

# To Manoel de Oliveira

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Luis Miguel Cintra

Dear Sirs and Madams,

Before addressing directly the guest of honour of this party, whose birthday we celebrate, I would like to salute you all for coming. And I shall explain why.

Since the day I was first filmed by Manoel de Oliveira, surrounded by a lot of people between figurants and crew, and tied to the mast of a monumental vessel constructed in the midst of the Tóbis Studios, swayed by the fake waves that actually were the strength of men arms in a long take of *Le Soulier de Satin* by Claudel, it's been already 25 years. I perceived then by experience what I believed I felt as a spectator in *Acto da primavera*: this is not a private cinema. This cinema is addressed to the world, to all and each man, to whoever desires. I do not know another cinema which thinks further than this one, about whom it is made for, about the spectators to whom it will be or should be shown, and who Manoel de Oliveira would wish to be, as said in the prologue of *Acto da Primavera*, 'any sinner', this means, the whole world, as sinners we will all be and each one as worthy of respect. Manoel de Oliveira's camera was in front of me that day to expose myself, rather than in a stage, to the world. I perceived that his cinema, like no other, made me responsible for my condition of human and actor, and that more than myself, put in that situation, much more courage and greater responsibility was assuming the one that filmed. I started perceiving then, from film to film, each time better, how truth this was. It was later confirmed when in that film, and in many others, Manoel de Oliveira asked me to look into the lens. He said: 'Listen, when you look to the camera think about the theatre where the film will be screened.' The filming machine was not the hidden look of a filmmaker, like in other cases, but rather the instrument he openly used to elaborate an art that only had sense when shown to the whole world.

In the same vein, I have always noticed the importance and the equal respect Manoel has given to all public acts he has been invited to, whether festivals, homages, contact with the mass media, any screening of one of his films; whether the simplest meeting with other people, an interview, a dinner in his house, a stroll, being with other people. I do not believe he does it for more vanity than that required by the self-love every man should have. I rather think that he does it because only as an active member of a human society he will understand his trade

as an artist or his simple condition of being, as well, human. Speaking in a less grave tone, it might be for the same reason he has happily never stopped joking, to relate with others. And because of this, I have already said it, this cinema is eminently political in the noblest sense of the word.

Not always, as we know, the reaction towards his cinema has known to have the same dignity as what it showed. I will never get tired of admiring how his energy kept fighting throughout so many years against the lack of curiosity of so many people that, as unhappily frequently happens, remembered and did not gave themselves the space to respond to the challenge with eyes to see. And he was rejected or simply ignored. But with an immovable will and conviction, he resisted until defeating the indifference, the Portuguese envy Viera talks about and, above all, the prejudices and the models of a forever-normalized taste. Happily, the whole world recognizes the interest in his work today, and even some of us might, as human beings, recognize ourselves in it and in its way of giving sight to live.

Even though I love him personally and have him as one of my fondest friends, it has a special significance to me that this celebration, in good time relied to the more than competent cares of Serralves, is a political ceremony, an official ceremony where his homeland's government acknowledges him for his work and pays tribute to him in his hundred 100th birthday. He has the whole right to it. And this day should make history. The way in which he handles his activity as a creator is exemplary. His work will be as useless as any work of art, but for the same reason, and like all works of art should be, it is the most complete way of being alive. In his case, it became evident in a treasure recognized with importance way beyond national limits. Your presence here means you understand it likewise, and I salute you for that. Thank you.

But if you allow me, this party is a party of friends as well, of a huge friendship. Happily, our king of the party knows well how everything in life merges and nothing alive is organized into sealed compartments. I would like, and if I am able to do so in a less solemn tone, to address you now, Manoel, making myself a representative of all the actors that Manoel called for his films. Congratulations, Manuel, for your 100 years and, of course, for the tremendous love to life they testify, but above all for what has been done, for the way you have known to be, and for what you have made us live.

When I watched *Cristóvão Colombo o enigma*, your last finished feature film, in the première that, as all the premières of your films, was a party, I was impressed by the deep melancholy of the film and I talked about it in an interview. I know you liked the observation. I was not mistaken, then. But I got used to see you more as a joker and more provocative, and if it is true that in the formal bravery of the film, the pleasure of subverting and reinventing the cinema language with which I have always seen you joking remains, I felt novelty in it, as I always do. But the novelty consisted in a new distance and a lot of melancholy that I perceived in that whole search the film shows us: the search for the memory, that usually the world does not have, of the life of one that has given so much. Colon's case is that of someone who gave to the world as much as the discovery of a new continent and nevertheless his life is barely known. It is like if the film questioned which of the things each one lived and gave to the world remain in the memory of others, fearing the memory of the world to be, in fact, little. And the film bravely faces the way in which that what makes us live is ephemeral. His cinema, it is known, makes one think. I found myself in the light of eternity, or of the course of time thinking about small things: in the life of those actors he has chosen to play the parts in the films, Ricardo, Leonor Baldaque and Leonor Silveira, Manoel himself and Mrs. Doña Isabel, so wonderfully showed there just as I know them, and even in myself filmed there by your side, so equal to myself that no one believes I am the director of the museum you decided me to pretend to be.

In those images as finally in all of your films, Manoel, beyond any fiction that as an exercise of fantasy, your spice of life, you always put to play with reality in your very unique way of thinking, we are all filmed in those more or less serious playing moments that you made us live, and in this case, you made for yourself. From such type of moments your cinema is constituted, from the life of your actors. For me what counts the most today and what is inseparable from the joy of having been able to participate in your work in so many occasions is exactly the memory of those moments of joy or tension, in any case of deep exaltation, that each of the films has meant for both the ones being filmed and the one who filmed or helped to do it. And there are so much already, so long ago and so many people whose names you have written in the credits of your films! What I would like to express better today in name of those

people, and above all, of those who call themselves actors, is how much it means to us that you have given us those moments of life and transformed them into communication to the world, is how much we acknowledge the fact of participating in your work because it makes us live more. There is no melancholy that can hide this joy. Your work gives a lot more sense to the live of a lot more people.

I never felt any notion of hierarchy in the shooting of your films. There are actors who are vedettes, there are beginners, some are non-actors, and there are evidently characters, but above all there are people I believe you know are worth for what they are. And that is why nobody ever does wrong, even though one does not know how to interpret. I believe that 'to do well or to do wrong' is not a concept that makes part of your cinema. That is strange, and it is a matter of one who knows the value of being alive. Manoel achieves the moment of filming with him to be an important moment of our life, and I have always felt it as an invitation to show the world who I am and what I am capable of. We have been, indeed, people alive in front of his camera, with all the variety that the human specie implies. Some good, some bad, for sure. And we all, who have been through it, feel now as a huge family of which you are the obvious founder. Because it was Manoel who wanted us to get together around him, who has put us in front of the world and who, with our own selves, has known how to create more life. All to try to understand better, with the help of your art, what finally means to live more. This gives more sense to our lives and even though we have not understood it with the same conscious and that, as it is ought to be, each one has kept a different memory about it, and that each one behaved differently in the responsibility that was given to us by the possibility of assuming it in complete freedom, *his cinema* shook all of our lives. That is priceless.

It is in my name, and I consider that in the name of all of your actors, and because of the plenty of life we have received from you, that, in your 100th birthday, I thank you. And, not even for a moment with the slightest melancholy, rather with the biggest love and the greatest joy of living. Please, continue making films. •