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X-Ray Vision: Surface and Depth in Aldir Mendes de Souza's *O homem que descobriu o nú invisível* (1973)

As a visual medium, cinema is an art of the surface. Bodies, objects, and environments are projected before us as two-dimensional images on the flattened surface of the screen, which provides only an impression of depth but which cannot be broached by the audience. Nevertheless, deep focus and 3D technology have sought to immerse the viewer in the world of the film, while film discourse more broadly has railed against ornamentation and superficiality in its bid to assert a certain depth of meaning. This article considers the tensions between surface and depth as they emerge in Aldir Mendes de Souza's *O homem que descobriu o nú invisível* (1973), a Brazilian softcore sex comedy that makes particular use of X-ray technology for both serious and voyeuristic ends. Comparing the use of radiography in this film with the artist's experimental work with X-rays elsewhere, this article interrogates distinctions between high and low culture, and between the literal surfaces and depths of the photographic image.

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Surface viewing[1]

As a visual medium, cinema is an art of the surface. Bodies, objects, and environments are projected before us as two-dimensional images on the flattened surface of the screen, which provides only an impression of depth but which cannot be broached by the audience. While the camera itself might take us deep into the worlds it conjures, zooming and tracking through space, the particular dispositive of the theatre space presents an impermeable wall between the viewer and the diegetic realms before them. For Stanley Aronowitz (1994), film is an "object medium" (53) that replaced the psychical interiority of the novel form with a "literalness" and a turn toward "stereotypical representation" (54). With the consciousness of character no longer the driving force in film as a cultural mode, the subject-object split that such psychological depth once allowed is now sacrificed to a visual field of object relations, a plane on which actors are immediately recognizable as readymade types. Cinema's material constitution can likewise leave its viewer at the surface of the image; the medium can induce its viewers to engage in what Laura Marks (2000, 162) terms "haptic looking," which "tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze." Drawn to blurred or hazy images, as well as the play of colors and light and the grain of celluloid, we are reminded that the experience of viewing cinema can also take on an embodied dimension, as we feel touched by the "skin" of the film (see also Barker 2009; Bruno 2014).

And yet cinema also aspires to the state of immersive illusion suggested by "optical visuality" (162), which Marks argues uses depth effects to reinstate the separation of viewing subject and screen object. From its initial miming of the planimetric flatness of the stage, cinema would chafe against its own two-dimensionality through developments in depth of field and later stereoscopic 3D technology, as well as the reflexive breaking of the fourth wall. During the 1960s and onwards, artists sought to exceed the confines of the screen altogether, exploring the possibilities of expanded cinema beyond the throw of the projector's beam on a flat screen, and even outside of the traditional theatrical *dispositif*. Elsewhere, filmmakers have used the affordances of digital to probe inside of the people and things that populate the screen: Gaspar Noé's climactic shot of an ejaculating penis inside a vagina in *Enter the Void* (2009), and Michael Mann's multiple sequences featuring malware working its way through computers and cables in *Blackhat* (2015), are but two examples that attempt a deeper articulation of interior spaces on screen. More generally as regards the history of the medium, we can observe with Rosalind Galt (2011, 53) that film discourse has often railed against the allure of spectacle and ornamentation, privileging instead the "meaning and depth" that apparently lie behind the decorative and "pretty" images on the surface of the screen.

In his interrogation of the scholarly turn to "surface reading" and its implications for cinema, James MacDowell (2018) attends to the medium specific aspects of surface and depth in film, seeking to understand what part an emphasis on surfaces might play in acts of interpretation. Suspicious of the way that a number of recent approaches have asked us to attend to "referential

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meanings" or the "literal" level of a text at the expense of symptomatic readings, MacDowell wonders if it might be possible at all to disarticulate implicit and explicit meanings in a film as opposed to a written work. A "literal meaning," he writes, "is not something easily expressed by a textual 'surface' that consists not of words, but rather assemblages of edited and soundtracked footage, usually depicting specific actors speaking lines in precise ways, framed in particular configurations, amongst and in relation to concretely realised environments, in certain narrative contexts" (275). As opposed to Aronowitz's claim of cinema's literalism, MacDowell writes of cinema as a "resolutely non-literal medium" whose surfaces contain all information we receive as viewers, but which is never "overt or incontestable" (279) in its meanings.

MacDowell's argument undoubtedly has value for the interpretation of any given film—his case study is Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* (1995)—but I am especially interested in what it might suggest for a reading of a film that clearly, although not necessarily intentionally, complicates the tensions between surface and depth in cinema. This article considers one particular film that brings into conjuncture both the X-ray, a paracinematic technology that is designed to make visible an image beneath or behind a surface; and the Brazilian softcore genre known as *pornochanchada*, a variety of sex comedy films for which ostensibly shallow plots function as the vehicle for nudity and simulated sex acts. The X-ray and the *pornochanchada* may seem to make for strange bedfellows, but as I will detail in what follows, they are brought together in the obscure 1973 feature *The Man Who Discovered the Naked Invisible* (*O homem que descobriu o nú invisível*, 1973), by the artist and filmmaker Aldir Mendes de Souza. In keeping with Mendes de Souza's pioneering experiments in radiographic art, as seen in a number of artworks and short films, this film presents the X-ray as an apparatus promising groundbreaking forensic insights into the human body, but ultimately, as per the dictates of its genre, uses the machine most obviously to look beneath women's clothing. As such, the potential depth and science fictional promise of the X-ray is made to serve the relatively superficial investments of softcore cinema—a genre that suggests but never delivers actual penetrative sex, and which in compensation revels instead in the presence of bare skin. A comparative reading of Mendes de Souza's work with X-rays—radiographic art and what he called "cine-radiography," especially as it emerges in his short film *Suicídio à brasileira* (1970)—would seem to suggest a simple sacrificing of serious, "high" art to the commercial demands of softcore. But the particular dialectic of surface and depth that animates *O homem* also invites a deeper reading of the film, and at least in part complicates our assumptions about the connection between the two halves of the artist's output.

X-ray cinema

I return to Mendes de Souza's *O homem* below, but at this point it is necessary to ground the artist's work both in the history of X-ray cinema, and in relation to the *pornochanchada* as a genre. First, it is worth noting that Mendes de Souza's eclectic appropriation of radiography in his filmmaking and art practice situates his work in a much longer lineage. Indeed, the inception of X-ray images on screen dates to the years immediately following the invention of X-ray itself, by William Röntgen in

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1895. Akira Mizuta Lippit (2005, 30) points to the twinned emergence in the same year of cinema and X-ray as two photographic modes that were both premised on bringing interiority to the surface, of visibilizing depth as surface, and of introducing a "secret visuality" in which one could be represented photographically on a screen as "an alien you, secret and distant in its proximity to you."

More particularly, X-ray images remediated in cinema bear a relationship with examples of double-exposures and superimpositions on film. As it is most commonly used, the X-ray constitutes a two-dimensional image of a three-dimensional object, revealing the inner skeletal structure of the body just as it reminds us that the visible layer of skin is superimposed over the bones, organs and muscle tissue inside us, and can be "unveiled" using radiographic technology. As Catherine Waldby (2000, 91) has written of the effects of the X-ray:

> The surface of the body, its demarcation from the world, is dissolved and lost in the image, leaving only the faintest trace, while the relation between depth and surface is reversed. Skeletal structures, conventionally thought of as located at the most recessive depth of the body, appear in co-registration with the body's surface in the X-ray image. Hence skeletal structures are externalized in a double sense: the distinction between inside and outside is suspended in the image, and the trace of the interior is manifest in the exteriority of the radiograph, the artefact itself.

In his own writing on this form of superimposed "co-registration," Murray Leeder (2017a, 100) points out that in addition to the X-ray image's collapsing of distinct spatial planes in the body, it also signals a "temporal collapse," insofar as it shows "us life and death, now and the deathly 'later,' in a single image." Leeder, who also explores the commonalities between X-ray images and spiritualist photography of the late-nineteenth century, explains how anxieties about both cinema and radiography at the *fin de siècle* were often premised on a "context of excessive and unwanted intimacy with the image" (124). Furthermore, the remediation of the X-ray in several examples of what Paul Young (2006) would term "media fantasy films" points to cinema's own anxiety about its technological rivals from the very beginning.[2]

However, there were also other dimensions to the range of X-ray films that appeared in this era. The earliest appearances of the medium demonstrate a versatile distinction between the very real footage obtained of the insides of humans and animals, and the cartoonish illustration of X-rays for comedic effect. The first of these is *Dr. Macintyre's X-Ray* (1896), a film screened by the eponymous doctor for the London Royal Society, and which showcases in close-up a human skull, intestines, and the knee joint of a frog. The second is the minute-long *The X-Ray Fiend* (1897), directed by George Albert Smith, which depicts a romantic couple seated on a bench, while a shadowy figure wields a camera-like device labelled "X-Rays" behind them, duly turning them into skeletons. From the beginning, then, X-rays clearly offered both serious implications for medical science, and provided the kinds of comical possibilities that were consonant with the early trick cinema of Georges Méliès—including the French filmmaker's own lost film, *A Novice at X-Rays* (*Les rayons Röntgen*, 1898) (Leeder 2017a, 120).

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The forking paths of the X-ray on screen would continue on in later years, bifurcating between horror and other cognate genre films on the one hand, and experimental cinema on the other. The troping of the medium was explored in such titles as *Hospital Massacre*, otherwise known as *X-Ray* (Boaz Davidson, 1982), and *They Live* (John Carpenter, 1988), where a pair of magical sunglasses provides a window into a global alien conspiracy (for a survey of the "X-Ray Craze" in cinema, see Leeder 2017b). Elsewhere, in relative obscurity, artists' films by such diverse figures as Ana Mendieta (*X-Ray*, 1975) and Barbara Hammer (*Sanctus*, 1990) make use of the medium, with Hammer's film repurposing old X-ray footage from James Sibley Watson to new ends. Watson, who had made the experimental films *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928) and *Lot in Sodom* (1933), turned in the 1940s to "cineflurography," taking very seriously the potential of X-rays for filmmaking. In her rephotographing and hand-coloring of Watson's films in *Sanctus*, Hammer mobilizes these earlier images to pass comment on disease-ravaged bodies; it is no coincidence that Hammer's next film, *Vital Signs* (1991), made affectionate use of a skeleton to address the AIDS crisis.[3]

The *pornochanchada* and beyond

While it may seem like something of a leap now to follow the X-ray from its beginnings as technical spectacle through to the softcore eroticism of the *pornochanchada* in Brazil, the marriage of the two in Mendes de Souza's *O homem* makes sense when we consider the well-established ripeness of radiography for comedy and voyeurism, as well as science fictional speculation. As early as 1898, in Alice Guy-Blaché's *L'Utilité des Rayons X*, the X-ray had looked under the garments of a man dressed in drag as a pregnant woman; it is no surprise that the technology would later find itself disrobing women's bodies for purely voyeuristic reasons. From its inception, the *pornochanchada* also made use of visual technologies so as to make visible the naked female form, which was "destined for exposure" (Simões 1979, 88). As Stephanie Dennison and Lisa Shaw write (2007, 95), voyeurism was "often articulated literally in these films, with the act of peering through telescopes or spy-holes, over walls and round corners, all carried out, on behalf of eager audiences, by the camera itself."

Given its unabashedly leering gaze, it is perhaps surprising that the *pornochanchada* managed to thrive as it did for more than a decade. The genre was conceived in the immediate aftermath of the hardening of a military dictatorship in Brazil in 1968, the outcome of which was the imposition of harsh censorship on the film industry. However, the *pornochanchada* was improbably (for the most part) left alone, allowed to thrive in this period because of its ostensibly apolitical stance and the fact of its being locally produced, given the government's suspicion of imported product and desire to champion Brazilian film against the world market. The films themselves contained from the beginning scenarios depicting a range of stock characters familiar to audiences from Brazilian popular theatre and musical comedies—the virgin, the womanizer, the impotent old man—along with bawdy humor, suggested or simulated sex, and increasingly copious amounts of female nudity. The *pornochanchada* was emboldened from 1969 through the next decade as it proved to be the most popular genre for Brazilian filmgoers. With the relaxation of censorship towards

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the end of the dictatorship, hardcore pornography appeared in the nation in the mid-1980s; the comparatively tame pleasures of the *pornochanchada* had been trumped, but the influence of the genre would be long-lasting.

Despite—and because of—its popularity, the *pornochanchada* has had, predictably, a mostly disreputable standing in film history. However, multiple scholars and critics—both at the genre's genesis and in more recent times—have sought to complicate received ideas about the *pornochanchada*, pointing variously to the way that the criticisms of its approach to sex might be seen as classist and "puritanical" (Bernardet 1979b, 106), and asserting its stylistic high points and its isolated signs of political resistance.[4] For José Carlos Avellar (2005), writing in 1979, the *pornochanchada* represented a cinema of "relativity," a cinema of relative brutishness and irreverence that was formed as the warped cultural logic of the censorship imposed by the dictatorship at the time. In spite of the genre's incapability of committing to the possibility of real sex, the Rabelaisian grotesquery on screen still provided, in the darkened sanctuary of the cinema, a riposte to the orderly regimentation of behavior in the world outside. Avellar notes that the *pornochanchada* declined around the time of the *abertura*, but nevertheless migrated elsewhere across the audiovisual spectrum, "sometimes in the humor on television, sometimes in advertising." Elsewhere, he says, the *pornochanchada* makes its presence felt in a film that, "in search of a wider audience, includes a sex scene in which lovers sexually assault each other as if they were in a wrestling match, in a *vale-tudo*, in a competition in which only one of them can emerge victorious—and in which cinema is always defeated."[5] If the genre's key virtue had been as a response to the censorship of the 1970s, then its continued echoes in a democratic Brazil were no longer adequate to the political and historical moment, and so inadequate to cinema itself.

Yet during its heyday, the *pornochanchada* proved infectious in its reach, and its effects registered elsewhere in the national cinema. We can sense some of the genre's aspirations in the more critically-acclaimed "luxury *pornochanchadas*" (Bernardet 1978, cited in Dennison 2003, 85) such as Arnaldo Jabor's *All Nudity Shall Be Punished* (*Toda nudez será castigada*, 1978), Bruno Barretto's *Dona Flor and her Two Husbands* (*Dona Flor e seus dois maridos*, 1976), and Neville D'Almeida's *Lady on the Bus* (*A dama do lotação*, 1978).[6] And yet not all efforts to elevate the *pornochanchada* were amenable to the whims of the dictatorship; elsewhere, Jean-Claude Bernardet (1979a) has written of the "intelligence, talent and elegance" (99) of *Vereda tropical* (1978), Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's short film that—along with the other three parts of the omnibus film *Contos eróticos* (1980)—would attempt to take the genre out of the *boca do lixo* and "into the sophisticated world of executives" (100). The film, however, with its depiction of uninhibited sexual pleasure (with a watermelon), was immediately banned by military veto. In any case, whether popular or marginalized, such "luxury" examples proved the success and wider resonance of the genre across comedies and B-films in Brazil, both in the 1970s and onwards.

In this vein, some of the work of the filmmaker Ivan Cardoso might be described as "*pornochanchada*-adjacent." His career has straddled highbrow and popular forms alike, resulting in an oeuvre including experimental films, short musical

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documentaries, Super 8 works, and several feature-length narrative films combining eroticism with other genre elements, and he continues to work across these forms today. His self-appointed moniker, the *mestre do terrir*, is a coinage combining horror (*terror*) and comedy (*rir*, "to laugh"), and his works reflect these dual preoccupations. In keeping with his ongoing career conversation with US genre cinema, Cardoso's most recent film is a short tribute to one of his idols, Roger Corman, titled *Corman's Eyedrops Got Me Too Crazy* (*O colírio do Corman me deixou doido demais*, 2020). Like many of his other retrospective compilation works, this late-career capstone includes footage of Cardoso's other forebears such as the horror filmmaker José Mojica Marins and the standard bearer of Cinema Novo, Glauber Rocha. But it is most obviously a direct homage to Corman's 1963 science fiction film, *X: The Man with X-Ray Eyes*, which follows the dangerous experiments of a pioneering scientist to extend the range of human vision through transformative eye drops, and which results in an excess of vision and light that renders the world "transparent, limitless and empty" (Lippit 2005, 145). In Cardoso's vibrant short, Corman hovers over him and administers the eponymous eyedrops to the Brazilian filmmaker, causing him to scream, and propelling the film into a psychedelic montage of scenes from Cardoso's previous work, as well as interpolated shots from other films (including Corman's *X*) and some more recent footage of Cardoso at a film festival. The chain of influence is palpable here, and the film's signal achievement is to marry a disparate array of found and original footage with the avant-garde practice of scratching directly on the celluloid, all the while paying tribute to a filmmaker and producer central to cinema as we know it.

While *Corman's Eyedrops* gathers its various parts together under the aegis of *X*, it appears that Corman's film had already extended its reach to Brazil nearly fifty years before Cardoso would appropriate its central idea. With *O homem que descobriu o nú invisível*, Aldir Mendes de Souza offered a narrative scenario also set in train by the possibilities of X-ray vision as conjured by Corman; in his version, an enterprising inventor creates a magnifying glass that allows him to see through living beings, and depicts the potential of his creation in a number of disjointed scenarios. Conceptually, and given the promise of extending the male gaze as the technology allows, the set-up appears to lend itself obviously to the stuff of the *pornochanchada*, and promises to go "all the way" in its capacity for forensic vision, even if sex itself could only be hinted at circa 1973.[7] However, while the X-ray device in the film is as expected used to see through the clothing of a woman in one scene, it is also employed (as actual radiographic images) to see beneath the skin of humans and animals. The contrasting of surface and depth offered by the technology thus also plays out in the film's affiliations with genre: a little X-ray vision gives us the kind of smut proper to a sex comedy, while a lot gives us something more formally experimental.

High and low in the art of Aldir Mendes de Souza

The filmmaker's background helps to explain the introduction of this technology into the work: this was the first feature film directed by Mendes de Souza, who was—and remains today—far better known as an oil painter of geometric coffee plantations and other colorful abstract landscapes.[8] But in the

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early 1970s, Mendes de Souza was also known as a new media artist who worked with radiography and thermography, aspects of his practice that in Brazilian art history place him in the company of artists like Paulo Bruscky and Eduardo Kac, and which in 1971 led to his selection by the computer artist Waldemar Cordeiro in his Artêonica group exhibition in São Paulo and Campinas. For our purposes here, it is also worth noting that he employed this medium in two short films that he made at this early point in his career: both *Suicídio à brasileira* (1970) and *Dança das artérias* (1971) use the "Técnica de Cine Radiografia," which is seen in short sequences in *O homem* but in these cases comprises the entirety of the seven-minute runtime for each.[9] The latter is an experimental observation of the function of the arteries in the human body, set to music by Jimi Hendrix, while the former narrativizes its X-ray images of bodies and objects (Fig. 1).

Text preceding the action in *Suicídio à brasileira* provides the film's medical bonafides, as we are informed that it was "Filmed in the Hemodynamics Department of the Beneficência Portuguesa Hospital in São Paulo." Further text explains precisely what we are about to see, because otherwise it is not necessarily clear: "The electrician appears in a scene: working, on the telephone, serving coffee, walking, ringing a doorbell, greeting, kissing, putting on wedding rings, typing a suicide letter, loading a revolver and shooting himself in the heart."[10] "The girlfriend appears in a scene: arranging her jewelry, greeting, receiving the wedding ring, refusing it, doing her nails."[11] And this is precisely what unfolds: the film depicts—all in X-ray—an electrician working while his girlfriend cooks and talks on the phone; he asks for her hand in marriage, and when she refuses, he commits suicide with a bullet to his head. This plot is a simple, melodramatic one, which on the face of it situates the film simply as a vehicle for exploring the use of "cine-radiography," but as with his work in this mode elsewhere contains within it both humor and tragedy.

The foregrounding of both everyday actions and the limit experience of suicide here resonates with the range of topics covered in Mendes de Souza's still radiographic artworks, which themselves depicted close-ups of human profiles engaged in mostly banal activities: smoking (*Fumando*, 1970), eating noodles (*Comendo macarrão*, 1970), celebrating the radio announcement of a goal scored by the Seleção (*Gol do Brasil*, 1970). These, as well as the artist's X-ray portrait of a cat owned by the sculptor Arcangelo Ianelli (*Eu e o gato de Ianelli*, 1970), are at once haunting and comical in tone. But the most striking of this series is *Death Squad I* (*Esquadrão da Morte I*, 1970; Fig. 2), in which a pistol aimed at the back of a human head is about to deliver its death blow.

The work is an explicit reference to the eponymous paramilitary group first active around this time, which carried out extrajudicial killings of suspected criminals in Brazil during the period of dictatorship, and the direct political address of the image in its title sets it apart from the others in an obvious way. But the work also suggests a more complex reading of the relationship to the form here, given the nature of the X-ray as a *memento mori;* the subject of *Death Squad I* is in the process of being executed, but even before the bullet is fired, the X-ray image of their skull marks them for death. Like the text that precedes *Suicídio à brasileira*, as well as its promissory suicide note, both of which spell out in advance the plot about to unfold, here

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Fig. 1: *Suicídio à brasileira* (Aldir Mendes de Souza, 1970).

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Fig. 2: *Death Squad I* (*Esquadrão da Morte I*, Aldir Mendes de Souza, 1970).

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it is clear that death is coming even if it has yet to arrive. And yet, while in *Suicídio à brasileira* the caveat that "Any resemblance between the actors in this film and dead people is a mere coincidence"[12] might be intended as a joke, in *Death Squad I* the living and the dead overlap in a different way, preserved as a static image that is seemingly on both sides of the grave.

In keeping with the divided lineage of X-ray films as outlined at the beginning of this article, it is perhaps no surprise that the works Mendes de Souza would himself produce with X-rays were on the one hand experimental (and closer in kind to James Sibley Watson's earlier efforts and Barbara Hammer's later ones), and on the other aspiring towards popular sex comedy. The two extant posters for *O homem que descobriu o nú invisível* also advertise this division, with one (Fig. 3) showing an image from the film of an X-rayed skull, while the other (Fig. 4) depicts a cartoon rendering of the film's central sequence, in which the protagonist prowls the streets with his new invention, gazing through clothes and skin of men, women, and even a dog.

In truth, the film's reputation precedes it somewhat unfairly; it remains largely unseen today, and to those who have yet to see it, *prima facie* appears to indulge in the leering gaze of the *pornochanchada*. However, the actual experience of watching *O homem* is far less titillating than expected, and analyzing the film reveals a work situated in an uncertain position as regards its genre.

The opening sequence of the film already marks it as both intellectually engaged and irreverent in tone. In a montage that reformulates the Stations of the Cross, and which is backed by contemporary instrumental tracks by George Harrison and The Rolling Stones, a christological hippie artist carries a giant painting through São Paulo. Heading down Rua Augusta, a major artery in the city connecting the downtown area to the wealthy neighborhood of Jardins, the artist is in search of a prospective buyer. Insistently rejected by one man, he carts his crucifix-like frame elsewhere in the area, encountering first "Simão" (a cipher for Simon the Cyrene) and then a woman who identifies him as a painter and wipes his face with a towel, an act that produces a crude approximation of the artist's face on the cloth. It is immediately a comical allusion to Veil of Veronica, the famous *acheiropoieton*—an image produced without human intervention—that recorded Christ's own image before his death. But in the context of a film about the power of X-ray vision, this reference—which also conjures the related Christian relic of the Shroud of Turin, one of André Bazin's precursors to the photographic image that stems from the "mummy complex" (2005, 14)—takes on slightly more grandiose proportions, suggesting from the very beginning a different lineage for cinema, and an alternative means of procuring indexical images of the world (Fig. 5). In addition to the suggestive parallels we will see in the film between X-ray vision and the powers of the camera, here we can see the film priming us—whether consciously or not—for a comparative reading of different apparatuses of image production, which record the world as surface and as depth.

From its very outset, then, the film encourages its viewers to attend both to the superficialities of the image as well as its hidden possibilities: what we have here is a scenario that is both immediately farcical and richly allusive in tone, which intends to procure laughter and critical reflection in equal measure. The artist's walk might be read as a lackadaisical day in the

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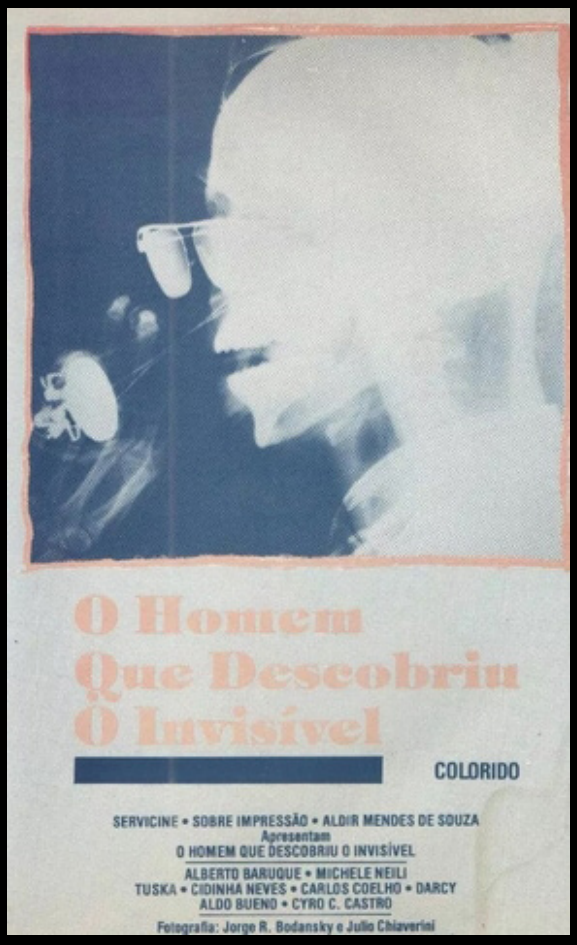

Figs. 3 and 4: Posters for *O homem que descobriu o nú invisível* (Aldir Mendes de Souza, 1973).

Fig. 5: *O homem que descobriu o nú invisível* (Aldir Mendes de Souza, 1973).

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life of a countercultural figure, banal and whimsical in its representation; but it also rewards the viewer who possesses the necessary cultural capital for decoding its overt point of reference (the parody of the Via Crucis) as well as its potential evocation of the Bazinian photographic index and its ancestors. What is more, the foregrounding of the biblical allusion here conceals a far more obscure citation of another film: several years earlier in his very first short, *Essa rua tão augusta* (1968), Carlos Reichenbach had depicted the painter Waldomiro de Deus in a very similar setup, attempting to sell his wares on the same thoroughfare. This is a street that, we are told, is "indifferent to the paintings of painters," and especially in this case to the artist's irreverent portrayals of "Christ in a miniskirt," among other sacrilegious images; Mendes de Souza's own painter must be read in the light of this scene, too.[13]

Allusions exist, then, both on the surface and in the deeper reverberations of the opening scene of *O homem*. Finally, adding further to the depth of this prologue is the fact that the painter is played by—and so functions as a surrogate for—Mendes de Souza himself, who will also reprise the role at the end of the film. His travails here as a struggling artist also suggest the film's appreciation of non-industrial art forms, and its simultaneous recognition of art's imbrication in commerce, which is necessary for its creator's survival. In this way, the opening of the film thus also allegorizes its production history, which apparently involved the filmmaker compromising on his original plan for a film about the wonders of X-ray vision, and including select scenes of an erotic nature so as to satisfy the commercial orientation of his producers, the Boca do Lixo company Servicine (Serviços Gerais de Cinema). For a film that is apparently most interested simply in the titillating prospects of the X-ray, there is already in this sequence a suggestion that it might be read as a layered and even autocritical text that is aware of its own shortcomings as a *pornochanchada*, but which is nevertheless determined to reflect upon the circumstances of its creation.

Separating the two bookending cameos by the filmmaker, which suggest a critical reading of the film through the lenses of art, commerce and religion, are a series of episodes that cast the film in the mold almost of sketch comedy rather than as a coherent three-act narrative feature. First, we are introduced to our unnamed protagonist (credited elsewhere as "Cientista") in his studio talking to his parrot, Newton, and trying to make his fortune through the invention of a home computer. The computer will allow housewives to make "rational decisions concerning their homes," and will solve all manner of domestic issues from home economics to parenting to problems with conjugal relations; we then see it working to little effect in a scenario involving a wife cheating on her spouse. Next, the protagonist devises a laser beam that will "pierce through metals, shape tourist attractions, and weld important sculptures." On his way to buy parts for the machine, he is hit by a car and breaks his leg and his glasses. He is taken to hospital, where a radiographic nurse makes X-rays to assess his injuries, and it is here that the tone of the film takes a turn for the worse: the protagonist relates a story in which he broke his penis from a fall while spying on a showering neighbor; the nurse radiographs his penis, and he accosts her while she resists, before eventually succumbing as per the film's rape fantasy. Returning to his studio, the protagonist—

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apropos of nothing—sets to work on a "manual X-ray magnifier" that can be regulated by the user: "With more penetration, I can see bones. With less, I can see a naked body. If I can make it to remove clothing," he reasons, "I'll sell thousands of magnifiers." The magnifier is thus premised on the demystification not of all surfaces, but in particular of women's clothing; for the protagonist and for the film alike, it is not enough to agree with Roland Barthes (1975, 9) that "the most erotic portion of the body [is] where the garment gapes."[14]

In a dreamed fantasy of his successful future as an entrepreneur, the protagonist tests out this invention on his secretary at the "Magic Magnifier" company, using the gadget to remove her blouse as she types a letter he dictates. While Mendes de Souza thus follows the "shift from science to pornography" (Lippit 2005, 146) that we see in Corman's *X*, as compared with the modest suggestiveness provided by lingerie and selective framing in that earlier film, here the nudity is clear.[15] But in spite of this vision, clearly the scientist is not so single-minded in his ambitions for the device. Returning from his reverie, he explains to Newton that he has "discovered the barrier between the visible and the invisible," and that the magnifier will have "application in anatomic studies," in orthopedics, where it can be used "to examine bones straight at the ER," and "in airports to scan passengers and luggage." As such, after its brief and predictable foray into crass voyeurism, the film comes full circle in wanting to examine more fully the utilitarian scientific implications of the scientist's invention. More than this, the protagonist also wagers that he "can look at my feelings and find out who my true love is," suggesting a transference of energies from lust to love, and from the surface-level erogenous zones to the more profound and unknowable depths of the heart itself.

In any case, and likely due to narrative and budgetary constraints, these more altruistic or noble aspirations are never realized in the film, and instead the major sequence that makes use of cine-radiography is comprised of a montage of chance encounters on the street. Proceeding down the Rua Augusta just like the artist in the opening scene, the protagonist—with X-ray magnifier glued to his eye—peers inside a woman's purse, examines a cat and a dog on a leash, watches a woman talking on a payphone, and observes up close a couple embracing (Figs. 6 and 7).

Finally, he observes a man with a gun in his pocket, and in an heroic attempt to intervene before the man uses the weapon, the protagonist is shot, his magnifier shattering on the ground.[16] But at that point the artist/director appears with his painting, taking pity on the protagonist and bringing him back to life: like Lazarus coming forth from the tomb, he may now cease his existence as a "poor, ugly researcher" and is resurrected instead as a "wealthy, handsome fellow" with a wife, a sports car, and a house in Morumbi, a wealthy district in São Paulo.

Before this, however, a bizarre non sequitur cut takes us to a seemingly irrelevant scenario involving a husband returning home to his philandering wife, and discovering her lover hiding in his refrigerator; the scene mirrors the earlier sketch of marital disharmony with the home computer, but here disrupts the protagonist's narrative in an even more obvious way than the other scene. These interludes contribute to the film's structural unevenness, and so prevent any

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Figs. 6 and 7: *O homem que descobriu o nú invisível* (Aldir Mendes de Souza, 1973).

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more thoroughgoing exploration of the potentials of the X-ray magnifier; yet at the same time they appear quite at home in the film given its generic tendencies, suggesting an amplification of the protagonist's own point of view in a context outside of the main storyline. In this respect, the seemingly haphazard orchestration of each of the film's set pieces is also in a way in keeping with the sudden appearances of the two misogynistic interludes involving the protagonist. A moment of self-reflection in his studio allegorizes this dynamic in some respects: the protagonist, standing before a wall of erotic doodles he has drawn on a wall near his bathtub (which also serves as his bed), observes that this "pornographic mural is a work of genius." He then reasons that "I never curse. Here is where I discharge my erotic-sexual aggressiveness of the whole day. I become happy and seem normal. But I only appear normal. Being normal must be horrible." The pornography of the mural allows the degenerate painter to cathect all his sexual energy into an image, permitting the sublimation in private of all those desires that cannot surface in public. With the mural (and by extension, women) bearing the brunt of these baser feelings, the artist is free to concentrate on his inventions, which promise new ways of seeing, understanding and shaping the world through the powers of scientific technology.

In this way, the film's softcore interludes function as objective correlative to the protagonist's pornographic mural; from the scientist's point of view, these are perhaps the necessary distractions that permit him to turn his inventive skills to more noble ends, with the X-ray resisting the promise of simple voyeurism that is expected of it. From another perspective, however, we might equally isolate the X-ray sequences as the work's most noteworthy fragments, which are formally revelatory and surprising, but also help to subtend the erotic sequences by providing a sense of narrative motivation. The experience of watching the film is that it can be read in multiple different ways: as an erotic comedy "redeemed" by its association with the experimental intermedial promise of the X-ray; as an avant-garde radiographic film sullied by its descent into smut; or as a more complex intertwining of high and low cultural reference points, fully aware both of its generic confines and its potential for traversing them. Considering the use of "cine-radiography" within the context of an early *pornochanchada* like *O homem* not only suggests connections with the wider artistic practice of Aldir Mendes de Souza, but also situates the film within a much longer lineage of X-ray films that resonate with the work's own bifurcation between the promising innovations of new media art and the comically erotic potential of technology. Furthermore, the presence of the X-ray as a very particular apparatus of deep vision in this film complicates its *prima facie* superficial storyline and characters, both allowing us to see the affordances of radiography as literally "deeper" than the apparent misogyny of the film's surface, but also demonstrating how a technology of great insight can also be turned to shallow ends.

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1/ Thanks to Gustavo Menezes for providing translated subtitles for this film; to the two reviewers for their insights and helpful prompts, which have assisted in the development of the article; and to Aldir Mendes de Souza, Jr., for providing information about his father's career, as well as access to the existing footage from *Suicídio à brasileira.*

2/ For more on the early associations between X-Rays and cinema, see Cartwright (1995), Tsivian (1996), Jülich (2008), and Natale (2011).

3/ Hammer also made a more traditional short documentary on Watson, titled *Dr. Watson's X-Rays* (1991). On the connections between Watson's and Hammer's films, see Osterweil (2010), Posner (2012), and Epstein (2016).

4/ As Fernanda Pessoa shows so well in her found footage documentary, *Stories Our Cinema Did (Not) Tell* (*Histórias que nosso cinema (não) contava*, 2017), the *pornochanchada* was not so simply an escapist genre, but had political points to make in its various allegories of state violence, some more overtly than others.

5/ "A pornochanchada assim como existiu entre o ato institucional número 5 e a abertura desapareceu, mas deixou marcas espalhadas pelo audiovisual, às vezes no humor da televisão, às vezes na publicidade, outras num filme que, à procura de público mais amplo, inclui uma cena de sexo em que os amantes se agridem sexualmente como se estivessem numa luta livre, num vale-tudo, numa competição em que apenas um deles pode sair vencedor — e em que o cinema sai sempre derrotado." My translation.

6/ More recently, Nick Pinkerton (2020) has written of Jean Garret's tendency to push the boundaries of the genre, producing "studies in sexual pathology like 1975's *Amadas e Violentadas* (*Beloved and Raped*) and 1979's *A Mulher Que Inventou o Amor* (*The Woman Who Invented Love*)," which "are rather closer in affinity to the Italian *giallo* thrillers of the period."

7/ In *With Pants in Hand* (*Com as Calças na Mão*, Carlo Mossy, 1975), another *pornochanchada* from this period, one scene features a doctor examining an X-Ray image with a nude cartoon woman inscribed on the brain of the patient.

8/ Although he would go on to make a second feature with *Trote dos sádicos* (1974), a film about university hazing rituals that remains in even greater obscurity than his first effort, and also completed the mid-length *O branco e o preto perdidos na Bienal com destino ao Guarujá* (1972), Mendes de Souza is now hardly remembered for his work as a filmmaker.

9/ See "Currículo."

10/ "O eletricista aparece em cêna: trabalhando, telefonando, servindo café, caminhando, apertando a campainha, cumprimentando, beijando, colocando alianças, escrevendo a máquina carta de suicídio, armando o revolver e disparando no coração." My translation.

11/ "A namorada aparece em cena: arrumando as jóias, cumprimentando, recebendo as alianças, recusando-as e fazendo as unhas." My translation.

12/ "Nêste filme os atores aparecem ao natural qualquer semelhança com pessoas mortas é mera coincidência." My translation.

13/ Many thanks to the reviewer who pointed out this strong allusion to Reichenbach's film.

14/ In a passage that resonates with Barthes's quotation, Inimá Simões (1979, 89) has written of the way that the camera in the *pornochanchada* was at times abetted in its aims by the *tanga* (thong), which, rather than hiding the female body, in fact revealed it: "What is covered by the fabric becomes 'figure' (according to gestalt basics) and the rest, something like 95% of the human body becomes 'ground', an undifferentiated totality, at least at first visual contact."

15/ The title of a more recent effort, the softcore movie *Girl with the Sex-Ray Eyes* (Fred Olen Ray, 2007), plays on the name of Corman's film, and foregrounds the voyeuristic potential of the technology. Thanks to the reviewer who alerted me to the existence of this film.

16/ In this scene the protagonist also has a racially charged exchange with a Black man, in which he asks to view the man's hand with his magnifier. While the man voices his objections to this gesture, the scientist assures him that he means no harm; the implication here seems to be that neither race is "superior" and that in spite of their apparent differences in color the two are the same beneath the skin, as the X-Ray would reveal.

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