

TABU:
 TIME OUT OF JOINT IN
 CONTEMPORARY PORTUGUESE CINEMA

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“The time is out of joint.” So says Hamlet after consulting with his father’s ghost, the former king, outside castle Elsinore. His words appear to refer to the rotten state of Denmark. Hamlet will attempt to set that state right by taking the life of Claudius, his uncle, in bed with his mother, who took the throne after killing Hamlet’s father. Hamlet’s efforts will cost him his own life and cost the Danish people a Danish king. In Shakespeare’s tale, Denmark will be ruled henceforth by the prince of Norway whose father Hamlet’s father killed. The price of monarchy, it seems, is so much treachery and so much death. So long as there be kings, Shakespeare’s play suggests, and, ever after, rulers who claim a divine or derived right to rule, all those who are ruled, who have no rights, will suffer.

Gilles Deleuze is not thinking about ghosts or kings or Denmark when he hears Hamlet’s speech. Deleuze is thinking about time in the context of cinema.¹ In a Preface to the English translation of *Cinema 2*, Deleuze says that Hamlet’s words signify that “time is no longer subordinate to movement, but movement to time.”² Deleuze hears in Hamlet’s words a revelation about a revolution in philosophy, waged over several centuries, from the Ancient Greeks to Kant, that is repeated, in the sphere of cinema, over a much shorter history. In European films made after the Second World War, on his view, the movement-images of classical Hollywood cinema gave way to time-images, direct images of time in its pure state. Specifically, he says, Italian neo-realism and the French New Wave abandoned representations of movement in action, which counted time as the link between successive, immobile segments, for direct presentations of time, for movement understood as concrete duration.

In the history of Portuguese cinema, this same shift is anticipated in the films of Manoel de Oliveira and realized in the films of the Novo Cinema of Fernando Lopes, Paulo Rocha, and others. In modern Portuguese cinema, Miguel Gomes shares this preference for a direct presentation of time. In what follows, we aim to show how, in his latest film, *Tabu* (2012), Gomes deploys time-images to present what is experienced as loss in contemporary Portu-

guese culture. Specifically, representing Portugal's colonial past in the form of a film within the film and in the form of a memory played as another film within this same film, Gomes gives us images of a paradise experienced as lost which was never really paradise in the first instance. We believe this sense of loss can be helpfully characterized in terms of what Jacques Lacan has called the *objet petit a*. Drawing from both Deleuze and Lacan, then, we will treat the paradise represented by Gomes as an object cause of desire trapped in time and experienced as lost in contemporary Portuguese culture and film. The time is out of joint in *Tabu* for the characters who act out its narrative as well as for the target audience for this film. Gomes has made a film that brings us into contact with that loss and with a longing (*saudade*) that will never and can never be satisfied.

The movement-image, as Deleuze understands it, incorporates time in the form of purpose and action. In classic Hollywood films, where the movement-image prevails, what we see and hear in the present alerts us to what we can expect from the actions that mobilize the narrative toward its immediate future. In Alfred Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder* (1954), for example, we hear the phone ring, see the pool of light flood out of the bedroom door, watch Margot walk from the bedroom to the desk, wait for Swann to come out from behind the curtains, and all of this adds up to an action we can reasonably expect to advance the story. The deployment of our sensory motor skills is rewarded with the realization of a purpose our perceptions anticipate. In this classic model, an action, the phone ringing, precipitates a situation, Margot now standing with her back to a would be assailant, leading to another action, Swann's attempt to strangle our heroine. On a larger scale, a situation, Mark's suspicions about Margot, call for an action, Mark's plot to have Margot killed, leading to another situation, Mark's detention by the police. In general, the audience for a film of this type observes goal oriented activity realizing its intended purposes. Time is subordinated to movement, here, because it is action in movement that advances the narrative and time serves merely as a measure of the realized purpose of this action.

In Oliveira's *Aniki Bóbo* (1942), by contrast, nothing happens, no purpose is realized. This is not because the film lacks drama. Carlitos, just a boy, acts tough to fit in with a gang of rougher kids. He and Eduardinho problematically share affections for the same girl, Terezinha. But there is no large action form. There is no problem the film promises to resolve. The film ends pretty much where it begins, leaving the children with their adventures, their minor conflicts and their more or less innocent pastimes. In Roberto Rossellini's *Strom-*

boli (1950), to take what will be, perhaps, a more familiar example, Karin goes out of her way, literally fleeing her situation, to make something happen, but nothing she does leads to any purposeful result. She is reduced to an observer of her adopted island home and the customs of its inhabitants. There is a breakdown of the sensory motor link between perception and action. What she sees of her situation does not support or anticipate any action that will alter this situation, and this breakdown characterizes the relation of the viewer to the content of this film, as well.³ The audience for a film of this type experiences time as duration, as the thick present in which a story unfolds but to no end.

So, while there is time in the movement-image, that time is in the service of action. It is time in a straight line, chronological time, time subordinate to movement. In the time-image, on the other hand, as Deleuze presents it, and as we encounter it in *Aniki Bóbo* and *Stromboli*, time is presented in its pure state as duration, as the time it takes for Carlitos to “prove” himself or for Karin to confront her inevitability. More formally, this duration is formed from a present which passes and a past which remains present. The past is formed from the present which must pass to make time for the present which is always present only in virtue of a past that is also present, virtually, as habit or memory or a distension of the mind. His habitual timidity gives time to Carlitos’s adventures. Her memory of a life on the European mainland before the war makes Karin’s time on the island endless. More generally, with the time-image we are given time to think precisely because we do not know what to think.

In the time-image, then, the actual situation of a subject in the present is thickened by habits or memories from the past brought to bear in the present on any possible future or, to put the same point in another way, the virtual situation of a subject in the time-image is a projection toward a future actualized by a past composed of habits and personal or shared memories. On this model, movement is subordinated to time. Whatever future action a subject may want to undertake in the present is conditioned by a past that constitutes and, often, confounds the present as the present that it is. The time-image gives us subjects who cannot act because what they want to do is complicated and compromised by a time that is virtually present in the form of a past that remains vague, indeterminate and unstable.

This is the situation in *Tabu*. The short story of the “intrepid explorer” that plays as a film and as a prelude to the film which includes this film is vague, indeterminate and unstable. We are, in the first place, and on first viewing, unaware that we are watching a film within a film. The content and the title, “*Tabu*,” superimposed on its opening shot associate

what we see with F. W. Murnau's 1931 film of the same name. Murnau's *Tabu* tells the story of traditional mores and forbidden love, but the story of our intrepid explorer concerns a love lost to death. The movement of his legs is said to be commanded by the king, but the movement of his spirit is motivated by a futile attempt to escape his broken heart. Though we cannot know it, yet, this is the general theme of Gomes's *Tabu*. In the short film, our explorer will rather throw himself to the crocodile and die than live without his heart's desire. In the film as a whole, the woman we will come to know as Aurora will lose her heart's desire and die, of dementia and old age, before she can be reunited with her true love and partner in "unspeakable crimes."

Yet, apart from this tragic eventuality, nothing happens in Gomes's *Tabu*, and the short film that opens the film gives us a taste of this breakdown in the sensory motor scheme. Though it is apparently set at the turn of the 20th century, the visual aesthetic, the music, the acting and the voice-over by Gomes himself are clearly from our time. The voice-over has an especially destabilizing effect since it does not describe but explains what we see.⁴ It adds purpose — especially by its invocations of "the most insolent muscle of all anatomy," the heart — to what on the face of it has no special meaning. The short film ends with a moonlit image of a crocodile and the specter of the explorer's lost love seated together along the river "united by a mysterious pact." In this image, we see the explorer, again, in the figures of those to whom he has committed his body and his soul. Nothing has changed. He is as melancholic as ever only, now, transformed in the image of an ancient reptile and the ghost of a lady from bygone days. He has still not escaped his heart.

So, things go on, time passes, parts of the narrative change in relation to the whole of the narrative which changes in relation to changes in the parts which change, again, in relation to the changing whole, but nothing is accomplished in all this change. When we cut to Pilar (played by Teresa Madruga), sitting alone, in a theater, staring astonished at the screen, we know, for the first time, that we have just viewed, with her, a film within the film that is *Tabu*. In one respect, this is a reflexive gesture pointing to the art of making films. In another respect, we are introduced, by this gesture, to something about Pilar and about ourselves. As the film, *Tabu*, will go on to confirm, Pilar is astonished by life and by representations of life: she is taken aback and amazed by the spectacle of things. Films are especially skilled at providing such spectacles. We have come to this film expecting such a spectacle. Pilar goes to the movies to engage the spectacle of a lovelorn explorer, on the Dark Continent of Africa, in

one of Portugal's colonies, seeking, in vain, to escape his heart. Why was Pilar attracted to this film? What about it has captivated her? For what broader audience was this film made? We are given the time of Pilar's drive from the theater to the airport to think about these questions without knowing what it is we are to think about them.

As said, above, the generalized time-image of this short film sets up the time-image that is *Tabu*. The thinking we do without knowing what to think is characteristic of this time-image which, Deleuze says, gives movement to thought.⁵ This thinking begins in the part of the film subtitled "Paradise Lost." This title, which refers, again, to Murnau, also sets us thinking without knowing what to think. For in Murnau's film, the first section, in which Matahi falls in love with Reri, is titled "Paradise," and the second half, in which Matahi loses Reri, is titled "Paradise Lost." We wonder, then, what Gomes has in mind when he calls the first part of his film, which follows Pilar's life in contemporary Portugal, "Paradise Lost." What was paradise, and how was it lost? Lost to Pilar? To someone we know so far only as a woman who visits films about Portugal's colonial past? Of course, this colonial past is not entirely lost in Pilar's or Portugal's present but remains, virtually, a vague, indeterminate and unstable part of it.

The balance of "Paradise Lost" explores this vague, indeterminate past as it is present in the life of Pilar. Pilar lives alone but extends herself to others. She offers her home to a Polish student visiting Lisbon over the holidays. She socializes with a man her age who also appears to live alone. She patronizes political causes. She practices her faith. And, importantly for the narrative of *Tabu*, she looks after her elderly neighbor, Aurora. We are introduced to Aurora when Pilar is summoned by Aurora's Cape Verdean housekeeper, Santa, to pick her up at the casino where she has gambled away all the money she has, including her train fare home. Aurora (played by Laura Soveral) appears to us as she appears to Pilar, as a movie star from a bygone era, someone to gaze at, in astonishment. Accessorized with large frame sunglasses she is wearing indoors, jewelry and a paisley scarf, with the background moving behind her, because they are sitting on a revolving bar, she tells Pilar a fantastic dream about hairy apes who convince her to test her luck at the casino, "at the old one, because the new one is rubbish." This is apparently not the first time Aurora has lost it all at the tables, and she does not appear devastated by her loss. Her actions appear to have no real consequences.

We learn soon after this that Aurora takes anti-depressants and may be abusing them, that she has a daughter from whom she is, for some reason, estranged, that she depends on

her daughter for the renewal of her prescriptions as well as for the funds she needs to live and that she squanders gambling. Pilar appears to accept Aurora's account of her daughter's neglect and of Santa's lack of assistance. She implores Santa to do more for her mistress, to contact Aurora's daughter or to give her the number so she can contact the daughter herself. She becomes so involved in Aurora's affairs that Santa asks her why she doesn't mind her own business. She becomes so consumed with concern for Aurora that she can barely contain herself. Out at the movies, New Year's Eve, her painter friend asleep in the seat next to her, she sits weeping, not for the spectacle on the screen, but, distracted from that spectacle, secretly, in the dark, to herself. While the soundtrack plays two verses and the chorus from a cover version, by Les Surfs, of the Ronettes 1963 classic, "Be My Baby," the camera closes in on Pilar's distraught and tear streaked face.

This is the first music we have heard since the opening sequence. As there, the music, here, links a film within the film to the narrative of *Tabu*. Shortly after the rebuke by Santa, we cut to a scene where Pilar presents a gift for Maya, the Polish girl who was to have spent the New Year holiday with her, to the "friend" of Maya who is, of course, Maya herself. Maya thanks Pilar and tells her, "You are a very kind lady. God bless you." The scene of this exchange is followed by a close-up of Pilar, her introspection indicated by the music, "Be My Baby," which has no source in this part of the film but which will figure so prominently in the film's second part. This reference to the early 1960's is part of the past present to Pilar, part of an indeterminate and destabilizing affect that complicates and confounds Pilar's ability to act in the present. The girl who has lied to her says that she is kind. The housekeeper who refuses her kindness tells her to keep to herself. Aurora pleads for that same kindness. Pilar's tears sign her confusion, the lack of any clear purpose to be served. There is a breakdown in the relation between what she perceives and any action that might change the perceived situation. The film gives us, here, an image of time as duration. Pilar does not know what to do or think, and we feel something for her that is entirely indeterminate.

What is it about this music, in particular, that alerts us to this image of time? What past does it make present for Pilar and for the target audience for this film? The early 1960's were the beginning of the end of Portugal's colonial empire. Just more than fifty years after the setting for the film that began this film, about an intrepid explorer trekking the Dark Continent on behalf of his king, the African colonies began asserting themselves against their European rulers. Portugal was the last European nation to give up its foreign territories in

Africa. The film that so captivated Pilar at the start of the narrative of *Tabu*, as the 1960's American pop song, captures and preserves a nation's sense of itself as an important empire. Even more specifically, Les Surfs, the band whose cover of the Ronette's hit song is used in the film, was formed on Madagascar and came to prominence in Europe after their island home won its independence from the French colonial empire. This sheet of past veils the narrative of "Part One" of Gomes's film as a virtually present but never actually determinate moment of it. It haunts Pilar as it haunts the culture of Portugal, generally.

Returning to the narrative, not long after midnight, in the first hours of the New Year, Santa rouses Pilar from her sleep. Her mistress is not feeling well. We cut directly to a close-up of Aurora, white as a sheet, on a bed of white sheets, in a white-walled hospital corridor, coming to, confused by her surroundings, thinking she is in Africa, finding her situation a nuisance, and worried about the crocodile. "What crocodile?" Pilar asks? With Pilar and Santa, we are inclined to think that Aurora is not quite herself. Besides the crocodile, she talks about her obsession with a Gian Luca Ventura, and it is her dying wish to see this Gian Luca Ventura, again. Pilar tracks him down in a nursing home, but before she can get him to the hospital Aurora has died. Ventura will have time only to attend the funeral and to sit with Pilar and Santa, after it, for a coffee before returning to his home. Unexpectedly, he begins, "She had a farm in Africa." Pilar looks up, startled. "Desculpe," excuse me, she asks. And so begins the story that will compose "Part Two: Paradise," of *Tabu*.

On Deleuze's view, the time-image comes in two forms, peaks of present and sheets of past. The peaks of present are accents in a single event which implicate a past and a future in the present: "a time is revealed inside the event, which is made from the simultaneity of these three implicated presents, from these de-actualized *peaks of present*."⁶ Films characterized by this form of the time-image can be treated as one single event and as the basis for the implication of several successive present states. Deleuze assigns this time-image to films by Alain Robbe-Grillet. It would be possible to find these peaks of present accenting Oliveira's *Aniki Bóbo*, as well. The sheets of past, by contrast, give us aspects, regions, strata, layers, each "with its own characteristics, its 'tones,' its 'aspects,' its 'singularities,' its 'shining points' and its 'dominant' themes."⁷ These regions form a past that is not in us as a personal memory or an individual history. In these time-images, "the past appears as the most general form of an already-there, a pre-existence in general which our recollections presuppose...and which our perceptions" use.⁸ Only because they co-exist in the present as this or that aspect

of the past does the present exist as present, as the moment which has not yet passed and, yet, must pass to fill out a layer, a stratum, that, as past, can give meaning to the present.

Gomes's *Tabu* is manifestly dominated by these sheets of past. The short film that begins the film is one such sheet, the song by Les Surfs is another, each with its own singularities, tones and dominant themes. The story Ventura narrates, and that comprises the whole second half of the film, is yet another. This stratum takes us from present day Lisbon to an unspecified African colony at a time before the wars for independence. We are given a 16 mm image of the region Ventura explores with his narrative, and the contrast with the 35 mm film used for the first half of the film gives this image the physical look of a memory or recollection. It is not entirely clear whose image of this recollection we are seeing — is it Gian Luca's visual memory or Pilar's visual imagination of the story Gian Luca narrates — nor can we be entirely certain about the reliability of this image. Until now, we have seen the world largely from Pilar's point of view. The nephew has described his great uncle as "going bonkers." It will be enough, however, for us to consider this image and this tale as a stratum already-there, a pre-existence any recollection of this period in Portugal's past would presuppose and a meaning or sense, a direction given by this stratum to the present time of *Tabu*.

Aurora's farm is said to have been at the foot of a fictional Mount Tabu. This imaginary geography serves as a reminder of Murnau's film. For just as Reri, by virtue of being designated the virgin bride of her people's god, was taboo and could not be touched by the boy she loved, so Aurora, by virtue of her marriage and pregnancy, is taboo and not to be touched by the man she loves. The man Aurora loves is Ventura, himself, and the "monumental crimes they lived" involve touching, often, passionately, obsessively, tragically. This is a region of the past that co-exists with the present of Aurora in the first part of Gomes's *Tabu*. Her gambling — Aurora's father is said to have lost a fortune to gambling — her relation with Santa, her estrangement from her daughter, whom she was carrying while she and Ventura carried on, all make more sense in the context of this stratum of the past brought to light by Ventura's recollections. The present sense of the film as a whole, however, is wanting something else from this sheet of past.

This sheet of past in the film is titled "Paradise," but it is not paradise in any ordinary sense, except, perhaps, in the sense that it is experienced as lost. This sheet of past, a region recollected as paradise and distinguished by its own singularities, is distinctly tinged with a melancholy that occupies the first part, the present time, of the film. The folly of the colo-

nists, as recounted by Gian Luca, their occupations and preoccupations cannot conceal a dread, a foreboding of emptiness. This is not the sense that something is coming to an end. It is the sense that there is nothing to end. Aurora is said to spend her time hunting animals for sport. Mario is introduced as a friend who forms a band to entertain his friends at what are presented as “parties” but which are nothing more than another way of spending time. The white colonists form militias and organize shooting contests ostensibly to protect themselves against the black indigenous population, but this is just one more distraction. In this context, the event that brings Aurora to Ventura’s door, a lost pet crocodile, is hardly significant.

Yet, it may not be too much to suggest that the crocodile stands, here, as it figures in the prelude to the film, for that still untamed element in Africa, for what has not and cannot be civilized. Although Aurora keeps the crocodile as a pet, she cannot keep this primitive creature from escaping her and leading her into what her cohabitants in “paradise” will consider uncivilized acts. Aurora and Ventura share an obsession that will not be contained. Mario, “the Priest,” demands that Ventura break off his unholy affair, but Aurora will kill Mario in the end to keep him from interfering in their destiny, if that is what it is. They have no plans. They can only and barely endure the time it is taking for Aurora to come to term. In the sheet of past that is the second half of *Tabu*, Aurora’s pregnancy can be described as a time-image of the second sort, the single event accented by peaks of present – conception as past present, delivery as future present, detection as ever present – that is this affair between Aurora and Ventura.

This shared obsession is clearly no paradise, even if that is what Aurora and Ventura seek as a respite from the “paradise” that life in the colony also is not. What is it that Aurora and Ventura want, that the Portuguese who colonized Africa wanted? What is it that is ostensibly lost in the lives of Pilar and her contemporaries? If we cannot put our finger on it, perhaps it is because there is nothing that can fill what is wanting or lacking in the real or fictional lives of these individuals. This lack, and the impossibility of filling it, is described by Lacan in terms of the *objet petit a*. Most crudely put, the *objet a* is the unobtainable object of desire and, as such, the object cause of that desire. That is, because it cannot be obtained, it causes the desire that would be satisfied were it to be obtained. As such a cause, Lacan associates the *objet a* with the Greek word for ornament, “agalma,” the precious something hidden in a worthless box.⁹ He takes this image from Alcibiades’s mocking description of Socrates in Plato’s *Symposium*. In the transference, the analyst is to embody

objet a for the analysand and so motivate the analysand in the same way as the inner beauty of Socrates, in spite of his outward ugliness, causes Alcibiades to love him.

For our purposes, it seems wrong to characterize the young Ventura (played by Carloto Cotta) and Aurora (played by Ana Moreira) or even the continent of Africa as outwardly ugly, worthless boxes. All are very pretty on the outside, easy on the eyes, as they say. The form of the box, however, is of no importance for Lacan. What matters is what is inside. Not because there is a precious something inside but because inside there is a fundamental lack. This is why it is paradoxical and not wrong that the young Ventura and Aurora, and the African landscape, as well, are pretty to look at. In the look that Ventura and Aurora give one another, and the looks we give both of them, they (and we) see the gaze of the other, the *petit autre*, looking back at them. They see something that cannot be encompassed by their own regard. That something, that otherness, is the residue of what Lacan calls the Real, that part of the Real which exceeds our narcissistic perception of reality. That residue, that otherness, which signifies a lack in our perception of the world, is Lacan's *objet petit a*.¹⁰

In short, and in general, we see what we want to see of the world. We see what satisfies a narcissistic projection of ourselves in the world. This vision is reality as we want to see it, but this vision of the world is lacking everything that does not reflect us back to ourselves. We are, of course, not alone in the world, but where we do not see ourselves we do not, alternatively, necessarily, see others. We see a lack of ourselves instead, and we desire to fill that lack. That lack, the *objet a*, is the object cause of our desire. Were we to satisfy this lack, we would stop desiring, and we would be dead. The death drive is this drive to satisfy this desire, to stop desiring, which will never happen so long as there is a lack, a want to be filled. Ventura and Aurora serve this function for one another. They are, for one another, the gaze that signifies, for the look of the other, the lack in the signifying function of each of them. Their love flows from a desire in each of them to fill a lack felt in their encounter with the other which is their own lack, what in the Real exceeds the capacity of each of them to tame it.

In this context, it will seem even more paradoxical to describe the continent of Africa gazing back at its European colonizers. Remember, however, that this gaze is not a literal looking but an uncanny sense that the object of one's signifying regard cannot be completely grasped by the orders of signification at one's disposal. Paradise is what the European colonizers called Africa (and Indonesia and the Americas, etc.). For the indigenous population,

however, Africa was just their home. Paradise is a construct imposed on Africa for the cultural and economic benefits it brought to those colonizers. It made western Europeans feel civilized by comparison and superior in respect of knowledge, even if this was only an affect fueled by a perceived distance of European civilization from the so-called primitive and pristine state of this Dark Continent. Narratives of the sort documented in the film that opens *Tabu* were made to reinforce this myth.

By incorporating this narrative as a film within his film, Gomes goes out of his way to expose this myth. Without resorting to Deleuze and Lacan, we are already alerted to the tension between the mission assigned our intrepid explorer by his majesty the King and the mission assigned him by his own heart. This tension is brought out in the voice-over by Gomes which questions what can be known by “men of reason” about what is truly important and importantly true. Gomes’s critique is also captured in the open irony of the subtitles. “Paradise Lost” can only describe the trauma in Pilar’s Lisbon of a fundamental lack, paradise as *objet petit a*, paradoxically experienced as taken. “Paradise,” shown in images from the story narrated by old Ventura, exposes the lack — in the palpable melancholy, in the tragic consequences of Aurora’s affair, in Ventura’s broken heart, Mario’s death, and the beginning of the colonial wars — felt traumatically as lost. Finally, the adventures of Mario’s Band appear to separate everything in this part of the film from any recognizable reality.

At the same time, it could be argued that Gomes goes out of his way to actively reinforce this myth. *Tabu* is by all accounts a visual beautiful film. The crisp, black and white, 35 mm, celluloid print produces a rich palette of gray tones for the first half of the film. The 16 mm celluloid stock used to film the second half gives the images of Africa a dream-like quality. It is a seductive spectacle, and the music of Mario’s Band is used to enhance this lure. There is no obviously abusive treatment of native people. White people are presented, for the most part, as benign conquerors, and black Africans are represented as obliging servants. The penultimate images of the film, devoid of white colonists, show indigenous people carrying on many of their domestic and field labors as if they still served some master, and the final image of Mount Tabu itself, the fictional setting for the film, is free — primitive, pristine — from the effects of human intervention.

And, yet, in Gomes’s beautiful and untrammelled tableau, there are images that return our look with a gaze that contains a residue of the Real, the *objet petit a*, a lack that wants to be filled but that will be ever wanting, that resists our capacity to order it symbolically. There

is the image of Pilar weeping in that movie theater. It is not just that we do not know why she is crying. Her glistening tears gaze back at us emptied of symbolic meaning. They threaten us with an excess that exposes our failed mastery of reality. We do not know how to understand her, and nothing in the film prepares us to make sense of her sadness. There is the wreath Santa places on Aurora's grave site with the motto "com eterna saudade," with eternal longing, in lieu of the daughter who does not attend her mother's funeral. This wreath also returns our look with a gaze. It demands that we make sense of it but overwhelms us with an apparent lack of meaning, an excess that cannot be ordered. We watch Santa place it on a hill of dirt beside the grave from Pilar's point of view. It contrasts with the single lily Ventura drops on the coffin itself. After showing the backs of the funeral party departing the scene, the camera returns us to this wreath and to its memory of "my dear mother," *minha querida mãe*.

We can find this same gaze in the entirety of the images that make up the second half of the film. We suggested as much above. It is especially present, however, in the image of the bodies and faces of the native inhabitants who literally look back at us when they are assembled for the government information sessions held to address rumors about "revolts and massacres" perpetrated by blacks against whites in the colony. It is not just what we know we don't know about the intentions of these African natives. What gazes back at us from these black bodies is an excess that cannot be subsumed by a Eurocentric symbolic order. Old and young, male and female, clad in tribal dress and variations on western garb, they demand a meaning we cannot give them. Yet, we encounter a residue of the Real in these black bodies only just in case we are vulnerable and can be wounded by what exceeds us, only just in case we have the courage, the temerity to recognize what cannot be narcissistically subsumed to the same. In images throughout his film, Gomes gives us encounters with this excess which threaten to wound us and, in threatening us, challenge the status of the paradise experienced as lost in contemporary Portuguese culture and film.

The time-images that dominate *Tabu* alert us to the ways Gomes challenges the mythology of a paradise that so captivates the imaginary of Portuguese culture and film. The main characteristic of the time image is the reversal of the subordination of time to movement. In classic cinema, and in the metaphysics of representation up to Kant, time served as the link between perceptions and purpose. What we see is connected to an end aimed at in action. But in post-war European film, and post-Kantian representation, movement is subordinated

to time. Time is the concrete duration in which movements begin and end, the Whole which is the condition for changes in the parts of that Whole which changes in relation to the changes in those parts. With *Tabu*, Gomes complicates the present, puts the time out of joint and forces us to think about the present in relation to the regions or strata or sheets of past which are co-extensive with it.

In addition, in this film, Gomes exposes the present day perceived trauma of a loss, paradise, that was never truly lost, not because it was an empty dream or an imagined state, but because it was only ever possessed as a fundamental lack, an absence, the *objet a*, serving as an object cause of a desire that will never and can never be satisfied. This trauma is not a debilitating illusion but one part of the source, the font for the longing, *saudade*, that is so crucial to the spirit of Portuguese culture and film. Pilar's kindness flows from this spirit and this longing but so does Pilar's astonishment with everything that makes up her life. Aurora's "mischievous behavior" and "taste for adventure" flow from this same spirit as does Ventura's "foolishness" and, generally, self-destructive acts. Most importantly, Miguel Gomes's love of film and of the sensuousness of the cinematic experience derives from this same longing to make present something that remains irretrievably past.

Tabu is a film in two parts. Gomes has said, "What counts is the third part, which does not exist in the film but is produced in your mind."¹¹ The time-image above all gives movement to thought. *Tabu* does not give us to think about what it means, as if it were a problem or a puzzle to solve. In confronting us with what cannot be ordered by the categories we have at our disposal, *Tabu* asks us to think without telling us what to think. The pleasure of this film can be found in the beauty of its images, the care taken in the organization of its parts, the time it gives these parts to find their place in the whole, and the thinking it inspires for those who take their time with *Tabu*.

1. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), and *Cinema 2: the Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

2. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, xi.

3. See Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 46-7.

4. On the autonomy of speech and visual image in modern cinema see Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 247-53.

5. Gilles Deleuze, "On *The Time Image*," in *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 57-61.

6. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 100.

7. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 99.
8. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 98.
9. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre VIII: Le transfert, 1960-61*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991), 163-178.
10. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1978), 67-116.
11. Quoted in Dennis Lim, "Past Is Present Yet Irretrievable," *New York Times*, 21 Dec. 2012.