

THINKING THE REVOLUTION IN
ALBERTO SEIXAS SANTOS'S *MILD MANNERS*
AND *GESTURES AND FRAGMENTS*

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INTRODUCTION — FILMING REVOLUTION

The 1974-75 revolutionary process in Portugal is particularly challenging to historical and filmic representation. This is partly a consequence of the specific nature of the period stretching from the 1950s to the 1970s, what historians have called the *long 1960s*, a historical moment marked by sudden social transformation and dramatic political events. But this challenge is also a consequence of transformations occurring at a different level. As Fredric Jameson has convincingly shown, this was the moment of a decisive shift in the order of representation, one in which the realm of culture — as a set of discourses, thoughts and narratives about the world — spread so widely that it became hard to disentangle from the objects it was supposed to represent.¹ More specifically, culture became gradually equated with audiovisual forms that are now seen as constitutive, indeed structural, aspects of society and politics. Cinema played a key role in this process, by emerging as a critical instance of contemporary visual forms. To analyze the relations between cinema and the 1974-75 Revolution is thus particularly relevant not only because the revolution was intensely filmed, but also in the sense that it broke, like all revolutions, the historical continuum, somehow turning traditional forms of representation obsolete.² This brings me to the problem I would to raise with this article, in which the work of the Portuguese filmmaker Alberto Seixas Santos will be contextualized as an important example of that broader critique of dominant cultural forms performed by cinema during the *long 1960s*.

The two films I will be analyzing, *Mild Manners* (*Brandos Costumes*, 1974) and *Gestures and Fragments* (*Gestos e Fragmentos*, 1982), thus question their own status as forms of filmic representation. They try, in this sense, to rise to the occasion and keep up with the challenges brought by revolutionary transformation. In short, one could go as far as suggesting that if the revolution disrupted an order of things dominated by the audiovisual, a form of critical

cinema like that of Alberto Seixas Santos had to engage with the process by performing its own *filmic revolution*. Consequently, cinema and revolution seem to make a perfect match in his films, as films that both describe revolutionary processes and disrupt the dominant forms of perception.

The work of Seixas Santos encapsulates all the different aspects of the relationship between film aesthetics and that particular historical period. This occurs, as it will become clearer throughout the analysis, at at least three levels. To start with, the two films explicitly use history as their referent. However, historical objects as such (Salazarism, in *Mild Manners*; the Revolution, in *Gestures and Fragments*³), only represent a first layer in the narratives and we have to dig deeper to get to a second-degree relation between the director and the context: for reality, or history, is never given here without a complex set of mediations through which film language is questioned *in order* to re-create reality, or history, in all its complexity. Seixas Santos's engagement with history (the history of film, in this second layer of the relationship) is, again, clear and explicitly assumed: his cinema deliberately takes part of the period's critique of representation and of the aesthetical and political debate around the figures of Bertolt Brecht and Jean-Luc Godard.⁴ Finally, and to complete this circle dialectically, what comes out of such a critical representation is a heightened engagement with history, whereby film goes beyond a mere depiction of events or historical circumstances to become simultaneously involved in, and invested by, history.

One could add that this is where Seixas Santos's politics lie, for these are films made by a director involved in the struggle against the Portuguese dictatorship and committed to the revolution, while simultaneously participating in a radical critique of dominant images. As before, the question is twofold. Seixas Santos is *faithful to the events* simply by recognizing their complexity (the fact that history is non-linear and non-uniform), which then reverses into the films' structures in the form of "narrative discontinuity" and through the use of "mixed materials," to use the author's own words.⁵ The main consequence of this is that both *Mild Manners* and *Gestures and Fragments* think the Dictatorship and the Revolution while *representing* it in its different aspects. Thinking and representing are here so intertwined as to become virtually indistinguishable,⁶ and this is what constitutes not only Seixas Santos' politics, as I have just suggested, but also its historicity proper.

And yet, despite the intellectual move these essay films⁷ (as the director himself defines them) make apparent — the use of theoretical-driven authors like Brecht and Godard and the

impact of a concept like *estrangement* —, Seixas Santos seemed to have felt the need of a “harder” version of thought to reinforce the historical engagement of his films. In fact, both *Mild Manners* and *Gestures and Fragments* literally *stage* philosophy. More specifically, whereas the former uses *The Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels to conclude the narrative, the latter “stars” a philosopher, Eduardo Lourenço, saying his own text and thus playing his own role in the film. The role of philosophy thus becomes a key aspect of Seixas Santos’s critical move. Ultimately, to identify the status of *thought* in his two films will allow us to argue that philosophy is here not just to clarify politics or explain history, but that which mediates between history and politics within filmic narrative. To put it simple: if, following Paul Ricoeur,⁸ time and history can only be thought through narrative, Seixas Santos’s use of philosophy and philosophers in his own narratives may give us an important key to the complex temporality and historical consciousness with which he engages, as a filmmaker, with the period.

In order to achieve this, I will analyze both films separately, in chronological succession. This will allow me to use the 1974-75 Revolution as the historical event organizing the films’ temporalities and determining their genres and the role of philosophy and philosophers in the narratives. In other words, by situating the films historically *in relation* to the revolution, it will be possible to grant them a specific *presence in history*, whereby *Mild Manners* will be conjugated in the future tense and *Gestures and Fragments* in the past. Of course, in order to consider what changes from one film to the other, one also has to consider the impact of the revolution and how film engaged with the event. Only this will allow us to define *Mild Manners* as a pre-revolutionary film – a revolutionary film that still did not have a revolution to show – and *Gestures and Fragments* as a post-revolutionary film — a film that distances itself from the already past revolution and from its saturation of images in order to better think about it. One could go as far as saying that the role of philosophers and philosophy in both is precisely to mediate this lack, a revolution that is still not there — only a utopia in *Mild Manners* — or that is not there anymore — history, or memory, in *Gestures and Fragments*.

1. MILD MANNERS: HOW TO FILM A UTOPIAN EVENT

Mild Manners weaves its narrative through the articulation of two different sources: footage from the Estado Novo’s⁹ newsreel propaganda (and a sequence from a colonialist feature

film) with a series of fictional sequences with particular scenes in a bourgeois family's everyday life. Juxtaposed throughout the narrative, newsreel and fiction narrate a history of the political regime and of Portuguese society in parallel, as the two sides of the same historical context. So, side by side with the formation of the dictatorship and the evolution of authoritarian order (throughout some key episodes, such as the Second World War and the beginning of the colonial wars in Africa in the 1960s), we can also see the family unit being formed, with episodes showing their domestic "events": marriage, the upbringing of two daughters, a birthday party and other episodes of the everyday. At the end, both narratives conclude in the same way, with the deaths of the father and Salazar (thereby shown as the head of a patriarchal society). This articulation is mostly achieved through montage. For example, after newsreel footage with speeches by Salazar and by a young athlete praising the dictator for having "saved" Portugal from Second World War, the narrative cuts to the family's kitchen where the wife and mother (the characters have no names and stand explicitly as *types*) lectures the maid about the dangers of mendicancy. The cut from one scene to the other is further problematized by discourse: whereas the images of the War are narrated by the mother's voice-over recounting the family's hardships and the country's poverty during the European conflict, her own speech to the maid (and to the camera) literally reproduces the conservative official doctrine the dictatorship produced about poverty.

In short, the device runs throughout the whole narrative in a constant dialogue between seemingly realist newsreel and all sorts of fictional representation (although fictional representation is far from exhausting the wide range of narrative techniques used by Seixas Santos: from the theatricality of sung dialogues to literary and political quotations and discourses uttered directly to the camera). This structure presents several challenges to interpretation. To start with, its relation with history is far from straightforward. Mostly shot with the fictional sequences just before the revolution, it would only be completed — with the archival footage — and premiered after the Revolution in 1974. Paradoxically, the images added later, taken from newsreel, are what allow the film to narrate a history of the New State (when the film was originally produced), whereas the fictional narrative, shot still under the dictatorship, not only draws a subversive picture of salazarist society (an act of freedom under censorship), it actually ends up with a utopian moment that literally announces a military coup. The film, with this dual use of filmic materials, seems to challenge periodiza-

tion: still immersed in the historical period it narrates, the dictatorship, while simultaneously contributing to its imminent fall.

This strange relation with history becomes further intricate if we question Seixas Santos's own classification of *Mild Manners* as an essay-film. The essay-film would presuppose the subsumption of one narrative under the other. Either as a fiction organized around newsreel or vice versa, the essay form would always involve a narrative disjunction between the two layers, in which one would function as the critical stance of the other — this critique being the form of the essay proper —, which could take one of two forms: a) the fictional scenes of the everyday life of a middle class salazarist family would run in parallel with a documentary history of the dictatorship, as a *case study*; or b) the History of the New State from the start until the death of the dictator Salazar would work as the *historical context* in which that same family's life story was immersed. Instead, I would like to suggest that what endows the film with its strong historicity depends on the impossibility to establish a clear differentiation between the two. In other words, to consider archival footage and fictional staging, i.e., history and fiction, within the same (complex) narrative, may take us beyond allegory — the device usually used to classify the film¹⁰ — and equate the two levels (history and fiction, but also the public and the private, the political and the intimate, the ideological and the moral, etc.) as the two sides of a metonymical relationship.

Taking the historical images of mass demonstrations and political speeches, on the one hand, and the fictional scenes of domestic life, on the other, as contiguous, metonymical, levels in the same narrative — in which none would represent the non-diegetic level of the other's diegesis — is thus what grants *Mild Manners* with its specific historical status. In part, because the tension between the two narrative forms constituting the film's metonymical association activates one of those critical situations we became accustomed to associate with the period's political cinema. Simultaneously, what this duality also seems to do is to combine the public and the private within the same political discourse, thus synthesizing the double front of 1960s and 1970s radical politics — when politics targeted both individual and collective subjectivities. To return to my main point, it may thus be suggested that what makes the film such a critical object lies in the radical questions it asks history. Conversely, one should add that what allowed for the narrative to raise the question of its own relation with history was in history itself: a particularly radical moment as the early 1970s brought contradictions (namely those combined within the film's structure) very visibly to the fore.

Seixas Santos's affinity with the period's counter-cinema is thus easily recognizable. If one thinks of Peter Wollen's contemporary analysis of Jean-Luc Godard's political films, for instance, it is not difficult to identify the exact same filmic procedures at work in *Mild Manners*. According to Wollen, Godard enacts a series of oppositions whose role is to short-circuit any kind of familiarity (Brecht's *estrangement* always looms closely) in a way rigorously akin to the constant tension between newsreel and fiction in *Mild Manners*: oppositions between "narrative transitivity" and "narrative intransitivity," between "identification" and "estrangement" ("using the same voice for different characters, different voices for the same character"), "transparency" and "negation," "closure" and "aperture" ("just as there are a multiplicity of narrative worlds, so too there are a multiplicity of speaking voices"), and, last but not the least, "fiction" and "reality."¹¹

At this point, one might wonder what further insight over the complexities of history does this counter-narrative open up for the spectator to see. The answer was already suggested earlier on — the combination of diverse forces (the individual and the collective, the private and the public) within the same radical move — and can now be more concretely shown in the figure of the family's younger daughter (the *rebel*, as opposed to the conservative eldest sister). The choice is not obvious, though. In fact, it can be said that the film's organizing force is the father, or rather the father's death — which has inspired most interpretations about the film as a specific allegory of the death of Salazar, the dictator thus becoming the country's father figure, the embodiment of patriarchy both at an institutional and social level.¹² More than plausible, this interpretation is backed up by Seixas Santos himself. And yet, the narrative of *Mild Manners* is open enough to allow for other readings.

To choose the daughter as the film's organizing force may enable us, I believe, to not only get closer to the crux of the narrative, but also, and as a consequence, to identify the politics of the film, to assess how philosophy articulates narrative and politics, and finally to assign *Mild Manners* to a different genre (other than the essay film). It can then be suggested that the daughter is important not so much because the film *is about her*, but in the sense that she organizes, not only the narrative, but indeed its temporality. This is something she starts doing right from the start when we are confronted with a medium shot of her apparently looking at the camera, and wading through her father's death:

It's your death, your death we're talking about. It is our painful duty to announce... it's my painful duty to announce your death. What if my father died? *"What if my father died," she asked ... "as if for the first time the idea had entered her head. ... but she saw an old house, falling to pieces in a slow motion. ... and her father's lips... moving slowly ... repeating his last commandment. It was a projection, a ghost imitating the echo of its own voice. She knew it... and couldn't help meditating on the significance of all this. [...]."*

When he dies I'll go into mourning. *"The daughter, the family, bereaved wish to thank all those who participated."* Dead you are. Already dead.

The speech then continues with a resentful complaint about her upbringing ("I hardly know how to speak. I can't find the right words. [...] Unlike what you think, your pedagogic system worked: what I am is the result of your education") and the order the father represents. However, despite the symbolical and ideological significance of this overture (in which the father is explicitly defined as a figure of repression), I believe that what is here most important lies elsewhere: her voice can be heard as part of the "multiplicity of speaking voices" identified by Wollen in Godard's films (she speaks both directly as a character and through the mediation of a narrator's voice-over) and time is left open, or at least undecided, between the future ("what if my father died?") and the past ("Dead you are. Already dead"). So, if the daughter plays such an important role in the narrative, this is because she utters more than one voice (and project more than one image: when the sequence ends, we realize we have been watching her reflection in a mirror all along) and because she points the narrative towards the future. Whether as an announcement or as a celebration, she embodies the historical opening of post-Salazarism to future generations. But by contemplating change through her father's death — by considering a political break stemming from a family, private, event —, emancipation becomes something she will have to come to terms with personally. Political freedom, as such, becomes a personal problem.

The full meaning (or utopian potential) of this initial speech will finally be fulfilled in the last sequence. As in the opening, it is the daughter who takes charge of the closure. The father is already dead (at least symbolically, as we are still able to see him cross the frame) and she decides to take matters into her own hands, as initially promised. This is when the ultimate political text written by a philosopher comes to lend a helping hand: she sits on a table, reading the first paragraph of the section "Bourgeois and Proletarians" from *The Com-*

munist Manifesto. And yet, as we were initially told, she hardly knows how to speak and has trouble finding the right words. Rather than reading, then, she starts by stuttering the first lines, as if learning how to read through practice: “The his... to... ry of all hith... er... to ex... is... ting so... cie... ty is the his... to... ry of class stru... ggles.” This is an extraordinary demonstration of what a *theory of praxis* looks like. One is not supposed to learn how to read in philosophy books. In her case, however, literacy and political consciousness will come simultaneously.¹³ As she keeps repeating the words, the text becomes more coherent. Gradually, she is not alone. Other voices overlap, insistently repeating those famous words determining the sense of history and the inevitability of class struggle. At the end, one can say her education is over: she closes the book, and facing the camera, repeats “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” in only one go, as if the words were already hers. From this moment on, she becomes the true subject of the narrative, and, as such, a true subject in history.

This is the point when the film achieves one of those rare moments when the distinction between historical *thinking* and *representation* blurs. Faithful to the nature of the text, the daughter’s utterance combines theory and practice in a truly political *speech act*. In these circumstances, philosophy (in the form of a particularly authoritative theory of history) not only enters the narrative, it indeed determines its outcome. This is what grants *Mild Manners* with a singular historicity: the noise of soldiers in the street (celebrated by the maid, but terrifying the other members of the family around the table where the daughter reads, impassive) emerges as a direct result of those words, illustrating rather tellingly my initial suggestion that the relationship between the form of the narrative and the historical moment it engages with works both ways. Rather than an allegory of Salazarism, then, the narrative dynamics of *Mild Manners* endows history with a utopian impulse. But utopia should here be seen as a genre in its own right, a narrative form capable of anticipating a revolutionary movement and determining its ideological origins,¹⁴ on the one hand, and combining individual emancipation (the girl learning how to read by herself) with collective consciousness (the words of *The Communist Manifesto* immersing her voice in a collective multiplicity of voices), on the other.

Paradoxically as it may seem, the revolutionary process triggered by the military coup on 25 April 1974 may here be seen as the historical figuration of an already existing filmic narrative. It was as if Seixas Santos was somehow able to anticipate the political event.

Whereas the soldiers marching on the street seem to anticipate the coup itself, the daughter's self-discovery and engagement with a political collective (under the aegis of class struggle) prefigures the following eighteen months, as a period when many sectors of Portuguese society were mobilized in all kinds of political struggle, from open challenges to capitalism and private property (namely with the nationalization of banks and the popular occupation of land, factories and houses) to forms of individual rebellion and cultural subversion. It should be stressed that if *Mild Manners* is able to announce the revolution at all, this is not so much for the explicit reference to soldiers on the street (the anticipation of the coup) but for the type of political subjectivity the daughter embodies (the individual voice merging with the innumerable). This may allow us to revisit the question of the relation between Seixas Santos's critical cinema and the challenges of the historical period. For the revolution, as an event unfolding in discourse and consciousness as much as in the streets, and potentially led by anyone (and everyone), rather than organized around political institutions, such an event seems completely inappropriate for conventional filmic narratives based on individual protagonists and linear plots.

2. GESTURES AND FRAGMENTS: HOW TO FILM A HISTORICAL EVENT

I already suggested that *Mild Manners* and *Gestures and Fragments* can be conjugated in both the future and the past tenses, in relation to which the revolution functions as a point of reference. *Mild Manners* thus points to the future (in the utopian impulse of the narrative towards the revolution), whereas in *Gestures and Fragments* the revolution had already been fixed in the past (as a failed event, from a revolutionary point of view). The second film thus deals with defeat and mourning, and it discusses the event from a distance. In fact, the film's relation with the revolution is historiographical, rather than historical, in the sense that it reflects about the past rather than engaging with the present. The difference between *Gestures and Fragments* and *Mild Manners* can be seen in this relation to history. There is nothing like the energy of the younger daughter heading towards emancipation in the latter. *Gestures and Fragments* is much more self-reflective, one could almost say contemplative. And yet, it is not really from *Mild Manners* that *Gestures and Fragments* is trying to distance itself. In between the two, the revolution had already been given a filmic narrative by innumerable documenta-

ries frantically engaged with the different struggles of the revolutionary process. So, to fully understand what changes from *Mild Manners* as a film pointing to the future, to *Gestures and Fragments* as a reflection on the past, we need to briefly discuss all this filmography (in which Seixas Santos also participated as one of the authors of *A Lei da Terra*, a 1977 collective film on land occupations) deeply committed with the revolution. My initial suggestion is that *Gestures and Fragments* would be incomprehensible without this contrast between its narrative structure and that of most documentaries about the revolutionary process, as films that only rarely helped falling into the kind of linearity Seixas Santos's own work criticizes.

In fact, films from the revolutionary period usually reflect the contingencies of the political process. The engagement of filmmakers was more than just a question of political activism, as they struggled to follow the events as they occurred. In this sense, these documentaries are in a permanent tension between a *revolutionary interpretation of the revolution* (in the choice of topics and situations, in the use of voice-over, but mostly in the final editing) and events whose narrative keeps changing in unexpected ways. Like in the films of Seixas Santos, a relation between thought and representation is established, but contrary to the historical objects of *Mild Manners* and *A Lei da Terra*, the ongoingness of the revolutionary process never allows thought in the documentaries to crystallize. Robert Kramer, a North-American director who made one of the most emblematic films on the Portuguese revolution, *Scenes from the Class Struggle in Portugal* (1977), describes very clearly the impact of these historical circumstances in his work:

This time it felt wonderful to document a mass revolutionary struggle. [...] We would get a body of material and then begin to think what needed to be there to fill it out. We'd look for a strand, and then follow it up with subsequent filming. Only the reality was that much more vibrant as it erupted around us. The disruptions that would constantly alter the direction of our work felt good, forcing us to include them in the scope of the film.¹⁵

To make a film in these circumstances thus requires a true militant involvement with the event.¹⁶ The director's efforts to weave a narrative out of what seems a random succession of many things happening simultaneously is usually visible in the ideologically imposing tone of the narration. The main challenge to filmmakers like Kramer was thus to combine the two

political aspects already announced in the last scene of *Mild Manners*: military action and collective participation. But despite all the efforts to embark in the event's non-linearity, most documentaries had no choice but to *follow* the present. This creates a very visible ambiguity traversing these films, that clearly distinguishes them from *Mild Manners* and *Gestures and Fragments*: if, on the one hand, the present imposes over the making of the documentaries, documentaries themselves will come back with a revenge by imposing its duration (less than two hours) over the revolution's eighteenth months. It can thus be said that the revolutionary process was less frantic than what this films' duration usually indicate, and that frenzy was, above all, the consequence of the tense process of editing with which documentary directors tried to synthesize the event's heterogeneity. By *emplotting* the revolution within the narrative structure of the documentary feature, most documentaries have given, even if inadvertently, a very similar picture of the revolution as a moment of excess.

It may now become easier to understand the role of distancing in *Gestures and Fragments*. In this second film, Seixas Santos's strategy should be seen as the refusal of any type of immediacy, a negative move that will hopefully allow us to grasp the true contradictory nature of the revolutionary process hidden under the linearity of a narrative of excess and chaos. It may be worth remembering that when it was shot, in the early 1980s, social memory of the Prec was already covered by two dominant ideas (or plots): that the revolution had mostly been a process led by politicians and the military, and that the confusion between the two institutions (politics and the army, i.e., the politicization of the armed forces), had been the main cause of the period's chaos (the moment of *excess* I referred to).

If we look at the discourses Seixas Santos chose to populate *Gestures and Fragments*, we may initially be led to believe that he did not avoid reinforcing the hegemonic view. In fact, the whole film is taken by *institutional* figures and events: we can hear a protagonist of the military process, Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho (the head of the operations on the 25 of April 1974, and the commander of COPCON, one of the most radicalized military units throughout the revolutionary process); the intellectual who has first written about the contradictions between the military and the political levels of the revolution, Eduardo Lourenço (Portuguese philosopher who published *Os Militares e o Poder* as early as 1975); and even the more ambiguous character played by Robert Kramer (who went back to Portugal, but this time to play the role of a journalist inside a room, trying to make sense of what *really* happened on 25 of November 1975, the date of the very confusing counter-coup) does not escape the nar-

rative of a revolution led by soldiers and politicians and organized around important dates. At first sight, then, it seems that the film is about individual protagonists, the military process and particular events. The fluid multitudinous revolution promised at the end of *Mild Manners* with which documentaries tried to come to terms with seems, at least at first, somehow lost.

And yet, these institutional voices are not allowed to stand on their own. Seixas Santos does not just let these three men speak; he questions their authority by forcing the discourses to dialogue with each other through a very rigorous exercise of montage,¹⁷ an articulation between the three voices that short-circuits the dominant memory of the revolution they are trying to convey. In a sense, the film's structure emerges as a fourth voice through which the director himself *thinks* the revolution, or at least shatters the limits through which the revolution can be thought.¹⁸ This means that whatever is left to interpret about the revolution in *Gestures and Fragments*, it is not to be found, or at least not primarily, in the excerpts Eduardo Lourenço reads from *Os Militares e o Poder*; or in the biographical interview given by Otelo; or in the detective-like monologues of Robert Kramer. In fact, Seixas Santos seems to suggest the exact opposite. His work is a subtle exercise whereby each discourse questions, when not indeed cancels, the others, and any new interpretations the film might have about the event have to be negatively grasped among the debris left over by the destructive impact the three discourses have on one another.¹⁹

The exercise is mostly visible in the articulation between the discourses of Eduardo Lourenço and Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho. Both seem to stand in propitious settings for their speeches to come forth (but this will later reinforce the sense of contradiction): Otelo is at home, and speaks about his life, revisiting his military career, the war and the mounting dissatisfaction of soldiers, all the way up to the revolution and his involvement in the process, especially as the commander of COPCON; Lourenço stands in bucolic landscapes and browses through his book, reading extracts about the incompatibility between military life and politics. His point is clear and, at first sight, fair:

One cannot have the two swords, pure force and political supremacy, in the same hands, without tyrannically confiscate civil liberties. Of all citizens, the soldier has to be the most democratic, and the essence of his democraticity [...] consists on privileging in himself the civilian he also is, or better still, the citizen, to the detriment of the soldier.

The problem with the revolutionary process, and with the overtly political behavior of military units such as COPCON, was that soldiers were indeed involved in politics qua soldiers, which, for Lourenço, was a contradiction in terms. In his subtle analysis, Lourenço is of course aware of why this was so: no one but the armed forces had the power to dethrone the dictatorship. The problem, however, subsisted. Soldiers are not supposed to get involved in politics because they are not supposed to think.²⁰ When they start thinking, the political consequences are inevitably disastrous, which would constitute the revolution's ultimate deadlock. At this point, montage intervenes, for all these seemingly reasonable ideas about the nature of military life and politics put forth by the philosopher are juxtaposed with Otelo's interview, where the latter shows a remarkable capacity to think, in general, and to give a sophisticated political analysis of the context that led the Portuguese armed forces to trigger the revolutionary process. So, while Lourenço theorizes about the incompatibility between the army and *thought*, Otelo proves his ability to *think* politically. Depending on how one chooses to look at it, one of the discourses is always bound to collapse (and the contradiction between the two are further dramatized by the domestic and rural settings where they take place), whether because the philosopher proves the commander's reasons to get into politics illegitimate, or because the commander's narrative exposes the vacuity of the philosopher's reasoning.

While both entertain their destructive "dialogue," the "journalist" struggles to understand the event. He draws a chronology on a board, writes notes and assembles newspaper clips. He tries to make sense of the ambiguous actions of soldiers and politicians, in order to come up with a clear picture of what really happened. And yet, the event always seems to escape him. Seixas Santos's *strategy of negation* can here be seen at another level. Kramer is looking for the revolution in the wrong place, for what distinguished the revolutionary process from a mere coup was the overflow of politics from the realm of institutions all the way to society as such. In this sense, what made the revolution so difficult to represent was the complete contingency of a political process *permanently participated by virtually everyone* with no reference points in fixed protagonists, institutions or events.

This brings us to a point where the historical meaning of *Gestures and Fragments's negativity* can finally come forth. As I suggested earlier, the revolution challenged representation because it transcended the limits of any *positive* narrative. The utopian drive at the end of *Mild Manners* lacked this positivity, as the revolution was still no more than a potential

event. On the other hand, to try to encapsulate the flow of energies at work during the revolutionary process within the single narrative of the documentary film was bound to fail as still another effort to close its multiplicity within a single narrative. Seixas Santos counter-narrative, a narrative destroying other narratives, may not exactly constitute a new form of *representation* of how things happened. What it does, however, is equally decisive: by not enclosing the revolution in a single narrative, it allows us to *think* the event's intrinsic openness.

CONCLUSION: THINKING THE REVOLUTION

There are times when you're lucky to belong to the mass, to history, and you're happy to give up your *specialness*, your individuality to a sense of common work and tasks that need to be done. And there are other times when this common energy has exhausted itself and it's willful and finally destructive to pretend that it exists in the same way. Times when there aren't many maps, when you have only your wits, your beliefs, your closest friends to help you navigate. And it's hard to say which one of these is really easier or more productive than the other. Each has its difficulties.²¹

The two temporalities mentioned by Robert Kramer in the epigraph above do not exhaust all the time tenses analyzed in this article. Probably because *Mild Manners* was made before history proper — the moment when, still according to Kramer, collective action brought everyone to participate in historical transformation —, he did not consider the last days of the dictatorship, when the younger daughter became ready for revolution through the reading of *The Communist Manifesto*. As for Alberto Seixas Santos, he tried to articulate the gap between *before* and *after* the 1974-75 revolution with *Mild Manners* and *Gestures and Fragments*. The radical difference between these two historical and cinematic moments may allow us to come back, for the last time, to the role of philosophers, and thought more generally, in both films.

The contribution of Eduardo Lourenço to *Gestures and Fragments* and the role of *The Communist Manifesto* in the narrative of *Mild Manners* could not, in this sense, be more contrasting. Whereas Lourenço will provide a conceptual reflection on the event, crystallizing it

as a theoretical failure, the manifesto will point beyond the film's narrative towards historical transformation. This would rigorously fit in still another declaration by Karl Marx, the famous last thesis "on Feuerbach": "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."²² In fact, it would not be difficult to match the figure of the interpretive philosopher with Eduardo Lourenço's theory on the military and the revolution, whereas Marx could emerge as the embodiment of his own call, when the manifesto was appropriated and put to use by the younger daughter.

And yet, there is a third thinking figure to consider in-between Lourenço and Marx. For the ways in which the ideas of both philosophers are allowed to reach their specific performances depend on the roles ascribed to them by Seixas Santos. From *Mild Manners* to *Gestures and Fragments*, the director seems to have moved from what Colin MacCabe calls a Brechtian "moment of subversion" (i.e., the girl reading the manifesto) to a "strategy of subversion" (the systematic refusal of dominant discourses). In the latter, according to MacCabe, "the narrative does not produce for us the knowledge with which we can then judge the truth of those discourses. Rather than the narrative providing us with knowledge — it provides us with various settings."²³ Seixas Santos's thought thus seems to call for still another thinking subject: the spectator, or the political spectator he had in mind with these two films²⁴, capable of opening the long monologues of *Gestures and Fragments* and articulating these various settings within a more productive memory of the revolution. In these circumstances, the relation between film and thought can shift from the realm of authors, narrative and characters (even when philosophers themselves) to active forms of spectatorship, where watching a film literally becomes another way of thinking.

1. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

2. The critique of contemporary audiovisual forms was one of the priorities of all "new cinemas" emerging during the 1960s and the 1970s. As Michael Witt has recently demonstrated in his analysis of Jean-Luc Godard, these new cinemas were particularly concerned with the forms through which cinema inscribed itself in history. Cf. Michael Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

3. *Brandos costumes* could be translated as *mild* (or *soft*) *manners*, a pervasive expression in Portuguese political culture, supposedly defining the non-violent character of the Portuguese people. Seixas Santos's use of the expression is ironic. *Gestos e fragmentos* literally means *gestures and fragments*. One of the film's characters refers both gestures and fragments as examples of traces left over by past events. I will be using the original titles to keep both its colloquial and symbolic resonances.

4. According to Seixas Santos, the idea to make *Mild Manners* as a “essay film” (“I never wanted to make a documentary”) was inspired by Jean-Luc Godard — Manuel Neves, “Entrevista de Alberto Seixas Santos,” in *Alberto Seixas Santos*, coord. Neves (Lisboa: ABC Cine-Clube de Lisboa, 2008), 26. In the same interview, Seixas Santos also recognizes his intimate kinship with the cultural atmosphere of the 1960s, including Maoism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, the refusal of “naturalist illusions” and his inclination to Brechtian techniques of distanciation, “narrative discontinuity,” “mixed materials” and “heterogeneity.” (23-24).

5. This is a key aspect to my argument for it suggests that the type of historical knowledge one gets is already ingrained in, if not indeed determined by, the structure of historical events, thus reverting the traditional relation between event and its representation by somehow conferring history with discursiveness while simultaneously giving a material and historical existence to discourse. The combination of ideas from Fredric Jameson (a theorist committed to the historicization of literary works) and Hayden White (a historian concerned with historiographical narrative) shapes this relationship: my suggestion is that historical narratives become the figuration of historical events to the extent in which they are already prefigured in the events themselves. Cf. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), and Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

6. Film theories from the 1960s and the 1970s have been subject to severe scrutiny in the last two decades. In *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (probably the most thorough attempt to undermine ideological analysis of film), Noël Carroll, one of the book’s editors, synthesizes the critique’s main point: film theories impose their pre-established ideologies on film: “Not only do contemporary film scholars pretend to find technique after technique and film after film that exemplify this or that general pattern — such as imaginary identification and subject positioning — film scholars also claim to find films that *express* the theories in question, that is, films [...] that share themes with such figures as Freud, Lévi-Strauss, and Lacan.” — David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 43. The problem with this critique, especially when one thinks of a filmmaker such as Seixas Santos, is that it sees filmmaking as an ideological-free act, thus becoming unequipped to consider the deliberate forms of thought conveyed by the film and the filmmaker.

7. On the essay film genre in Portuguese cinema cf. Carolin Overhoff Ferreira, “Em Favor do Cinema Interdisciplinar: O Caso Português,” *Rebeca: Revista Brasileira de Estudos de Cinema e Audiovisual* 1.2 (2012): 99-138.

8. See especially vol. 1 of Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

9. Estado Novo (New State) was part of the wave of European Fascist regimes in the 1930s, and lasted from 1933 to 1974. Given the charisma and resilience of its leader, António de Oliveira Salazar (in power from the early thirties until 1968), the regime, and indeed the period, is also known as Salazarism.

10. On the status of metaphor and other formal aspects of the film, see Leonor Areal, *Cinema Português: Um País Imaginado, Vol. II – Após 1974* (Lisboa: Edições 70, 2011), 45-48.

11. Cf. Peter Wollen, *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (London: Verso, 1982), 80-90.

12. “With *Mild Manners*, we seem able to see the everyday of fascism, salazarist ideology at work.” — Fernando Lopes, “Duas ou Três Coisas a Propósito de *Mild Manners*,” in *Alberto Seixas Santos*, coord. Neves (Lisboa: ABC Cine-Clube de Lisboa, 2008), 120.

13. This image is not completely strange in the context of the Portuguese revolution, where literacy and political consciousness were often equated. I want to thank Tiago Baptista for pointing this out.

14. There is nothing divinatory in this anticipation. As António Pedro Pita aptly noticed apropos the 25 of April 1974, revolutions bring the future to the present, i.e., their temporality is particularly dense, as they come as the fulfillment of a utopian drive (or an imaginary narrative) previously constituted somewhere in the past. Cf. António Pedro Pita, “O Dia Inicial: 25 de Abril ou O Imaginário da Revolução” (paper presented at the III Colóquio História e Arte, Florianópolis, 2010).

15. Kramer started shooting *Scenes from the Class Struggle in Portugal* while visiting the country in 1975, during the revolutionary process. Cf. Thomas Brom, “Interview with Robert Kramer: Filming in the Fist of the Revolution,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 12/13 (1976, 2004): 29-30.

16. This does not stop Kramer from raising specific, and complex, questions related to his own position as a filmmaker and to the relation between the camera and the event, as Raquel Schefer has recently noticed: “news-reel sequences cut by abrupt intertitles, the gap between the shooting and the editing processes, the prologue and the epilogue being disruptive sequences which not only point out to the processual nature of revolution, but also to the contradictions of class struggle, and the ambiguities of militant cinema.” — Schefer, “The Lived Cinema of Robert Kramer: Politics and Subjectivity,” *La Furia Humana* 16 (2013).

17. “*Gestos* is completely planned [*pensado*: thought about], shot by shot, angle by angle, with an absolutely millimetric rigor.” — Seixas Santos, in *Alberto Seixas Santos*, coord. Neves (Lisboa: ABC Cine-Clube de Lisboa, 2008), 25.

18. In one of the best texts ever written about *Gestures and Fragments*, Augusto M. Seabra speaks of Seixas Santos's camera as the self-conscious "fourth character" typical of modern cinema: the "strategy of disjunction" opened by montage allows "the spectator to think" in a way that is very close to Huillet's and Straub's "filmic cubism." — Seabra, "À Procura da Revolução Perdida," in *Alberto Seixas Santos*, coord. Neves (Lisboa: ABC Cine-Clube de Lisboa, 2008), 148.

19. Seixas Santos on his own method: "to choose a strategy of negation, of confrontation between different levels, different ways of saying. The difficulties, the sterility of an interruptive reading, blocking what is "natural" in a spontaneous word [...]. And more, the essential: to subvert the rules of simple addition, to make a film from a set of destructions." — *ibid.*, 143.

20. "[W]hen the army starts thinking as a civilian institution [...] then the citizen senses the visible disorder of that thought and finds the indelible mark of stupidity in it."

²¹. Robert Kramer, in *Gestures and Fragments*.

22. Karl Marx, *Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 173.

23. Colin MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses," *Screen* 15.2 (1974): 19.

24. "I want to give the spectator back his role as spectator, I want him to be sitting in the movie theatre [*na plateia*], not having a secondhand experience of dramatic events." — cf. Neves, "Entrevista de Alberto Seixas Santos," 26. The Brechtian move not only is not difficult to identify in the way montage allows the spectator to *read* the film (as montage is equated with thought), it becomes the director's ultimate achievement: "The aim is no longer to fix the spectator apart as receiver of a representation but to pull the audience into an activity of reading: far from separating the spectator, this is a step towards his inclusion in a process." — Stephen Heath, "Lessons from Brecht," *Screen* 15.2 (1974): 111.