MIGUEL GOMES'S *TABU* (2012)

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INTRODUCTION

This article proposes a new concept, the interdisciplinary film, and aims to prove its analytical benefits by analysing an outstanding and prize-winning contemporary Portuguese example: Miguel Gomes's *Tabu* (2012). The concept is inspired in Jacques Rancière's¹ idea of philosophy as an area of knowledge that thinks between disciplines, as well as in his notion of the aesthetic regime. As I have suggested elsewhere,² the notion of the interdisciplinary film aims to substitute that of the essay film. I will repeat my argument, in order to justify why I think that the study of films that escape classification should not focus on auto-reflexivity and subjectivity, but rather concentrate on their relation between method and fiction, politics and aesthetics, and reception.

I will advocate that Gomes's film thinks Portugal's colonial history between disciplines since its interest lies in the disclosure of fiction, as well as in acting on spectator expectations by engaging with our visual, aural and audio-visual experiences of colonial history in photography, music and film. Other than the written media that, according to Vilém Flusser,³ participated in offering a linear explication of our world, *Tabu* proves the full potential of the technological codes appointed to by the author. This is due to their capacity to develop concepts of images instead of understanding the world as an accumulation of scenes (as images do) or concepts that signify ideas (as literature does). In a very literal sense techno-imaginary codes indicate the end of history⁴ and the entrance into the world of models. Images and literature can thus be recognized in their role as mediators. I will claim that Gomes, whose film is inspired in F. W. Murnau's *Tabu: a Story from the South Seas* (1931), which discussed the influence of writing on native cultures, makes us perceive this dimension of techno-images as concepts, thus setting new standards for contemporary film and its relationship with history as fiction.

In fact, with his title, his topic and aesthetics Gomes sets up an intense and contemporary dialogue with Murnau's silent masterwork. He follows the German filmmakers' representation of colonialism from an anthropological point of view, his defiance of categories such as ethnographic documentary and fiction film and his highlighting of the materiality of the cinematographic image and of sound, but focuses even stronger on the performativity of the characters' roles. However, Gomes deals from a changed because post-colonial perspective with the feeling of loss of an empire, instead of the loss of an autochthonous society. The contemporary filmmaker actually permits the feeling of nostalgia for the colonial past, camouflaged as the longing for one's youth, as post-colonialism's insistence in its most negative side, explicitly the master-servant relationship towards contemporary African migrants. As a result, *Tabu* stands out in present film production by confronting the spectator expectations usually aroused in European and Hollywood films, as well as in ethnographic films that express an un-deliberately craving for lost empires.

INDISCIPLINARITY VERSUS THE ESSAY-FILM

Given its aesthetics and defying politics, *Tabu* is difficult to classify. Even though close to what is usually considered a fiction film, it could easily be associated with what filmmakers and theoreticians have called an "essay film." As part of modern cinema, this concept has been used to inscribe film into the history of modernism, however mainly for films that are stronger linked with documentary filmmaking.

How then approach this genre resisting film? I suggest "indisciplinary film" since the concept reveals the construction of fictions and calls attention to film's capacity to make us experience aesthetic heterogeneity and dissent, presenting as such the possibility to grasp a deeper understanding of film as a sensorial *and* cognitive art form. Following Rancière⁵ and his ideas on art and the avant-garde, I am proposing that we should abandon the notion of modernity in cinema, associated with self-referentiality and the subjectivity of the author, and analyse the trans-historical relation between knowledge, politics and aesthetics articulated in film instead.

What are we giving up and what can we earn from doing so? Claiming the essay as a genre for film theory and practice has been an important item on a political agenda: to de-

find the mass medium as a serious art form whose critical and reflexive capacity is comparable to philosophy and other disciplines of knowledge. Michel de Montaigne, responsible for introducing⁶ the concept in his famous book, was, on the other hand, more interested in human limitations. The *Essays* presented the “thoughts” and the “essence”⁷ of its author, so as to delineate how to understand and live with humanities imperfections. Self-observation and reflection on human behaviour, disregard for rules and schemes, idealization or typification lay at its core. While this could be regarded as an “indisciplinary” methodology that thinks between disciplines, the essay was quickly adopted as a genre in a wide range of disciplines, from philosophy to human sciences and the arts, among them film. The genre question is actually the one issue that still divides scholars in the theorization of the essay-film.⁸

Establishing the essay-film as a genre meant defending it as an audio-visual tool for reasoning. Sergei Eisenstein was the first to embrace the concept for *Oktyabr* (*October*, 1929), maintaining that cinema was “capable of articulating ideas”⁹. Based on Eisenstein, Bela Balázs¹⁰ argued in the 1930 that the “Gedankenfilm” mediated abstract ideas through sensitive forms and intellectual thought through the effect of images. In the same line, Hans Richter¹¹ pondered in 1940 that the essay-film was a much-anticipated variation of the documentary film, capable of visualizing ideas and thoughts by making the invisible visible.¹² Almost a decade later, in 1948, Alexandre Astruc¹³ fell short of pointing out a filmic example that deserved to be called an expression of thinking. In his notorious text on the camera-pen he was nevertheless certain that this hypothesis would soon become a reality.

Examples of the kind of filmmaking he idealized were being observed from the 1950s onwards. In 1954, Jacques Rivette¹⁴ described Roberto Rossellini’s feature *Viaggio in Italia* (*The Lonely Woman*, 1954) as an essay, sustaining that cinema was as capable of being essayistic as literature by stressing the film’s remarkable mix of everyday details and ideas. In 1958, André Bazin¹⁵ spotted a film that fitted Astruc’s foresight perfectly: *Lettre de Sibérie* (*Letters from Siberia*, 1958) by Chris Marker. Fascinated by an editing style that cut from eye to ear (called horizontal montage), Bazin claimed that this could take documentary filmmaking to a new level. Astruc, for his part, reckoned that the camera-pen would be as much a tool for fiction as for documentary. In 1965, German filmmakers Alexander Kluge, Edgar Reitz and Wilfried Reinke¹⁶ picked up on the ideas of Balázs by concentrating their attention on the dialectical relationship between aesthetics and concepts in films that they considered suitable for the communication of complex ideas. In the same year, Jean-Luc Godard designated

his *Pierrot Le Fou* (1965) an essay-film.¹⁷ Roughly at the same time, in 1969, Argentinian directors Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino¹⁸ signposted what the essay-film could offer to the development of their 'Third Cinema' in Latin America.

When the essay-film became a key concept in film studies in the 1980s, mainly in German¹⁹ and French²⁰ academia, the concerns changed only slightly. In the wake of the definition of modernist art²¹ and avant-garde film,²² subjectivity of point of view and auto-reflexivity were singled out as key characteristics of films that encourage active spectator participation and involve the audience in the decoding of inventive sound to image montage. The rational side thus remained paramount to its definition and the documentary was seen to be its main playground.

When the concept's theoretical discussion and usage as an analytical tool spread in the following decade around Europe,²³ reaching North and South America²⁴ at the turn of the new millennium, it was generally agreed that the essay-film was an open art work that breaks away from the parameters of established genres, questioning their and the medium's limits by disregarding established hierarchies between literature, philosophy and visual media. In short, it was modern cinema's most modernist accomplishment that made its audiences think and question established knowledge by means of its filmmaker's authorial style.

George Lukács,²⁵ in 1910, and later Theodor W. Adorno,²⁶ in 1958, strongly influenced this mind-set by stressing the centrality of the author and his critique of ultimate knowledge. Both discussed the essay in the light of a revision of sciences' objectivity. Even though Adorno disagrees with Lukács' definition of the concept as an artistic form,²⁷ he cites him extensively to underline the contribution of the essay to unorthodox thinking and to foreground the limitations of scientific methods:

Even the empiricist doctrines that grant priority to open, unanticipated experience over firm, conceptual ordering remain systematic to the extent that they investigate what they hold to be the more or less constant pre-conditions of knowledge and develop them in as continuous a context as possible. Since the time of Bacon, who was himself an essayist, empiricism — no less than rationalism — has been "method." Doubt about the unconditional priority of method was raised, in the actual process of thought, almost exclusively by the essay. It does justice to the consciousness of non-identity, without needing to say so, radically un-radical in refraining from any reduction to a princi-

ple, in accentuating the fragmentary, the partial rather than the total. Perhaps the great *Sieur de Montaigne* felt something like this when he gave his writings the wonderfully elegant and apt title of *Essays*. The simple modesty of this word is an arrogant courtesy. The essayist dismisses his own proud hopes which sometimes lead him to believe that he has come close to the ultimate: he has, after all, no more to offer than explanations of the poems of others, or at best of his own ideas. But he ironically adapts himself to this smallness — the eternal smallness of the most profound work of the intellect in face of life — and even emphasizes it with ironic modesty.²⁸

The inconclusiveness of methods is recognized by both authors and approaches them more than their divergence on the essay as an art form might suggest. Both thinkers also underline the centrality of the author who opens up a space of experience through which the essay articulates its doubts and its critique of ultimate knowledge. Lukács speaks of reflexive monologues and the essayist's growing consciousness of his own nature, whereas Adorno uses the image of the author as a stage of interrogations and doubts:

Actually, the thinker does not think, but rather transforms himself into an arena of intellectual experience, without simplifying it. While even traditional thought draws its impulses from such experience, such thought by its form eliminates the remembrance of these impulses. The essay, on the other hand, takes them as its model, without simply imitating them as reflected form; it mediates them through its own conceptual organization; it proceeds, so to speak, methodically unmethodically.²⁹

Accordingly, Adorno recognizes that the essay's aesthetic shares the possibilities of non-conceptual works of art. But since he understands art to be non-discursive, the essay can by no means be considered an artistic expression.

Whereas both authors' observations on the importance of experience were not so eagerly remembered but, conversely turned into the subjectivity of the author, Adorno factually ended up complicating matters for the reception of the essay in art theory. For once, since his paradoxical statement on its "methodically un-methodically" procedure made up for much of the mystification of the essay-film. And second because he considered this "method" as purely literary. Paradoxically, it the questioning of this hierarchization of disci-

plines that helps to explain why filmmakers from Eisenstein to Getino were attracted to this label. The audio-visual was already being perceived as having a potential that could rival with any other discipline that produces knowledge. But this was being supported by drawing strongly on film's capacity to think, as well as on a modernist nomenclature that overshadowed conceptually what was already a consciousness of cinema's capacity to make concepts of images, as Flusser would say. In fact, there is nothing wrong with claiming the essay for film art, had its definition not been so strongly connected with reason, modernism and documentary.

Since Adorno defended, inconsistently, the logo-centric side of the essay, time has passed and hierarchies have crumbled. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's³⁰ well-known definition of the philosopher as a creator of concepts is less restrictive and much sharper with regard to the differences between art, science and philosophy and are certainly responsible for Rancière's idea of indisciplinaryity. Focusing on concepts demonstrates that the filmmaker's worries and those of today's film scholars have lost ground. Accepting that each field of knowledge is creative and interrelated, Deleuze and Guattari explain that they all think, even though in very different ways:

from sentences or their equivalent, philosophy extracts concepts (which must not be confused with general or abstract ideas), whereas science extracts prospects (propositions that must not be confused with judgments), and art extracts percepts and affects (which must not be confused with perceptions or feelings). In each case language is tested and used in incomparable ways — but in ways that do not define the difference between disciplines without also constituting their perpetual interbreeding.³¹

In the philosophers' understanding science is also less affirmative than Adorno would have it, and art undoubtedly capable of thinking: "Art thinks no less than philosophy, but it thinks through affects and percepts." One might want to add that it does so in varying degrees.³²

If the essay-film was successful in fighting film's case as high art (in post-modern times somehow obsolete), it can, given its association with the above mentioned characteristics of modern cinema, also prove misleading as an analytical tool. Let me briefly demonstrate this with *Tabu*. The film juxtaposes two parts set in different historical moments after a prologue. It makes references to Hollywood movies, ethnographic films, the silent masterpiece *Tabu: A*

Story from the South Seas, pop songs from the 1960s and colonial photography. If we looked for its self-reflexivity and the author's subjectivity, we would ignore the dissent, which is at the core of Gomes aesthetic: that he establishes identity with Murnau's film and differences with dominant cinema's take on colonialism, uses several main characters and their contradictory viewpoints, engages with their moods without identifying with them, and that he reveals the enduring connection between colonial past and present.

Instead of looking to a hierarchizing literary theory in order to canonize film as a modernist art form, as filmmakers, theoreticians and scholars of the essay-film have done for decades, a turn towards philosophy might offer a more productive methodological approach that focuses the dissident attitude stronger by concentrating on the relation between the production of disciplinary knowledge and aesthetics, in short, indisciplinaryity.

THE INDISCIPLINARY FILM

Adorno was undoubtedly concerned with counterattacking disciplinaryity when he highlighted the anti-methodological method of the essay. While Jacques Rancière's concept is obviously indebted to some of his ideas, indisciplinaryity presents an original take on the problem of method that makes it more attractive to film analysis since it foregrounds the question of fiction. The author claims that disciplines are not defined *a priori* by their methods, but rather by "constituting an object as an object of thought and as the demonstration of a certain idea of knowledge."³³ This attention towards the system on which knowledge production is based is reminiscent of Michel Foucault. But the relation between power, truth and subject is enhanced by the question of aesthetic practices, as the author himself clarifies:

If the reader is fond of analogy, aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense — re-examined perhaps by Foucault — as the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible of speech and noise [...].³⁴

Aesthetics is, then, a problem that concerns every aspect of human life, including science and politics. Science for once is seen in a dim light: not only as a "war machine against al-

lodoxy. But what is called alldoxy is, in reality, an aesthetic dissent.”³⁵ The disciplines of knowledge are being criticized more drastically and from a different vantage point. In fact, they are accused of trying to neutralize everything that breaks away from consent and threatens social balance, everything that would put the distribution of social roles and occupations at risk. In short, everything that aims to restructure the “distribution of the sensible.”

Following Deleuze and Guattari, Rancière’s target is philosophy’s rival, sociology. But, factually, all human and social sciences are in his sight. Post-structuralism’s lessons have been learned: the boundaries hide the fact that methods actually unfold into the construction of stories. While Jacques Derrida would speak of deconstruction, Rancière calls this indisciplinaryity. He defines it as a way of thinking that reveals the borders established by the various disciplines, as well as their purpose as weapons in their “war” against aesthetic dissent. For that reason, methods do not examine a territory but try to define it by telling stories. Any area of knowledge, with philosophy at its lead, needs to pay attention to the tales of other disciplines — which they call methods — in order to maintain its indisciplinaryity:

Disciplinary thought says: we have our territory, our objects and the methods which correspond to them. This is what sociology or history, political science or literary theory, says. This is also what philosophy, in the regular sense, says, posing itself as a discipline. But at the moment in which it wants to found its status as a discipline of disciplines, it produces this reversal: the foundation of foundation is a story. And philosophy says to those knowledges [*savoir*] who are certain of their methods: methods are recounted stories. This does not mean that they are null and void. It means that they are weapons in a war; they are not tools which facilitate the examination of a territory but weapons which serve to establish its always uncertain boundary.³⁶

Like Deleuze and Guattari, Rancière sees no difference between the diverse disciplines. It is the construction of their stories that varies: “Only the language of stories can trace the boundary, forcing the aporia of the absence of final reason from the reasons of the disciplines.”³⁷ In one big stroke Rancière also does away with differences between science, art and politics. Fictionality is, indeed, the one trait they all share: “Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct “fictions,” that is to say, material rearrangements of signs and

images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done.”³⁸

It is surprising that when the philosopher speaks of film, apart from challenging the avant-garde discourse of pure art, he positions art film again as opposed to classical Hollywood narrative, as though cinema was destined to produce fables and not fictions. He actually says that: “The art of cinema has been constrained, empirically, to affirm its art against the tasks assigned to it by the industry. But the visible process by which it thwarts these tasks only hides a more intimate process: to thwart its servitude, cinema must first thwart its mastery. [...] The film fable is a thwarted fable.”³⁹ Curiously, this sounds like the unmethodological method of Adorno and is thus less poignant than his ideas about the fictionality of all method. Moreover, although Rancière’s understanding of fable might not be an Aristotelian one, when he speaks of cinema’s open, fluid and passive character, which he calls a “positive contradiction,”⁴⁰ he does not seem to have resolved the theoretical problem that is usually referred to as the binary opposition between realism and anti-realism.

In this respect, the philosopher Martin Seel developed a more compelling idea by affirming film’s indeterminacy⁴¹. Analysing in detail the two opposing trends in film theory — one that discusses the extra-filmic reality and another that spotlights the construction of reality — as well as film’s illusionism — presented in a new light within film history with the concept of the cinema of attractions — Seel advances with a different approach capable of expressing film’s ability to produce an audio-visual experience that is neither real nor illusionary but always an indeterminate construction. Rancière, on the other hand, who is revisiting its history, does not engage with this theoretically undefined potential. Parting from Seel’s definition of film as unspecified in its relation to the construction of reality, I would suggest that film does not need to thwart its mastery, since the mastery itself is only a fiction of film history — a fact that Rancière is tackling but not resolving with the same theoretical consistency as Seel.

Rancière’s definition of the aesthetic regime, however, is much more suitable for the theoretical definition of film’s aesthetic possibilities. By employing a philosophical concept to define art, this other axiom in Rancière’s thinking has two key goals: to define art in the singular, i.e., to abandon the idea of art’s specificity, and to question the very idea of modern art and its impact within the periodization of art history. What is more, it presents a defini-

tion of realism that is not only groundbreaking for film (and aware of its indeterminacy within art) but also proposes a way to use indisciplinaryity as an analytical tool for film studies.

The turning point towards the aesthetic regime is spotted in two instances: in German idealism and in literary realism. With regard to the latter the author develops a dynamic concept: "its inaugural moment has often been called realism, which does not in any way mean the valorisation of resemblance but rather the destruction of the structures within which it functioned."⁴² *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert is the philosopher's prime example. He argues, and this is of the utmost importance for my critique of the essay-film, that the book does not bear the traces of its author's intervention, i.e., his subjectivity, but, rather, of the indifference and passivity of things without will or significance: "The fictionality specific to the aesthetic age is consequently distributed between two poles: the potential of meaning inherent in everything silent and the proliferation of modes of speech and levels of meaning."⁴³

Consequently, realism retracts from the imitation of action and highlights the "brute" materiality of the objects, remembering, at the same time, their narrative potential.⁴⁴ Pre-established borders are imploded and new experiences proposed that reconfigure the distribution of the sensible. Is this not Rancière's very own definition of indisciplinaryity? And is film not an art form for which this is particularly true? It is worth noting that recent scholarship on the avant-garde film has put forward a comparable redefinition. Gabriele Jutz⁴⁵ and A. L. Rees,⁴⁶ for example, have questioned authors such as Clement Greenberg and P. A. Sitney, who famously defended self-reflexivity and subjectivity, by foregrounding the relation between materiality and performativity in films from the early 1920s to the present.

Since indisciplinaryity is concerned with the fictions of disciplines that construct borders and consent, its main objective is described not only as the foregrounding of these fictions, but also as the re-configuration of the sensible and thus as an aesthetic of dissent. Rancière's definition is as follows: "Thus dissent is not an opposition between a government and people who challenge it, it is a conflict about the configuration of the sensible. [...] Dissent has as its aim what I call the cut-out of the sensible, the distribution of private and public spaces, of issues that are dealt with or are not, and of the actors that have or have not a motif to be there to take care of them."⁴⁷ It seems to be a simple equation — fictionality equals consent and indisciplinaryity equals the redistribution of the sensible — if it were not for the aesthetic

dimension. Rancière's idea of the aesthetic regime believes in the necessity of an aesthetic dissent, not in the Marxist sense but as a means for a democracy that needs to question the binary oppositions on which consensus is built.

When elaborating on the aesthetic regime, the author actually specifies a number of characteristics that may serve as key indicators for film's indisciplinaryity. They all share a fundamental "identity of contraries,"⁴⁸ that is, they manifest a heterogeneous world-view that goes beyond the border construction of conventional methods. I will use them therefore as methodological tools for film analysis: 1) the co-presence of temporalities; 2) the in-definition of borders between the reason of facts and the reason of fictions; 3) the suspension of the opposition between the activity of thought and the passivity of sensible matter; and, generally, and, finally, 4) the re-composition of the landscape of the visible.⁴⁹

Let me look at the third feature more carefully as it is especially important for a revision of the characteristics associated with modernist art, modern cinema and the essay-film. Film studies, developing on Brecht's ideas on anti-Aristotelian theatre, has a long tradition of defining the spectator as body-less and of challenging his passive, ocular perception, as for example, in the apparatus theory, the discussion on continuity editing, suture and the panoptic view, or in feminist film theory. Much recent film scholarship has contested this point of view. As Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener⁵⁰ put it: "Cinema is not a case apart of perception with proper rules; the brain processes all sensible perception and that of the body, in cinema and anywhere else." Rancière too argues for the concept of an emancipated spectator by saying that there is no distinction between active and passive reception whatsoever: "Spectatorship is not the passivity that has to be turned into activity. It is our normal situation."⁵¹

With regard to the essay-film, recent theoretical debate has gone from the activation of the spectator towards the idea of a dialogue between author and audience.⁵² Although it sounds more dynamic, it factually remains based on distinguishing the essay-film from other films by overestimating its cognitive reception and by forgetting, or ignoring, sensitive stimuli that are equally important in the process of constructing signification. One could argue that the indisciplinary film is in fact grounded on the sensitive engagement with the "brute" presence of materiality since it is interested in the construction of meaning in a complex way that exceeds rational perception. If we can agree that any film is always active and passive,

cognitive and sensitive, we might be able to look more closely at the way in which (indisciplinary) films try to re-distribute the sensible and produce dissent.

A second point needs further clarification: the author's subjectivity. I would argue that since Montaigne, self-observation has been much more important to artists than authorship. I would even claim that the so-called "subjectivity" which has been singled out as the key characteristic of the essay-film, has been a misinterpretation of Montaigne's intent to focus on self-scrutiny, i.e. the setting up of a stage for experiences that makes life's heterogeneity perceptible. Much of the theorization of the essay-film, strongly influenced by auteur theories in the context of modern cinema, is actually built on this "fiction."

Let me summarize my arguments: Even though the essay-film looks back on more than eighty years of theoretical discussion, a number of concerns have persisted and some questions have remained unanswered. The interdisciplinary film as a theoretical framework aims to resolve these issues or to prove that they have become obsolete. Accordingly, it wants to settle the question of whether film cannot only think but act by arguing that it does so between disciplines. This results from its interest to work towards the redistribution of the sensible by means of dissent. This brings the discussion about the essay-film as genre to a close. By using Rancière's definition of realism, it surpasses a questioning of the boundaries between fiction and documentary by foregrounding art's attention towards the signifying potential of the heterogeneity of recorded and thus constructed reality. As a result, subjectivity and the centrality of the author lose their position as key characteristics. Finally, and in tune with current scholarship, formal aspects become less important and the idea that the essay-film "activates" the spectator is revised.

I trust that the concept of the interdisciplinary film can change our perspective on film and its reception in general and on the essay-film in particular by shifting our attention towards more vital features for future theorization and film analysis outlined above. I will now examine *Tabu* in order to point out how the film acts between disciplines.

TABU (2012) BY MIGUEL GOMES

Tabu distinguishes itself from most of contemporary Portuguese film production, since it opens up a new and interdisciplinary path with regard to the way it deals with national history

and the sentiments of loss involved⁵³. Let me first look at how it constructs a co-presence of temporality that jeopardises linear history and renders the inseparability of the reason of facts and fictions perceptible. Then I will demonstrate how the film suspends the opposition between activity of thought and passivity of sensible matter, so as to offer the experience that techno-imaginary codes are always nothing else but mediators.

CO-PRESENCE OF TEMPORALITY AND UNDEFINED BORDERS BETWEEN FACTS AND FICTIONS

Portuguese cinema has used historical comparison or the association of different historical moments to depict colonialism or the colonial war before. *Non ou a Vã Glória de Mandar* (*No or the vain glory of command*, 1990) by Manoel de Oliveira and *Um Adeus Português* (*Portuguese Farewell*, 1985) by João Botelho are well known examples.⁵⁴ *Tabu*, shot entirely in black and white, takes this analogy to another level, since it insists, in contrast to the earlier films, in the persistence of the colonial mind-set in contemporaneity, and it does so by foregrounding its presence in both the colonial and post-colonial temporality.

In order to do so it is divided into two parts with a prologue. The first part, entitled “Paradise Lost,” is set in modern day Lisbon, while the second, “Paradise,” takes us back to the 1960s in an unspecified and overtly fictitious Portuguese colony on the African continent. I will explain in more detail how these two parts not only cite Murnau’s *Tabu*, but actually invert and comment on the earlier film’s structure. The short prologue complements yet another time layer, the 19th century, while setting up the tone, the subject and the aesthetics of the film.

PROLOGUE

The film opens with an image of an explorer equipped with a tropical helmet and a water pouch. He stands still in a pose reminiscent of photography, a frozen image in time of a prototype explorer in the African bushes. The iconographic image comes to life when his African carriers appear in the picture. While the titles blend in, he remains motionless.



Fig. 1: *Tabu* — the explorer.

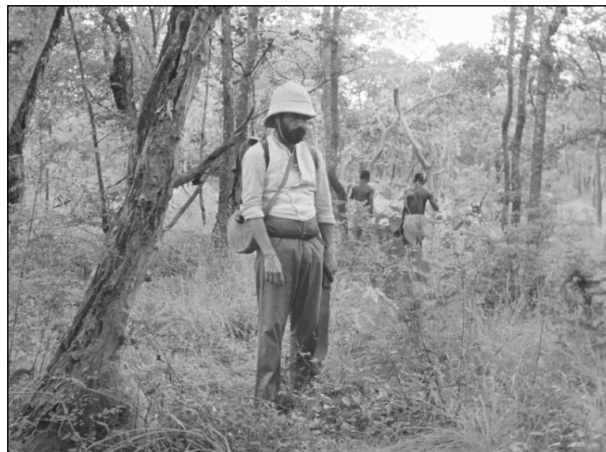


Fig. 2: *Tabu* — the explorer and his servants.

Already in this first shot Gomes puts at stake a historical self-image that Portugal has developed over centuries: that its colonization was a humanistic and scientific project without economic interest.⁵⁵ The filmmaker recreates one of the images that this idea entails, and then exposes its construction by revealing it as a pose when the Africans move at the explorer's service. The moving image thus tells more about colonialism than the photographic image, since it is capable of demonstrating the subservience at its base. This capacity of movies to disclose fictionality will be employed throughout the film.

The historical photographic or documentary images that have participated in structuring discourses on Africa and its landscape are as much revisited, as are the romantic adventure stories that have been told by mainstream cinema. The prologue deals, therefore, with another central fiction that will also be vital in the second part: the love story. But this occurs

in a fashion that enhances as much the fictionality of Hollywood movies set in the African jungle, as well as by acting on our ideas on facts by means of the aesthetics of ethnographic filmmaking.

An omniscient voiceover, reminiscent of this type of documentary film, explains that the explorer is not propelled by scientific longing for knowledge, but by the grief for his deceased spouse. We see the explorer walking through the savannah and having an encounter with his dead wife who tells him he will not be able to run away from his feelings. He then throws himself into a river to be eaten by a crocodile, as the voice tells us. In a generic twist that emphasizes even stronger the character of documentation, his African servants, who witness his ridiculous love suicide, perform a dance. Some of the dancers establish eye contact with the camera, as though we were now watching a genuinely authentic ethnographic film. However, the constant play with genre conventions jeopardises any binary opposition between the reason of facts and fictions. We are perceptibly confronted with a fictional account that comes in the disguise of documentation.



Fig. 3: *Tabu* — citation of ethnographic documentaries.

Returning to the love story and underlining the surreal dimension of the story, which takes us even further away from the reason of facts, the voice over then informs us that according to legend the melancholic animal was often seen in the company of a lady. This is then illustrated by a shot of the two creatures. Due to the estranging ethnographic approach and the deadpan acting the sequence is not only unreal but also rather comic. In travelling or static shots, the characters perform mechanically their supposedly deep feelings, and while the explorer recalls Buster Keaton, his wife looks like a ghost from a B-Movie. One of the fa-

avourite genre mixes of Hollywood — adventure and love stories in exotic landscapes — is dismantled with dry humour the performativity of the roles of tragic romantic hero and haunting love object.

Thus, the introductory part makes us perceive two kinds of fiction: colonialism camouflaged as exploration and the cinematographic love story set in a tropical environment. This is made possible by Gomes's citation and appropriation of codes from artistic movements and genres such as Surrealism, the Hollywood adventure melodrama, silent comedy, the ethnographic film and colonial photography. They set up a dialogue that excels the imposition of a subjective viewpoint on the colonial imaginary. On the contrary, by reactivating this imaginary the film makes its fictionality perceptible. This interdisciplinary approach is already obvious in the prologue where it shows that the impact of colonialism can only be understood if the different genres and methodologies involved are revisited. By revealing their constructiveness as sentimental backdrop, a dissident outlook becomes possible that ridicules the imaginary heroes of the imperial past.

PARADISE LOST

So as to underline the positive disguise of colonialism and its audio-visual cover-up through the love story, and to establish a relation with contemporary times — where these fictions persist in a different temporality — a cut takes us to Pilar, the main character of the first part, sitting in the cinema and, presumably, watching this movie. The blending in of the title "Paradise Lost" already sheds an ironic light that will intensify once we have seen the second part of the film. But even after the prologue the question arises, if this was Paradise, what has been lost?

But there is more to the inter-title and the idea of having been expelled from the Garden of Eden in nowadays Lisbon. As in the prologue, it is not only a historical and biblical reference, but also an artistic and aesthetic one. Fritz Murnau's film on a love story in the South Sea is equally divided in two parts. A native couple, Reri and Mathai, defies the religious authorities and ends tragically since they have to flee from their island. The first part, set on Bora-Bora, is called "Paradise" and the second, set on an island that has already suffered the effects of colonization, "Paradise Lost." Gomes not only reverses this logic, but radicalizes

the lack of rigidity of this binary opposition with the aim of developing on his main theme: the persistence of the colonial mind.

As Julian Hanich notes, the native society in Murnau's *Tabu* is already corrupted on the native island in "Paradise."⁵⁶ When Reri, the daughter of the chieftain, is claimed by the Polynesian king to become the virgin of their gods, a priest arrives on a French ship and presents his demand in writing, which proves that the once oral and flexible society has already become rigorous and authoritarian. Threatened by their own society, the couple finally becomes victim of capitalist colonialism in "Paradise Lost." Unfamiliar with the monetary system, Mathai, who now earns money diving for pearls, becomes indebted to Chinese merchants. Even though he successfully defies imposed taboos twice, he and Reri cannot get away from the exploitation institutionalized by modern civilization.

Murnau's *Tabu* thus not only engages with a critique of Western civilization brought forward by his contemporary anthropologists such as Franz Boas, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict.⁵⁷ The film also criticizes the triumph of the written word and law, imposed by religion and colonialism: "writing in *Tabu* is a means of power and authority."⁵⁸ The focus on the act of writing and its implications thus associates the loss of the natives' world with the end of silent film being that the silent film considers the spoken word as equally threatening to the art of filmmaking as the written word is to pre-colonial society. It is worth remembering that both, and Murnau was certainly aware of this, written law and sound film — build the basis for capitalism.

Gomes's situation is dissimilar but not completely different. His post-colonial context makes him equally sceptical towards contemporary society, but he adopts a caustic change that results from his historical perspective. Instead of focusing on natives, as Murnau did in a moment in which colonialism was being challenged by anthropology, he uses a romantic couple from the colonial period, which he ironically calls "Paradise." As a result, he includes the notion of nostalgia towards the characters' youth that seems to push the colonial question into the background but guarantees a more heterogeneous engagement with their contradictions. The post-colonial moment, on the other hand, is entitled, paradoxically but coherently, "Paradise Lost," given that the persistence of the colonial mind is the true fall from Eden. As mentioned before, the spectators will only get a chance to understand the full meaning of the titles at the end of the film. I will return to them after discussing each part.

The modern paradise-lost part establishes a sense of loneliness, hollowness, and so engages consciously with a latent sense of lack, which, again, serves to obstruct the political question that lies at its core. It thus introduces with great understatement important contemporary socio-political issues that result from colonial times, particularly the manner in which African migrants are treated, but, equally important, how, if at all, the characters engage with history. The story of Pilar, a common and lonely middle-aged Portuguese woman who tries to be a good Christian and an active citizen, is told in short sequences that span over a week. She is politically engaged in an NGO, assists her demented neighbour Aurora, offers to host a nun who comes to Lisbon for a meeting of the ecumenical Taizé community (turning out to be just an ordinary Polish girl) and spends time with an elderly painter friend who has a crush on her. Her fascination with Aurora — who, in a pun on the novel *Out of Africa* by Karen Blixen and its cinematographic adaptation — once had a farm in Africa, testifies to her desire of a more exiting life that she tries to satisfy by frequently going to the movies, as we already saw. Aurora, on the other hand, is a senile gambler who constantly loses her money at the casino. Empathic with Aurora, Pilar censures Aurora's black housekeeper Santa for not taking action, even though she is only a poor immigrant from some unspecified country of the PALOP, paid for by Aurora's daughter who lives in Canada.

Santa's character reveals the limits of Pilar's Christian and democratic values. Even though she is friendly, Pilar also assumes an intimidating and superior position. Aurora's demonization of her — she says Santa was sent by the devil — testifies more visibly against a happy coexistence between ex-colonizer and former colonized. Both attitudes demonstrate that luso-tropicalism and lusophony, two key concepts related to Portugal's "soft colonialism" survived in post-colonial society as a common sensual mentality, covered under a pseudo-democratic veil.

Lusophony and luso-tropicalism deserve special attention since they have been substantial in the development of a positive imaginary with regard to Portuguese colonialism. As I have stated elsewhere,⁵⁹ luso-tropicalism can be defined as propagating Portugal's outstanding accomplishments — the discoveries of sea routes, islands and "continents" — as a consequence of the country's desire to convert the world to Christianity in a peaceful manner. Trying to distinguish itself from the Spanish conquerors, Portugal's colonial process has been interpreted as guided by religious instead of material interests and understood to have been non-violent, by engaging, living and mixing with the most diverse cultures and ethnicities

from the southern hemisphere. Luso-tropicalism is, in fact, based on the idea that the Portuguese people, due to their own cultural miscegenation that suffered influences from Europe and the North of Africa, are trans-national in their essence.⁶⁰

Lusophony, on the other hand, is a product of international decolonization but entered the lusophone stage only permanently after Portugal finally let go of its colonies in Africa in the early 1970s, which brought a feeling of loss to the core. It also advocates a harmonious trans-national community in the colonies and aims to guarantee its survivals after the end of the empire by identifying the Portuguese language as a metaphor for a shared culture. To do so, it ignores regional and national linguistic, cultural and historical differences and uses Portuguese as the principle and corner stone of a common cultural identity, which — due to its transnational dimension — is considered superior to any national identity. Both concepts are powerful tools that convert the colonial history into a collective cultural history.

As I have noted in a different place,⁶¹ only in the last decade or so have Portuguese literary critics and social scientists started to translate the insights from post-colonialism and the awareness of a post-colonial national identity crisis into the critical assessment of these and other concepts and ideas associated with Portugal's colonialism. Questioning the national predisposition for transnationality and the celebration of its post-colonial cultural legacy, this has helped to lay bare luso-tropicalism's and lusophony's intent to camouflage difference by acknowledging that they were designed to maintain the imaginary of Portugal as a great nation.

The same is true for Gomes's film, but in an ironic way. It is possible to sense the persistence of an oblique master-servant relationship between Aurora and Santa that reveals luso-tropicalism to be a fraud, but also between her and Pilar. *Tabu* takes great care to sustain also the inexistence of lusophony since Santa is just learning how to read and write in Portuguese. Poignantly, even the Polynesians in Murnau's film were literate, though this was not to their advantage. As an African immigrant in 21st century Portugal, Santa's way out of illiteracy is thorny. Her teacher displays paternalistic arrogance when she praises the fact that Santa is ahead of her class because she is reading a book; and the literature she picked only reaffirms her subordinate place. *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by Daniel Dafoe, the most famous and widely published book on the colonial encounter, tells the story of a castaway who establishes a master-servant relationship, which Gomes subtly associates not only with Aurora, but also with Pilar.



Fig. 4: *Tabu* — Santa reading *Robinson Crusoe*.

Contemporary Portugal appears as a rigid and secluded world in which the power play from colonial times continues.⁶² However, none of the characters seems to be at ease or even remotely happy with their lives. Fixed static shots and mechanically delivered dialogues are aesthetic hints towards an unrevealed subtext. Each composition is “brute” in the sense that its materiality hints towards meaning that surpasses what the characters disclose. What is more, embedded in a disconnected structure of two parts, the narrative potential is not only present in the shots but remains also rather disconnected due to the divided plot.

The first sequence of the first part may serve as an example for the materiality of the shots. After we see Pilar sitting in the cinema where she watches the film on the explorer, there is a cut to a shot in which she is driving through the streets. Lisbon is not at all portrayed as being picturesque, only modern and functional buildings fly by the window whose indifference and passivity are telling about the life in the city.



Fig. 5: *Tabu* — On the way to the airport.

The artificial composition of the framing of the shots, which is added to the levels of meaning inherent in the filmed objects, enhances the sense of inflexibility and dullness of this society. They make it possible to sense that human relationships in this environment are superficially cordial but actually corrupted. When Pilar reaches the airport to pick up the supposed nun she is going to host, the girl wants to stay with friends and lies that her guest did not come.



Fig. 6: *Tabu* — Maya and Pilar at the airport.

But this exaggerated stiffness preserves also some of the humour and, above all, the irony from the prologue. Another example is the demonstration of Pilar's NGO against the ONU that is discernibly rendered ludicrous. Not only because it demonstrates that her religious values are stronger than her democratic ones when she breaks the moment of silence in order to pray for her unhappy neighbour, but mainly because the whole action seems pointless in its staged and insincere tedium. The actions, the arrangement and the props of the scene are far from realistic and expose that the supposedly democratic act is only a fake.



Fig. 7: *Tabu* — Pilar and her NGO.

However, none of this is completely obvious or determined in its meaning. Comparable to the genre citations in the prologue, the portrayal of contemporary Portugal results from references that only when perceived together render the puzzling scenes into an unsettling image. The shots are not simply stylized expressions of self-reflexive filmmaking that wants to make us realize that we are watching a movie. The materiality of the shots is better described to be interdisciplinary, because it reveals that the young democratic society is equally a fiction as the romantic colonialist explorer — civic action is merely a ritual, people deceitful and post-colonial power structures persistent. In other words, it is not the foregrounding of filmic strategies that develops this dissident imaginary but rather the composed shots and the gaps between them that offer a signifying potential beyond their narrative function. The common sensual conception of nowadays Portugal — a post-colonial multiracial democratic system — is rendered a fiction. This exposure of fictionality is still enhanced by the disclosure of the performativity of the roles the characters have chosen for themselves in post-coloniality — Aurora is mocked as grand lady with an exotic past and Pilar as the Good Samaritan.

The second part steps in to show us that another fiction, based on the imaginary of the former colonies as “Paradise,” and present in Pilar’s attraction with Aurora and period films, does not deserve the nostalgia invested into it. Aesthetically, it is equally interdisciplinary in the sense that it works towards a re-composition of the visible regarding the colonial period.

PARADISE

In “Paradise” a non-Portuguese migrant, Gian Luca Ventura, who Aurora calls to her death-bed but arrives too late, tells their illicit love story in a non-existing African country where she lived on her husband’s tea plantation at the foot of a fictitious mountain named Tabu. Not only the invented mountain points at the fictionality in this second part. Since Gomes’s ethno-fiction comes with the contemporary twist of a voice-over, we now enter, in contrast to Murnau’s *Tabu*, into the already imaginary territory of memory.

But memory not only stands in for the selective recollections of a man who had a certain distance as a non-colonialist foreigner. As a result of his dialogue with Murnau’s film, Gomes takes advantage of the earlier filmmaker’s conclusion for his representation of colonialism.

Instead of using signs or letters that express the colonial regime, he shows that the unruliness of imperialism — it is grounded in no legal right — cannot gain an official account. By choosing a narrator for his second part, Gomes hints in a very subtle way at the fact that colonialism was always a lawless activity and colonized countries unlegislated places.

The choice of the narrator has yet another drastic result: there are no dialogues. In another uncanny reference to Murnau's critical assessment of sound film⁶³ and his employment of synchronized music, we can only hear Gian Luca's memoirs, environment sounds — for example a stone dropping into a pond — nostalgic pop songs from the 1960s, or the chants of the natives.

The love songs are particularly important since they are emotionally charged and highly popular hits that have not lost their romantic power. "Be my baby" (Jeff Barry, Ellie Greenwich, Phil Spector), sung in Spanish, is already introduced in the first part to underline Pilar's loneliness. When Gian Luca speaks of his easy life, the band led by his friend Mário performs "Cosi Come Viene" (Remo Germani). And while Aurora chats with her girl friends, we hear "Lonely Wine" (Roy Orbison), followed by "Baby I love you" (Ramones) at a party.

Exposing the materiality of the sounds has several effects: first and foremost, in the era of sound-film it boosts the film's fictionality in the same ways as the shots in the first part. With regard to the music, the character's feelings and longings are not developed through their speech acts but only suggested by means of the soundtrack and the very personal narration. Thus, it is possible to perceive the utopian and sentimental dimension of their acts even more strongly. And this is vital for the spectator's interdisciplinary engagement, which is quite complex because, beyond the possible cognitive critique towards the soppy colonizers, they can equally connect with their own memories and sensations evoked by the romantic melodies. I will return to this suspension of the opposition between the activity of thought and the passivity of sensible matter in more detail in a moment.

With regard to the colonial imaginary, Gomes seems to take distance from Murnau's ethnographic stance in "Paradise Lost." But, in fact, the second part of the film takes also the shape of an odd ethnographic study of this very restricted part of colonial society. This is especially noticeable in the character's roleplaying that is highlighted through the lack of dialogue. Generally, they appear to be performing the parts of young adults who are living without a cause in an exotic setting. But they also remind the spectator of many common film roles, i.e., the Italian lover, the bold heroin, the betrayed husband and the loyal best friend.

The performances of these roles are an obvious ironic take on Hollywood movies set in Africa. Since Gomes is not interested in denouncing imperialism but its imaginary, Gian Luca introduces the characters verbally as self-indulged adventurers. Aurora is described as a spoiled young woman and as a renowned hunter. And Gian Luca presents himself as someone attracted to escapades that involve women, gambling and unknown, preferably exotic places. In effect, the second part not only depicts colonialism as an unlegislated regime but decisively as one that allows for self-centred behaviour.



Fig. 8: *Tabu* — Aurora, the hunter.

Whereas the original silent movie shows a native couple whose downfall is caused by authoritarianism, this pair is characterized as being irresponsible and extravagant by taking their unruly environment too literal. As part of the colonial society, they are perpetrators but also become victims of the double standards of Christian morality, an issue already developed in the first part. In contrast to Reri and Mathai, Aurora and Gian Luca factually commit sins within the context of Christian dogma. And they are incapable of escaping from this overpowering cultural mind-set. It is their Christian consciousness that results in their expulsion from “Paradise”: they are not only adulterous, but Aurora, the skilled shooter, kills her husband’s and Gian Luca’s best friend Mário. Developing on Pilar’ hypocrite character, Mário is equally ambivalent and likewise an essential piece of the story. A former seminarian and Gian Luca’s bandleader, he is portrayed as a womanizer and a liar, but it is him who manages to prevent Aurora from running away, even if he pays with his death.

After the murder, Aurora, who is pregnant, gives birth to a girl. Full of remorse, Gian Luca calls her spouse and father of the child, and they never see each other again. Thus, at

the end of the film the loss of Paradise, associated with contemporary Portugal, reveals itself as a punishment of sorts of the illicit affair, but also, more generally, of the foolish acts that occurred in the colony. As mentioned earlier, Gomes does not judge the characters or denounces colonialism directly; he simply shows how each of them — just like the imperialist regime — was entangled in his or her desires.

By concentrating on the question of Christian sin in the colonial context, *Tabu* posits itself within the tradition of Portuguese film history but by dialoguing strongly with Manoel de Oliveira's films, especially with *Le Soulier de satin* (*The Satin Slipper*, 1985) offers a laical interpretation. Oliveira sustains in his adaptation of Paul Claudel's play that the European desire for material wealth and power during colonialism is in vain and submitted to God's higher plans, but does not blame Portugal, occupied by the Spaniards at the time.⁶⁴ Gomes visibly does not share Oliveira's religious stance. Mostly secular or just hypocrites, his characters do not gain such insight. Instead of taking rescue in an omniscient godly perspective and the flaws of human vision, Gomes challenges the fictions told on colonialism, including these by Oliveira.

SUSPENSION OF THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN THE ACTIVITY OF THOUGHT AND THE PASSIVITY OF SENSIBLE MATTER

Given his aesthetic strategies that either follow Murnau's silent film closely or read them in a contemporary mode, there is no conventional melodramatic structure in Gomes's *Tabu*. We are not invited to identify with the characters or to indulge in their stories: we watch them while they try to perform their chosen roles. This is mainly the result of the artificial framing and the indifference and passivity of the things and characters filmed. In the second part the camera is more mobile, using the African landscape to express the adventurous side of the characters, but the materiality of the sounds due to the lack of dialogue the odd environment sounds and the nostalgic love songs assume the creation of additional levels of meaning.

These strategies could easily be described in the tradition of Brecht as alienating, or in the tradition of the essay-film as trying to activate the spectators in order to make them evaluate the characters and the issues at stake. But this would only be half the story. Let

me return to the use of music in order to make this more evident. In the second part, we are as much engaged intellectually by means of the divers aesthetic strategies that make it possible to perceive the production of fiction, mainly the sound, as we are allowed to immerse in the images of the African landscape or the nostalgia associated with the pop sound track.

The songs are, in fact, an important instrument to create a non-judgmental and interdisciplinary ambivalence that not only foregrounds human desire but arouses the spectator's feelings as well. Even if we do not identify with the characters, the songs make us understand their moods and resonate with our own sentiments. Their heightened materiality as music and the feelings they raise in the spectator make them also distinguishable in their sugary and inadequate sentimental flair. Consequently, in the moments that feature music it is truly impossible to divide the cognitive from the sensitive. What is more, since the second part of the film seems to be much more about rebels without a cause than about colonialism, we get several chances to blank the issue out and stay only with the love story, if it was not for the prologue and the first part that remained as puzzle pieces in our minds and that needed to be fitted cognitively into the story.

Additionally, the prominence of the materiality of the film's elements – sound, image and performance — adds also a layer of documentation to the character's actions. Since we are not able to hear what they utter, we get to observe them better and this observational take reminds of conventional ethnographic film and its depiction of the "Other." There is no clear cut between the reason of facts and the facts of fiction. Portraying the colonialists in such a manner does not reduce them to objects. On the contrary, with the help of the sentimental music, they are neither essentialized nor demonized. It is possible to perceive them in a heterogeneous way: we can recognize their desires for romance and adventure but also grasp their capriciousness.

Whereas Murnau made a statement against colonialism *and* sound film, Gomes profits in post-colonial times from his aesthetic strategies in order to make us see and feel the persistence of an absurd longing for exotic adventure and passionate love perpetuated in the talkies ever since they came into being. Rendering perceptible that this nostalgia masquerades, together with Christian love, the master and servant power play still being practiced in nowadays Portugal, is the achievement of the film's interdisciplinary aesthetics.

CONCLUSION:

RE-COMPOSITION OF THE LANDSCAPE OF THE VISIBLE

Tabu uses understated humour and irony to deal with the persisting positive and romanticized imaginary of colonialism in photography, music, and films. While the film engages with the fictionality of earlier portrayals of the colonial past in ethnographic documentary, ethno-fiction, adventure melodrama and/or love-stories, silent comedy, period drama, colonial photography, among others, it also confronts disciplinary thinking put forward in social and human sciences such as luso-tropicalism and lusophony in post-coloniality.

Divided in two main parts and a prologue, the spectator literally discovers the strong liaison between colonialism and post-colonialism step-by-step. By telling no linear story, the gaps between the narrative on the romantic explorer, the present-day sensation of an unspecified loss in Lisbon together with the subtle portrayal of the hardship of migrants from the PALOP, and the tale on a self-indulgence colonial society, the spectator is offered to perceive this relationship and, accordingly, the perpetuation of colonial power relationships.

In the prologue, the pose of the farcical explorer and the way in which his extravagant and absurd story is told, acted and framed already reveals Gomes's witty interrogation of adventure and love story as quintessential colonialism. Whereas present-day Lisbon's civilizational malady has no palpable explication at first, it can already be sensed that the central myths of the colonial mind — lusophony and luso-tropicalism — endured. The way this lost paradise is filmed gives the present a grotesque and stiff appearance. By means of the materiality of the cinematographic elements, sound and image, together with the general lack of dialogue, the eminence of romantic pop music and the performativity of the characters, the love-story of the last part renders comprehensible that any nostalgia towards the colonial past results from a utopian imaginary, comparable to the illusive remembrances of our youth. The analogy between the psychological mechanisms with which we look back on colonialism and those with which we evoke our formative years, makes it possible to associate the personal wrongdoings of the characters with the collective "sin" of colonialism.

After watching this film, the idea of a humanist, and above all, Christian colonialism, and even post-colonialism, becomes distinguishable as pure fiction. The film is therefore not un-political, as some international critics noted. On the contrary, its indisciplinary take on the colonial imaginary factually reconfigures the landscape of the visible for good.

In order to understand this more fully and to pinpoint the film's dissent, I have read *Tabu* not as yet another example of modern cinema, that is to say, as an essay film. Instead of simply describing it as the self-reflexive and subjective view of an *auteur*, I have focused on the relation between method and fiction, politics and aesthetics, and reception. This methodology discloses that Gomes's dissent goes deeper. It results, above all, from the interdisciplinary dialogue with the history of film and of photography, as well as with the sentimental potential of pop music, making it possible to "think" the colonial past between established disciplines and genres. By disclosing their fictions, *Tabu* thus announces the end of disciplinary or generic accounts of colonialist history and the post-colonial present in moving and still images, as well as in music and sound films, offering the spectator a chance to challenge his or her expectations by engaging cognitively and sensually with the contradictions and inconsistencies of the existing imaginaries.

1. Jacques Rancière, "Thinking Between disciplines?: An Aesthetics of Knowledge," *Parrhesia* 1 (2006): 1-12.

2. See Carolin Overhoff Ferreira, "Em favor do cinema indisciplinar: o caso português" [In favour of interdisciplinary cinema: the Portuguese case], *Rebeca – Revista brasileira de estudos de cinema e audiovisual* 1.2 (2012): 100-138; and Ferreira, "Indisciplinary Cinema: Jia Zhang-Ke's *Hai shang chuan qi* (*I Wish I Knew*, 2010)," *Transnational Cinemas* 4.1: 43-66, doi: 10.1386/trac.4.1.43_1.

3. Vilém Flusser, "The Codified World," in *Writings*, ed. Andreas Ströhl. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 35-41.

4. Flusser uses this expression, which came up again in Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History," *The National Interest* (Summer 1989): 3-18, after the iron curtain came down.

5. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2006), 20.

6. Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 30, suggests that the essay is a literary tradition that goes back to Cicero and Seneca. George Lukács, "On the Nature and Form of the Essay: A Letter to Leo Popper," in *Soul and Form* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1978), 1-18, speaks of Plato as a predecessor.

7. Anton Franz, "Einleitung," in Michel de Montaigne, *Die Essais* (Frankfurt am Main: Reclam, 1993), 34.

8. Whereas some define it as a major narrative form of the modern world — see Christian Scherer, *Ivens, Marker, Godard, Jarman. Erinnerung im Essayfilm* (Munich: Fink, 2001) — next to fiction, non-fiction and experimental cinema, others sustain that it is an anti-genre that should not be pushed into classification, since it transgresses all existing genres and subgenres — see, among others, Nora Alter, *Chris Marker* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), Volker Pantenburg, *Film als Theorie* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2006), and Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*.

9. Sergei Eisenstein, "Notate zu einer Verfilmung des Marxschen 'Kapital'," in *Schriften 3: Oktober* (Munich: Hanser, 1975), 290.

10. Bela Balázs, *Der Geist des Films* (Frankfurt am Main: Makol, 1972).

11. Hans Richter, "Der Filmessay," in *Schreiben, Bilder, Sprechen. Texte zum essayistischen Film*, ed. Christa Blümlinger and Constantin Wulff (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1992), 195-98.

12. Richter's examples are the English films by Alberto Cavalcanti, Basil Wright and John Grierson, as well as those by filmmakers around Jacques Brunis in France and Henri Storck in Belgium.

13. Alexandre Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: 'La Caméra-Stylo'," in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. Georges Vincendeau and Paul Graham (London: BFI, 2003).

14. Jacques Rivette, "Lettre sur Roberto Rossellini," in *Rivette: Texts and Interviews*, ed. Jean Narboni and Jacques Rosenbaum (London: BFI, 1977), 54-64.

15. André Bazin, "Lettre de Sibérie," *Le Parisien Libéré* 4399, 3 Nov. 1958.
16. Alexander Kluge, Edward Reitz, and Walter Reinke, "Wort und Film," in *Schreiben, Bilder, Sprechen. Texte zum essayistischen Film*, ed. Christa Blümlinger and Constantin Wulff (Vienna: Sonderzahl), 209-223.
17. Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues, "Un art de l'équilibre," in *L'Essai et le Cinéma*, ed. Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues and Murielle Gagnebin (Seysell: Éditions Champ Vallon, 2004), 9.
18. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, "Towards a Third Cinema," in *Movies and Methods*, vol. 1, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 44-64.
19. See, for example Karl Kanzog, "Filmgenres, Strukturkonventionen und Diskurse," in *Filmphilologie* (Munich: Schaudig/Bauer/Ledig, 1991), 59-67; Hanno Möbius (ed.), *Versuche über den Essayfilm* (Marburg: Augenblick, 1991); Christa Blümlinger and Constantin Wulff (eds.), *Schreiben, Bilder, Sprechen. Texte zum essayistischen Film* (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1992); Michel Hattendorf, "Selbstreflexivität und Essayismus im Dokumentarfilm," in *Dokumentarfilm und Authentizität* (Konstanz: UVK Medien, 1999), 258-73; Christian Scherer, *Ivens, Marker, Godard, Jarman. Erinnerung im Essayfilm* (Munich: Fink, 2001).
20. See, e.g., Raymond Bellour, *L'Entre-Images. Photo. Cinéma. Vidéo* (Paris: La Différence, 1990); Bellour and Laurent Roth, *Qu'est-ce qu'une Madeleine? A propos du CD-ROM « Immemory » de Chris Marker* (Paris: Yves Gevaert, 1997).
21. Clement Greenberg, *Modernist Painting* (1960), <http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/modernism.html>, accessed 21 Aug. 2012.
22. P. A. Sitney, *The Essential Cinema: Essays on the Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives* (New York: New York University Press, 1987).
23. See, e.g., Adriano Aprá (ed.), *Le avventure della nonfiction* (Rome: Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema, 1997), María Luisa Ortega and Antonio Weinrichter (eds.), *Mystère Marker. Paisajes en la obra de Chris Marker* (Madrid: T&B Editores, 2006), and Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*.
24. See, for example, Alter, *Chris Marker, Timothy Corrigan, The Essay-film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Cezar Migliorin (ed.), *Ensaio no Real* (Rio de Janeiro: Azougue Editora, 2010).
25. George Lukács, "On the Nature and Form of the Essay," 1-18.
26. T. W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
27. George Lukács was conscious of the ambiguity of his proposition, since he saw the parallel between art and the essay only in its gesture towards life, acknowledging also their differences.
28. Adorno's idea survived in Jean-Luc Godard's suggestion that the film is "a form that thinks" who tried to highlight the fact that it is not necessarily the filmmaker who thinks but the "material" he puts together.
29. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," 101.
30. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (New York: Verso, 1996), 5.
31. *Ibid.*, 24
32. *Ibid.*, 166. Percepts and affect are understood by the philosophers, as "autonomous and sufficient beings that no longer owe anything to those who experience or have experienced them: Combray like it never was, is or will be lived; Combray as cathedral or monument" (168).
33. Rancière, "Thinking Between Disciplines," 6.
34. Rancière, *The Distribution of the Sensible*, 13.
35. *Ibid.*, 6.
36. Rancière, "Thinking Between Disciplines," 11.
37. *Ibid.*, 6.
38. Rancière, *The Distribution of the Sensible*, 39.
39. Rancière, *Film Fables* (New York: Berg, 2006), 11.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Martin Seel, "Realismus und Anti-Realismus in der Theorie des Films," in *Die Macht des Erscheinens* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007).
42. Rancière, *The Distribution of the Sensible*, 39.
43. *Ibid.*, 37.
44. Exploring this heterogeneous potential, the works of art of the aesthetic regime differ from those of earlier artistic rules: the ethical regime of images and the regime of representation. Echoing Adorno, Rancière (*The Politics of Aesthetics*, 3) explains: "a product identical with something not produced, knowledge transformed into non-knowledge, logos identical with pathos, the intention of the unintentional, etc."
45. Gabriele Jutz, *Cinéma brut. Eine alternative Genealogie der Filmavantgarde* (Vienna: Springer, 2010).
46. A. L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video. From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice* (London: Palgrave, 2011).

47. Rancière, "O Dissenso," in *A crise da razão*, ed. Nicolas Bignotto and André Novaes (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996), 367-82
48. Rancière, *The Distribution of the Sensible*, 24.
49. *Ibid.*, 20-41. The author also mentions the subversion of the distinction between high and low, popular and cultured, but this does not seem to be important for film since it is, factually, always a popular mass medium with the potential of being an art work.
50. Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 164.
51. Citation from <http://ranciere.blogspot.com/2007/ranciere-emancipated-spectator.html>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012.
52. See Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*.
53. With the exception of Pedro Costa's Fontainhas trilogy — *Bones* (*Ossos*, 1997), *In Vanda's Room* (*No Quarto da Vanda*, 2000), *Colossal Youth* (*Juventude em Marcha*, 2006) and Teresa Villaverde's *The Mutants* (*Os Mutantes*, 1998) that present an equally critical and heterogeneous view of colonialism and its legacy. See Ferreira, *Identity and Difference – Postcoloniality and Transnationality in Lusophone Films* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2012).
54. See Ferreira, "Decolonizing the Mind?: The Representation of the African Colonial War in Portuguese Cinema," *Studies in European Cinema* 2 (2005): 227-39.
55. Eduardo Lourenço observes in *Portugal como Destino seguido de Mitologia da Saudade* (Gradiva: Lisboa, 1999), 79–80, that Portugal did not have a cultural revolution during the re-democratization and that it remained "a structurally imperial ideology without empire. Militant, hagiographic, ultra-nationalist, openly and innocently hostile to democratic inspirations, it was not possible to overcome half a century of 'single thinking'."
56. Julian Hanich "Jenseits der Stille. F. W. Murnaus *Tabu* zwischen Hollywood und Südsee, Moderne und Primitivismus und dem Ende des Stummfilm-Kinos," in *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 47.4 (2002): 517.
57. *Ibid.*, 512.
58. *Ibid.*, 515.
59. Ferreira, *Identity and Difference*, 19-20.
60. The Brazilian sociologist, Gilberto Freyre (n.d.) is considered the concept's spiritual father in an attempt to tighten and pacify the Luso-Brazilian bonds. It regained importance in the 1950s when the Portuguese empire was getting under threat by the decolonization processes in the anglophone and francophone colonies.
61. Ferreira, *Identity and Difference*, 19.
62. As I have argued elsewhere, national and transnational films on the encounter of colonialists and the native population still tend to recycle luso-tropicalism. See Ferreira, *Identity and Difference*.
63. Hanich "Jenseits der Stille," 520, quotes David Flaherty who explains: "It is not without significance that *Tabu* was made as a silent in the beginning of the era of talkies. This was a deliberate choice, dictated not by economic but by aesthetic considerations. If *Tabu* enjoys a certain universality and timelessness, credit this (for that time) bold decision."
64. See Ferreira, *Identity and Difference*, 90-92.