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Bressane's *O Anjo Nasceu* ("The Angel Is Born"), released the same year as *Matou a Família*, develops certain variations on these structural aggressions. If *Matou a Família* is perverse in its hermeneutics, *O Anjo Nasceu* is perverse in its syntax. The film maintains the facade of a linear tale: two bandits—one black and one white—steal and murder. The perversity consists in the film's ellipses. First of all, it often inverts the conventional process by eliding not the superfluous but rather that which the

conventional spectator would regard as most essential. The white bandit, at one point, is obviously wounded, but the film never explains how he received his wound. Secondly, *O Anjo Nasceu* refuses the conventional narrative legerdemain that suggests that the events of the film form part of a temporal continuum extending beyond the film itself, with an implied "off-screen" anteriority (a setting, a situation) and futurity (the projected conjugal bliss of classical happy endings). The opening shots of a slum, for example, seem to promise the kind of sociological definition one might expect from a conventional realistic film, and more precisely, from a Neo-Realist or early Cinema Novo film. Instead, the film abruptly changes setting and the slum is forgotten. The initial shot is retroactively exposed as a pseudo-establishing shot, a sociological red herring. The film refuses to imply some social or psychological substratum on which the film rests.

By its refusal to make any comment on its marginal characters, *O Anjo Nasceu* grants them a kind of understated solidarity. The two criminals might be seen, in this sense, as recalling the radical criminality evoked by the figure and the work of Saint Jean Genet, comedian and martyr. Their crime simply exists, without forethought, without program, without redemption. Its tranquil self-confidence becomes clear in the sequence where they break into the house they plan to use as a hideout. They enter the house in the most natural way, without surreptitiousness, exploring it with unaffected curiosity, as if there were never any question that it belonged to them as much as to its "owners." At another point, the two bandits watch the televised transmission of the first astronauts landing on the moon. Richard Nixon, the earthly representative of official power, occupying a small rectangle to the left of the screen, congratulates the astronauts with perfunctory clichés about peace and progress. The black

bandit comments: "They're really out of it. Why do they go to the moon, when I've already been there for a long time?" As Brazilian critic Fernando Mesquita suggests, the bandits, in their lunar solitude, represent the hidden face of the official earth. The film implicitly identifies with this hidden face; the film itself represents a cool and tranquil kind of criminality, an audio-visual assault and battery. Like the crimes depicted, it simply exists in all of its provocative gratuitousness, a nihilistic gesture directed against the hypocritical discourse of power.

The film's final shot typifies its refusal of all teleology and redemption. A static shot, held for eight minutes, shows a deserted highway stretching toward the horizon. On the soundtrack: a Brazilian folksong with no clear relation either to the image or to the "story" of the bandits. Virtually nothing occurs within the image, except that at one point the camera zooms in, abruptly and uselessly, as if in an attempt to take the vanishing point by surprise. The zoom, a conventional signifier of a movement of attention, here signifies nothing. Unlike the forty-five-minute zoom of Michael Snow's *Wavelength*, which at least culminates in a visual pun referring back to the film's title, the zoom in *O Anjo Nasceu* has no

diegetic or structural justification whatsoever. It is simply there. One need only think of the countless "meaningful" highway endings of films—from Chaplin's final iris-ins to Paulo's upraised rifle in Rocha's *Land in Anguish*—to realize how radical *O Anjo Nasceu* is in its resolutely proffered negations. //