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Q. Did you make ANTONIO DAS MORTES as a reaction against TERRA EM TRANSE?

A. No. ANTONIO DAS MORTES represented, for me, a first truly cinematographic effort. Furthermore, it incorporates problems of my native region. It is very close to my childhood and to my life. Although TERRA EM TRANSE was attacked more by critics, it is for me my most important film. ANTONIO DAS MORTES was the easiest to make. TERRA EM TRANSE represents a more profound expression of my life, a more intellectual work. ANTONIO DAS MORTES rejoins a certain cultural and cinematic tradition, and reflects a discipline very different to that which lies behind TERRA EM TRANSE. In Brazil there was already the whole heritage of the western and ANTONIO DAS MORTES goes in this direction.

Q. Do Antonio das Mortes and the 'cangaceiros', the outlaws, belong to the past in Brazil, to an outmoded legend, or to a continuing force, an active myth?

A. They still correspond to a reality, to the point where I was able to find a concrete justification for making the film. The person on whom Antonio das Mortes is modelled is still alive, his name is José Rufino and he is about seventy years old. I've met him and spoken to him. The actor who played the role also listened to him and used what he learned to create the part. You can see this person in a short film by Gil Soares. He killed several 'cangaceiros'. Before making BLACK GOD I was doing some research and met him. He told me everything, even the story of BLACK GOD - all the second part is based on what he told me. He is an amazing personality because he never tells a story in the same way twice. I was fascinated by him and, little by little, we became friends. When I wanted to make ANTONIO DAS MORTES I learned that a new 'cangaco' had arisen in the region of Pernambuco, and I read in a newspaper that Rufino had gone there because the whole police force couldn't catch this 'cangaceiro' called Zé Crispin.

Q. When did this happen?

A. Last year. He went to arrest the 'pistoleiro'. Another time he took me to a town called Santa Brígida. Several professional bandits live there, but he can go there. He explained to me that these bandits were his friends, that they knew he didn't kill for money and that he was the only policeman able to go there. That's how I came to see the bandits, and now I would like to make a film about them. But they are different from 'cangaceiros', they are not gangsters, they don't stage hold-ups, they are no longer looking around for money. They are in the paid service of the present day political parties. The old liberal parties engage them to obstruct the elections and to kill candidates.

Q. Wasn't Mata Vaca, the colonel's gunman in ANTONIO DAS MORTES, really of this type?

A. Yes, he was somebody I knew. He killed one of my relations when I was a child and sometime later one of my cousins killed him.

Q. If the man who served as the model for Antonio das Mortes saw this film, in which Antonio changes sides, how would he react?

A. He would react favourably because he, too, often changed sides. He has already served several causes... I spoke just now of the town of Santa Brígida whose chief died last year. His name was Pedro and Sergio Muniz made a documentary about him. On the level of mystic relations there is a mixture of catholicism and protestantism and these are well integrated. That is why Antonio says to the professor, "Your affairs are political affairs, mine are the affairs of God". He didn't become a revolutionary, his change was more a matter of morality than of politics. He is simply a person of the middle class, he has all its complexes, guilt etc. When he is affected by the myth of the Saint, that is a reaction which I find difficult to explain, very subjective. Although I am from a protestant

background, I am fascinated by the aesthetics of catholicism. I am an atheist, but everything connected with black religion has a great effect on me, its 'mise en scene'. At Bahia, for example, the black culture has succeeded in imposing its religions, its food, its music, its dancing. Even politically, it has resisted the dictatorship of Vargas by a veritable underground war.

Q. Someone who had just seen BLACK GOD asked how one could reconcile revolution and folk lore. It's because revolution is an instrument of cultural as well as political resistance.

A. The greatest rebellions in Brazilian history are those wars which the blacks and the peasant mystics fought at the time of slavery. The most famous are those of "Zumbi de Palmares" (black) and Canudos (peasant mystic).

Q. The black force exists not because it is detached from religion but on the contrary, because it resurges around religion and its myths. In the United States, the Negroes have had their culture destroyed. They were converted to Christianity and traces of black religion remain in the Negro spiritual, although not in a conscious and organised way. But the Macumba have organised this resistance. You were talking about the personality of Antonio das Mortes and you said that people like him change sides several times. But they always change from the side of reaction.

A. A peasant doesn't have a great deal of choice. He becomes a bandit, or he dies of hunger or he becomes a labourer in Sao Paulo as in Gianni Amico's TROPICI. To him, the profession of a killer is quite normal. He doesn't kill to steal. He is paid to kill and at the same time has a keen sense of honour which is sometimes stronger than his professional conscience. For instance, in the great war of Canudos, a large number of 'Jaguncos' abandoned their profession to join their chief Concelheira to resist the army. These reactions are very moral and sentimental, a little like those of the lorry driver in Ruy Guerra's OS FUZIS. What's more, I made my film in the same region, at Milagres, because such stories are frequent around there.

These reactions are as surprising as those which allow the left in Brazil to move to the right, and the right to move to the left. I am not an expert in political science, but I have spoken to those who are and it seems that in this sense Brazil is the most peculiar country in Latin America, and that all political reactions are extraordinary. All routes are valid if they offer means of liberation. In ANTONIO DAS MORTES I wanted to show clearly how people may arrive at action by quite different routes. The professor and Antonio come together in a massacre directed against oppression but their motives are totally different. They have no theoretical notions, no guide lines. I am against proselytism.

Q. This coincides with what you said about OS FUZIS. When Guerra shows the driver who is first portrayed as an exploiter - at last turning against the army, it is a very personal, and therefore limited, reaction.

A. Yes. I want it understood that political theories in Latin American are often the source of serious misunderstandings and demagogic attitudes. The phraseology of the left, its moralism and its procedures often end up with a distinctly folkloric flavour. The political maturity of the Brazilian people will not be reached, in my opinion, by means of a traditional political education.

Allowing, of course, for a certain level of political awareness, there will be a revolutionary explosion in spite of all the contradictions characteristic of Brazil. But we must not believe that we will arrive at that stage of educating the people. The black strength, which is a mystical strength, does not only involve the peasant. Whether they belong to the bourgeoisie or the aristocracy, no-one in Brazil is a stranger to the Macumba and mysticism. This sentimental, emotional and blood-thirsty aspect of Brazil is, admittedly, a defect, an obstacle but it could become a positive quality...

Q. Don't you think that this spontaneity, this lack of theoretical schemas, could lead Brazil into events as disastrous as those shown by Solanas in Argentina?

A. I believe things must be done. Kubitshek realised this when he said that we must build Brasilia. The economists argued that Brasilia would be the economic downfall of Brazil. In fact, the devaluation was sufficient to provoke an economic crisis. But Brasilia has been Brazil's cultural revolution. After that, Brazil could shrug off her colonial complex. Political awakening and the awareness of under-development date from the building of Brasilia, which is a bit of a contradiction, because Brasilia was a sort of Eldorado, a chance for Brazilians themselves to create something. I mention this in particular because the Brazilian cinema was also born with Brasilia, at a time when no-one believed in it. The modern university and political science both appeared with Brasilia and even the rebellion of the modern church was inspired by it. Even though Brasilia caused inflation, all Brazil's widened horizons appeared at the same time.

In fact, in spite of its fascist government, Brazil is the most revolutionary country in Latin America. Everything is changing, moving incessantly. Even the bourgeois nationalists and militarists, since they are led to defend themselves against the United States, enter into conflict with Imperialism and, each time, lose a little of their reactionary status. The country is moving in a revolutionary direction. Without being able to foresee the precise nature of the Brazilian revolution, I affirm that it will take a very original form.

--Afterimage, no. 1, April 1970, excerpt from an interview (first published in Les Cahiers du Cinema, no. 213, 1969).

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Q. Leaving theory aside, the initial situation in ANTONIO DAS MORTES is used to destroy what the spectators expect.

A. That's very true! ANTONIO DAS MORTES, it's the structure of a western (I would like to make a Latin-American or Brazilian western), but I constructed a type of montage which is in opposition to the idea of discursive structure. There are only 110 shots in ANTONIO and I tried to put all the dramatic, psychological and informative action in every shot without using a similar kind of cutting. As a result, each shot is in opposition with the next one and destroys it. It's very different from LAND IN ANGUISH. It's something more intellectual, but sometimes irrational too because I was afraid that the film might be labeled too readily. That's what I find the most interesting, because it's not very good for me to look upon a film as an architecture, a series of effects, logical or conventional expositions. I feel much more at ease with another kind of cinema. Some critics have said that I have baroque or surrealist tendencies: I don't agree with them. Filmmakers and critics like to classify. I am working with a culture which is not new but which opposes the culture of international colonization. It's pretty strange to make a film in Latin America and to see how it is received by the European critics and filmmakers. We had been colonized for this same public. I can talk to you about Balzac or Pascal, but no-one knows any Brazilian writer, poet or philosopher. When I see one of Godard's films, I understand everything, but when I show one of my films, it is not understood or it is classified according to the criteria of European culture. There is a total lack of communication. I can't attend every performance to explain that my film is not a piece of folklore but that it is theater and representation, and that it is linked with four centuries of representation, that it's another kind of dramatic structure, that the characters are not logical like those in the European fiction or drama... but that these characters belong to different kinds of structures. As to violence, it's not my invention, it's characteristic of the Latin-American temperament! If slashing someone forty times with a dagger constitutes "research" in the European cinema, in Brazil it's the truth. LAND IN ANGUISH was a documentary about an existing political situation: the locations exist, the characters are real, the madness, the grotesqueness and all the awful conditions of an underdeveloped country exist. But I hear that it's

a baroque and surrealist work. I can't agree: it's a documentary film that goes to the end, up to exorcism. It's the same thing with my other films. Critics say that Rocha's cangaceiros are samurais, that I want to imitate the No and Kabuki theater. It's ridiculous; I am familiar with these theatrical forms as well as Brecht's theater. It's not my films, it's Brazil. It's the tradition of popular theater; and if the cangaceiros look like samurais, it's merely on a superficial level, because they are epic characters....

...Usually my films are dubbed, but ANTONIO was shot entirely in sync. The music was recorded in sync except for the small piece of an Indian opera.... Brazil is a musical country, and I think of cinema in musical montage with pause and musical spaces. Music is very important in my films.... ANTONIO's entire staging is controlled by music.

Q. It's a bit like opera.

A. Yes, but it's not traditional opera; it's a different kind. I don't know if other Brazilian filmmakers have the same idea, (I doubt it), but more and more I am getting interested in musical films, entirely sung, and with dancers. That doesn't mean that it's not possible to make political or tragic films, but they'll be sung because in Latin America, people express themselves that way....

...The song at the end of ANTONIO DAS MORTES is very violent. It was composed by a blindman. It's violent in a political sense too. It's the story of someone who went to hell, burned Satan's wealth, burned the constitution of hell, freed the workers. He makes an elaborate connection between hell and capitalist society, and he does it with very violent words.... The actor who plays the part of the blindman did an extraordinary improvisation and invented a summary of the entire literature on that kind of character. Consequently, music was not needed. The professor is linked to a musical tradition which is the samba. It's something violent and anarchistic. He's always singing a samba which is a very well-known samba in Brazil and which pushes him to act at the end. ANTONIO DAS MORTES is effective because I didn't want to show any political consciousness outside political theories.

Antonio slaughters a whole bunch of people in the name of morality, justice and the Church. He's a middle class type character very different from the professor, who arrives at a political conclusion through a moral process and experiences the pain very deeply.

In Latin America, the Revolution will not be made by the University people who are working for Marx and Mao, but by the ignorant people (and a few intellectuals); all this marxist and maoist talk strikes me as ridiculous. We've got that in Brazil, too, unfortunately. But that doesn't interest me. For the Brazilian revolution there are the blacks, the priests, the bandits, the peasants and the intellectuals who are all caught in the same thing. And the entire film is made for the climax in the last scene where, in front of the church, too men with different ideologies join forces to massacre the enemy. The key shot of the film is the reference to Peckinpah's GUNS IN THE AFTERNOON. It's the shot where they are walking side by side shooting. It's like a western. It's that shot that led me to the entire idea of the film.

--Excerpt from an interview published in Image et son, no. 236, Feb. 1970.

Translated by Bertrans Augst.