RE-CREATING THE FAVELA IN *O HOMEM QUE COPIAVA* BY JORGE FURTADO

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Abstract: *The Brazilian film director Jorge Furtado's* O homem que copiava *centers on two plots, both based on accepted social discourses: how to escape lower-middle-class poverty; and the perennial question of the obstacles to love. These two plots are intertwined when the love quest is made to depend on the former, that is, when success in love is predicated on success in social mobility. However, in making the film's protagonist black, Furtado inserts the question of race into these two discourses and highlights the discursive absence of race in dealing with the problems of poverty and race relations. The film underscores the role of education and the discursive implications of social representation in excluding marginalized groups from social mobility while exploring the underside of the* mestiçagem *myth, the role of race in the question of national identity.*

In *O homem que copiava* (2003), the Brazilian director Jorge Furtado turns a classic boy-meets-girl romance into a questioning of the aesthetics of poverty, social mobility, race, and violence. The film narrates the successful attempts of André, a young black who works as a photocopy operator, to woo Silvia, a white neighborhood salesgirl, in what suggests the success of *democracia racial* in contemporary Brazil, an affirmation of one of the myths of national identity that asserts equal opportunity and the absence of discrimination based on ostensibly cordial interracial relations. The violence that this quest unleashes not only undermines the idea of a harmonious racial democracy; it also brings to the fore questions of economic access and social mobility when race is factored in the discussion. In spite of the obvious visual differences, the protagonists make not a single mention of color: the focus seems to be instead on a color-blind poverty that generates a variety of violent acts with the goal of attaining vertical mobility. Class and poverty, therefore, take an apparent predominance in the film's examination of violence. Social mobility, the film proclaims in tongue-in-cheek fashion, is always at the root of criminal violence.

Nonetheless, Furtado's narrative techniques provide a different way of reading race and its importance to poverty, violence, and social mobility. Using other forms of visual media such as André's drawings and cartoons, as well as film montage and voice-over commentary, the film provides a subtext that subverts both itself and the apparent glamorization of poverty and violence. The black protagonist in the predominantly white context of Porto Alegre marks both a presence and an absence that speaks Brazil's great unspoken: the problematic role of race relations within social inequality. André's discursive invisibility relies on the metonymic sequences that tie poverty, race, and space into a seamless unit of thought. Although poverty exists in Brazil in various contexts, the geographical spaces that

epitomize the great socioeconomic divide in Brazilian society are the favelas. A step further down the metonymic chain is blackness, the predominant color of the favela's inhabitants. Furtado's techniques break this signifying chain (race-space) by symbolically removing blackness from the space designed to contain it and by effecting a transfer of the conditions of that space to the city center: in Freyrean terms, the insertion of the *senzala* into the *casa-grande*. The fragmented being that is produced is a new aesthetic that references the constant displacement of the "other," as in the depiction of the *sertão* and the favela in Brazilian cinema from the 1960s to the 1990s, and finally to the "normal"—albeit lower-class—spaces of the city itself. And in that new space, race is still a significant factor in the poverty-violence mix.

The first scenes of *O homem que copiava* establish the superficial correlation of poverty and violence. The visual narrative shows André at a supermarket checkout in a long and tortured attempt to pay for his groceries, which he finally succeeds in doing only after leaving out some items to fit his budget. Shot against the background of silent white customers waiting patiently in line for him to finish his negotiations, it is painfully clear that André is poor. The use of tight frames in this scene—André is boxed in by the cashier, the line of customers behind him, the rows of shelves in the background—all suggest a man trapped by poverty. Subsequent images of the protagonist, this time accompanied by a voice-over narrative, explain his work as a photocopy boy, and again, the framing shows a person trapped in tight working spaces (between the back wall of the *loja* and the photocopy machine), and the repetitive and simpleminded nature of his job. The only way out of this situation, as both the visual and the voice-over narratives suggest and foreshadow, is to resort to crime. This visual framing and the narrative it generates reinforce the link between poverty or low-paying, mindless work and the violence that crime produces. In this obvious causal relationship, however, André's color adds another dimension to the problem of social mobility, as it suggests that over and beyond poverty and violence lies the issue of race and that race may be more central than a generalized concern about crime and marginalization.

The sequence that follows the supermarket scene paints a dramatic image of inequality and race: André is seen burning fifty-real notes (later revealed to be counterfeit) in a vacant lot, a move that visually links unkempt land, money, fire, and race. As the audience eventually discovers, this event actually occurs toward the end of the movie, after André robs an armored truck and wins the lottery. This displaced narrative sequence, along with the director's other techniques mentioned earlier, suggests that there is more to the story than what is readily visible. Paralleling the displaced narrative sequence, the vacant lot shown in this scene is a displaced favela: Furtado here reproduces on a symbolic scale conditions that prevail in peripheral areas where underemployment or lack of employment, underdevelopment of infrastructure and services, and the chronic lack of money are the norm. And André's profound comment about the role of money ("It's only paper; has value only if people believe in it"; my translation) is a questioning of the discursive dicta at the root of racial and social inequalities. If visual representations of the favela in contemporary Brazilian film "bring the point of view of the major victims—the encircled population of the favelas—to

the center," as Xavier (2003, 47) affirms, *O homem que copiava*'s novelty derives from placing marginal space and its representative inhabitants squarely in the city center in collision with the discursive myths that had previously kept them in favelas.[1] It attempts to correct what Perlman (2010, 14) calls the "perversely asymmetrical" relation of the favela to the center.[2] While suggesting that these marginalized spaces—and the violence they generate—are not restricted to the periphery, the film also makes clear that even in the sanitized center, blackness will not go away: its entrenchment in the long-standing myth of racial democracy signals its potency in any examination of the educational, economic, and racial inequalities in Brazilian society.

Furtado's intertwined plots of love and social mobility carefully mask his sharp treatment of race, inequality, and violence, and they appeal to common tropes of the *novela* popular in Brazilian and Latin America media. Furtado's style has been characterized as a collage, a charge to which the director himself has admitted in several interviews. From mixing genres to borrowing from both filmic and nonfilmic sources, Furtado developed his technique in several shorts and documentaries, with collage eventually becoming a trademark of his approach to moviemaking.[3] Although his products are difficult to classify—such as the boy-meets-girl summer romance of *Houve uma vez dois verões* (2002) with noirish aspects of the crime thriller—the intention of Furtado's collages is usually clear: an examination of social ills in Brazilian society. In a style reminiscent of his earlier mock documentaries *Ilha das flores* (1989) and *Esta não é a sua vida* (1991), the voice-over in *O homem que copiava* narrates in a simple, factual manner the harsh truths of poverty and education in his society. *Ilha das flores* tracks the chain of production of tomatoes in a capitalist system, the waste it generates, and the poor people who scramble through garbage to find sustenance. Here the narrator's deadpan voice-over provides scientific definitions of people, nationalities, and animals, playing out their contradictions through extreme projections. *Esta não é a sua vida*, in contrast, details the difficulties created by a lack of education for a white woman adopted at an early age, brought up to be a housewife, and married to a black man. The themes of race, poverty, and illiteracy come together in *O homem que copiava*, and the explosive consequence of violence is treated as the logical conclusion of the frustrating conditions documented in *Ilha das flores* and *Esta não é a sua vida*.[4]

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1. Beto Brant's (2001) remarkable *O invasor* performs a similar transfer of violence to the center: a favela gunman is invited into the city center and decides to stay, as opposed to the protagonist of *O homem*, who is a resident there.

2. Janice Perlman (2010) refers to the contributions of favela residents—labor, culture, and construction—to the wealth of the city, in return for which they are exploited, excluded, and denigrated (14). More significant, she sees favelalike spaces and conditions becoming the norm rather than the exception (8).

3. The basic plot of a young man in love with the woman he spies on has similarities to Krzysztof Kieślowski's *A Short Film about Love* (1988). Some scenes in *O homem que copiava* also suggest Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954).

4. Unlike the two documentaries mentioned already, Furtado's *O dia em que Dorival encarou a guardia* (1986) deals specifically with blackness in Brazil, this time focusing on the penitentiary system and mindless authoritarianism.

Hamburger's (2007) examination of recent Brazilian film worries about the limited attention paid to the role of visual media in the incidence of violence and poverty. Charting the trend of media visibility of violence and poverty, Hamburger notes a change from the initial romantic sympathy of the *cinema novo*—whose goal was to challenge hegemonic ideologies in development—to the *cinema da retomada*'s emphasis on documenting violence and poverty.[5] She goes on to read the recent documentary *Falçao*'s (2006) dark, shadowy nature, with fragmented body parts, as a response to the clear-eyed visibility of films such as *Notícias de uma guerra particular* (1999), *Palace II* (2000), and *Cidade dos homens* (2003). These films, Hamburger explains, portray a stereotypical homogenous favela compounded by a voice-over commentary that marks the difference between inside and outside viewpoints. She concludes that not providing solutions to the problem of poverty leads to a legitimizing effect of the resulting violence (Hamburger 2007, 114–115).[6] *Falçao,* she suggests, can be read as the voice of the inhabitants of *Cidade de Deus* contesting their depiction in the eponymous film. Missing in Hamburger's (2007, 117, 114) analysis is any mention of the role of race in the poverty-violence dynamic, in spite of her recognition of police racial prejudice (117) and her article's clear awareness of "cidadãos pobres, negros, moradores de favelas e bairros de periferia." Hamburger's article subsumes blackness into poverty, denying race a specificity in the nature and consequences of poverty and violence, either as a causal factor or as a vital part in solving social inequalities.

Hamburger's (2007) text builds on Bentes's (2003) hypothesis of a move from Rocha's *estética da fome* to a *cosmética da fome* that glamorizes the violence and misery of the favela and its residents. This new visibility, she concludes, turns poverty into banality, as something "typical" and "original," while creating new mediators who benefit more from this new exploitation with a globalized appeal, which suggests that the problems of the favela are turned into commodities that do not help its denizens. That director Furtado is keenly aware of the aesthetics of homogenization and exploitation of the favela is very clear in *O homem que copiava.* The film locates poverty in a white, middle-class neighborhood, but by using a black protagonist, it symbolically brings to the fore the spaces he connotes. On another level, Furtado solves the problem of authorial legitimacy through the use of a number of techniques. Voice-over narrative by the protagonist questions the transformational narrative of art (or soccer) as redemption from misery and poverty, and alternative visual animation suggests breaks in a seamless story line that undermines a myth of national identity. Throughout the film, André's

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5. An intermediate period between the two styles (the 1970s and 1980s) is marked by a complete absence of these themes in the authoritarian government's projection of a white and affluent "país do futuro" (120). Hamburger (2007, 118), however, makes clear that Brazilian cinema from its beginnings has always portrayed poverty and violence, tying the two themes by the umbilical cord to the *favela carioca.*

6. Perlman (2010) points out that the legitimizing effect is bidirectional: public acceptance and approval of the authorities' use of extralegal militaristic solutions, and the conversion of drug and militia lords into antiheroes admired by favela youth (187). One symptom of the pervasive violence and the atmosphere of fear it has generated, not only in the favelas but also in the entire city of Rio, is the quasi legality of running red lights between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. (7).

comments serve not only to introduce himself and his social context but also to provide insights into his thoughts, emotions, and plans. We learn of his father's abandonment at age ten, André's dislike of school, and his eventual expulsion after blinding a white schoolmate in a fight. The protagonist's voice-over narrative also confirms the fact of his poverty—vividly represented previously in the supermarket scene—by detailing to the audience his monthly income, expenses, and the material equivalent of his earnings, a pair of tennis shoes. Although this *fala direta* serves to present the point of view (and voice) of the protagonist, thus lending authenticity to the narrative (Xavier 2006), André's voluble inner monologue marks a sharp contrast with his visual representation, which suggests a dissonance and a tension beneath both the visual and the voice narrative. André never reflects once on his race—not in the education process, in his underemployment, or his interracial romance with Silvia. His matter-of-fact acceptance of who he is, and the invisibility of his race, presents a tension that is unspoken and unresolved in the entire film.[7]

As mentioned earlier, education or the lack of it plays a part in poverty and social mobility. Although the film makes no attempt to explain the causes of this situation, the illiteracy rate for nonwhites at the compulsory elementary level in Brazil is roughly 36 percent, and only 13 percent manage to complete all eight years of this level (Hasenbalg and do Valle Silva 1999, 155).[8] The protagonist of *O homem que copiava*, André, is a dark-skinned Afro-Brazilian who is borderline illiterate and by his society's standards not very smart. He has difficulty understanding words like *hirsuta* ("bristly," "hirsute"), *vala comum* ("pauper's grave"), and *doutrina* ("doctrine"), words and ideas he picks up from snippets read during his photocopying duties. Yet the Shakespearean sonnet with these same words profoundly moves him, which points to an innate capacity that the education system fails to develop. Andre's voice-over and cartoon images document his disenchantment with an education system incapable of developing the human potential of its charges. In one episode, his cartoon representation questions the founding myth of Álvares Cabral's discovery of Brazil, only to be ridiculed by the class, which conveys the message that challenges to foundational discourses are forbidden. André's portrayal of the teacher as a monster (Dona Hirsuta) is indicative of a difficult relationship with the institution, and his eventual expulsion from school seems almost inevitable. The resulting semiliteracy leads to a series of low-paying jobs, first as a bagboy in a supermarket, interspersed with periods of unemployment, and eventually to his photocopying position. In between these

7. On the use of protagonist voice-over, Xavier (2006, 140) notes that in addition to its usual functions of narrative suturing and creating dissonances, the voice-over is indicative of an acute subject crisis emerging from a field of tensions marked by violence, the expansion of illicit markets, impresarial delinquency, consumerist hegemony, and a crisis in both family and nation-state in *Redentor* (2004), *Cidade de Deus* (2002), and *O homem que copiava* (2003). Like Hamburger (2007), Xavier also collapses blackness into other social vectors.

8. The summary of statistics by the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia y Estatística as of September 2006 is even worse: blacks and browns (multiracials) show lower levels in all socioeconomic areas than whites: black and brown employment is 12 percent as compared to 87 percent for whites; average income for blacks and browns is 61 percent of that of whites; household income of whites is two times that of blacks and browns combined.

menial jobs, we are informed of how reality dashes his dreams of becoming a famous footballer like Pelé or getting a well-paid job as a graphic artist.[9] In an effort at social mobility—escape from poverty—to find employment as a comic-book illustrator, he sends samples of his work to a publishing house. These are not acknowledged or returned in spite of his insistence. If social mobility depends on educational qualification or artistic skills—assuming a level playing field for employment—André's deficiency in the former and lack of success with the latter paint a picture of a man condemned to a life of poverty.

André's previously announced skill at drawing suggests empowerment of the subject: it is assumed that the drawings in the film are by the protagonist and therefore a direct interjection of his own subjectivity. The film's portrayal of An-dré plays with several perspectives ranging from the conventional close-ups and action shots to full shots. Nothing remarkable stands out in these conventional visual representations, except the portrayal of an externally calm and composed individual, probably antisocial and taciturn in nature. These images contrast with André's own representation of himself in animated scenes from his school days, accompanied by a lively internal monologue that contradicts his outwardly calm demeanor. This tension is also apparent in his drawings, where there is a clear awareness of his blackness—contrasted pictorially with that of his white schoolmates—that is not verbally enunciated: interestingly, André's daydreams of being a famous footballer like Pelé are presented in black-and-white format. André processes information acquired on the job and elsewhere in cartoon for-mat: the story of St. Cecilia's martyrdom is animated in an internal monologue that is both visual and verbal. André's narration of his mother's nightly trips for water from their tiny two-bedroom apartment's living room to the kitchen presents a very ambiguous yet disturbing picture of life for blacks. His voice-over commentary is accompanied by visuals fragmenting the normal shot: his mother's body parts and actions are juxtaposed in the same frame. Coincidentally, André repeats a similar visit for water, although this time the shot is presented sequentially. This routine suggests a zombielike existence, possibly a forecast of André's own future in the normal course of events. The combination of cinematic norms, interspersed with cartoon strips, fragmented body parts, and black-and-white footage, though serving to carry the narrative forward, provide a subtext resonant of a virtual space that is absent but whose conditions are prevalent even in the film's spatial location.

Although the physical spaces in *O homem que copiava* are not as visually frag-mented and subverted as the filmic spaces described here, they present contradic-tory messages that point to the tensions in the film narrative. Located neither in a favela nor in Rio de Janeiro, this spatial location marks a contrast to the stereo-typical portrayal of the favela carioca as synonymous with violence and poverty.[10]

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9. André's dreams of success highlighting the social spaces reserved for blacks, "futebol, carnaval, musica, escola de samba, terreiros religiosos" (Seyferth 2002, 69), are reminiscent of *sambista* films of the 1950s and 1960s, particularly of Grande Otelo's favela-artist character in *Rio Zona Norte* (1957).

10. As Hamburger (2007, 118) notes, the development of modern cinema in Brazil is tied directly to the favela carioca.

The space in *O homem que copiava* is quite distinct from that of the favela in several ways: it has a majority white population, well-laid-out streets with regular bus service, working-class apartment buildings, supermarkets, shops, cafeterias, and the regular traffic of a medium-size city. Compared to the favela, in which people live cheek by jowl with neighbors in densely populated precarious structures, the spaces in *O homem que copiava* seem idyllic, a sort of working-class haven. The voice-over narration by the protagonist informs us that we are in Porto Alegre, in the Navegantes district, a lower-middle-class neighborhood, recognizable by its proximity to the Rio Guaíba and the Ponte do Guaíba drawbridge. Porto Alegre, in Rio Grande do Sul, is Brazil's fifth-largest capital, with almost 5 million inhabitants, most of whom are of European descent (German, Italian, and Portuguese) with a minority black population, a situation reflected by André as one of the few blacks in the film.[11] The protagonist's color thus acquires symbolic value in this context: it generates an interracial romance in a city where blacks constitute a demographic minority, a microcosm of Brazil as a whole. More to the point, the events in *O homem* do not take place in a favela, which suggests a remove from the problematic spaces associated with peripheral areas. These casting and location choices focus attention on race relations and space, but without ever mentioning them directly they are sublimated into the question of poverty and violence, in keeping with the discursive invisibility mentioned earlier.

O homem's unremarkable space (as opposed to that of the favela) acquires demographic tensions when we are introduced to the protagonist's use of binoculars to observe his neighbors.[12] Although the film suggests a multiracial neighborhood, André's isolation is demonstrated by the fact that his nocturnal voyeurism (similar to his bus rides and shopping scenes) does not reveal other black inhabitants. Although this might be demographically factual in Porto Alegre, the isolation of this spatial reality suggests a precarious belonging, a lack of integration into the body politic. Bentes (2003, 130) notes that this "deterritorialization" is typical of the representation of residents of the favela—they no longer belong to the rural *sertão*, yet are not integrated into the city—but it is striking that this same feeling of not belonging carries over even when the space in question clearly is not peripheral. The unusualness of the black presence in this space is enhanced by André's reference to agoraphobia, a fear of the open that often forces people to be reclusive, a fear he thinks needs to be confronted head-on. Although this fear is not contextualized in André's case, the fact that he mentions it suggests a discomfort with a space in which he feels out of place. The movie floats the idea, therefore, that Andre's inclusion in this bourgeois public sphere is contingent and partial—as opposed to his "natural" favela—in spite of the much bandied ideal of integration and assimilation (Hanchard 1999, 61).

It is possible that André buys his expensive binoculars from simple fascination with technology, but the fact that he saves for a year for this purchase suggests

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11. According to the latest census by the Instituto Brasileiro Geografia e Estatística (2000), blacks in Porto Alegre make up 7.45 percent of the population; *morenos,* 11.8 percent; and whites, 79.9 percent.

12. This is an interesting tie-in with the representation of the favela in contemporary films, where drug gangs and militias use binoculars, two-way phones, and other high-tech tools.

a vital need: it signals a gap between himself and his environment, at the same time confirming a desire to bridge this gap. André's voyeurism indicates a distancing from his environment, exclusion from a space that can be bridged only artificially. Through the lenses he is able to vicariously enjoy consumer goods outside of his economic reach (expensive audio equipment in his neighbor's living room) and virtually participate in a lifestyle from which he is excluded. But even with the help of this tool, André is still left pondering the type of music to which a fat neighbor dances every night, which suggests that technology can go only so far in establishing human links. Ironically, it is through the medium of the long-distance lens that André manages to partially close the spatial and existential gap in which he finds himself. He sees Silvia on one of his daily sweeps and falls in love after a period of continued surveillance, which leads to the eventual romantic relation, a case of virtualness motivating the possibility of physical contact. The interracial romance that dominates the film's story line is here undercut by space and the technologies that André is obliged to use to bridge the gap. André might as well be living in a favela, and racial harmony, the film shows, is not as seamless as it appears.

Contemporary films about the periphery and its role in the construction of Brazilian identity highlight the favela, its citizens, poverty, and the marginal activities that occur in this spatial enclave, namely drugs, armed violence, and gang activities, among others.[13] Because of the predominance of blacks in favelas, the two have become synonymous and have come to stand as symbols for each other. This metonymic relation enables a transference of activities to persons associated initially with these spaces, and eventually as a marker of violence. Thus in Brazil, blacks—and the poor in general—have come to represent violence and crime, reflected by the news and entertainment media and received as such by the viewing public. In a sense, the media's portrayal of the favela and the activities that take place there set up a violent contrast (an "other") with its opposite, what is symbolically constructed as the "normal" Brazil.[14] Structurally, the favela provides a visual representation of failed modernity, the inequality embedded in Brazilian society, made more dramatic by the verticality of the favela in contrast with the "normal" city's wide-open horizontality (Hamburger 2007, 119, 124).[15]

The filmic representation of these spaces and their marginal activities invite a causal reading of environment and behavior; that is, the severely deprived and insalubrious favela breeds criminal personalities and behaviors, the latter being a

13. Some recent films that portray the dichotomy of periphery and national identity are *Cidade de Deus* (2002), *O homem do ano* (2003), *O invasor* (2003), *Palace II* (2000), and *Cidade dos homens* (2003).

14. In addition to the *sertão*, the favela represents "both real and symbolic lands which to a large degree invoke Brazilian imagery; they are lands in crisis, where desperate or rebellious characters live or wander; they are signs of a revolution to come or of a failed modernity" (Bentes 2003, 121). This contrasts with Perlman's (2010, xxiii) view that "favelas are not the shadow side of the city; rather, the city is the shadow side of the favelas."

15. Rio's peculiar geography and development have placed most of its favelas on hillsides, which creates a visually stunning image of irregularly shaped houses facing the city's prosperous seaside neighborhoods and tourist sites. This verticality contrasts with the wide-spaced avenues and boulevards of the central business district or the Leblon district. Caracas's Sierra Maestra ranchos, similarly located on hillsides, do not present the same contrast with affluent, well-built neighborhoods.

cause of the former. It can be argued that the failure of full integration is deliberate and intentional: the creation of a marginal space in which undesirable inhabitants can be deported, much like prisons provide policed spaces for social deviants.[16] However, this view calls into question the incorporation of certain aspects of marginal culture into national symbology, thereby creating a link that unsettles the margin's role as society's abject other. Read this way, Furtado's filmic transfer of marginal spaces—and its iconic representative—to the center can be interpreted as an indictment of the country's inability to successfully integrate inhabitants of all colors. By symbolically inserting blackness into a predominantly white context, the film points to its absence both physically and discursively.

In *Racism in a Racial Democracy*, Twine (1998) describes her encounters with the avoidance of race issues in a small Brazilian town northwest of Rio de Janeiro (she fictiously names it Vasalia). While helping two teacher friends prepare material for their primary school, she is troubled by "the repetitive absences" of Afro-Brazilians and dark-skinned people, except as "traditional Africans," in Brazilian school textbooks and in the classroom (Twine 1998, 55). Even more disturbing is the fact that her two friends Carla and Catarina, both "Afro-Brazilians," both "brown-skinned and brown-eyed women," repeatedly drew images of exclusively blond, blue-eyed children to illustrate all of their grading books (Twine 1998, 54). When queried about it, the two teachers viewed this as "unremarkable" in spite of teaching classes where few students fit this "naturalized" stereotype of the ideal. For Twine, this "invisible" form of racism, in its repetitive absences, is complemented by a more visible form that negatively stereotypes blacks in Brazilian school textbooks. Citing a study by Vera Moreira Figueira of Rio de Janeiro public schools in which the author concluded that school textbooks (1) depicted blacks as social inferiors of whites, (2) depicted them as similar to animals, (3) did not portray them in families, and (4) excluded them from references in history or social science texts, Twine (1998, 55) suggests that the apparent acceptance by ordinary Afro-Brazilians of this dual strategy of invisibility and negative visibility explains the racist "common sense" that underpins racial democracy in Brazil.

This racist common sense is brilliantly represented by André in the film and appeals to accepted stereotypes of blacks. Throughout the film the issue of André's race is never directly mentioned, only obliquely, creating a tense contrast with his all too visible blackness in the film's visual narrative. For all intents and purposes André's race is invisible in spite of the considerable internal monologues explaining his background, family situation, education and career aspirations, and love interest. However, the stereotypes this unspoken discourse generates appear quite spontaneously in a confrontation in a music shop. André sees his fat white neighbor who dances to music at night and follows him around the music stacks to finally assuage his curiosity about this neighbor's music. Confronted about his stalking, André immediately makes recourse to a stereotype—of men-

16. Conde (2006, 198) notes that the creation of the favela started around the period of modernization in Brazil, when buildings in the center occupied by freed slaves were torn down to make way for the new image of Brazil modeled on Parisian boulevards. The displaced occupants set up in peripheral areas.

tal retardation—to explain his snooping. In a slow and halting monotone André explains that he is conducting a survey of music tastes of shoppers for a school project. The neighbor divulges his passion for Creedence Clearwater Revival, implying an interpretation and acceptance of Andre's visual and discursive signs.

Two other moments illustrate to a lesser degree the invisibility of blackness. André daydreams about achieving fame as a soccer player while working as a bag boy at a supermarket. His daydream—in which he scores the winning goals to the acclaim of adoring fans—is abruptly interrupted by a shopper who berates him for bruising her fruit with his careless packing. In spite of André's apologies for this mistake, the shopper continues to rebuke him, this time for being "an angry young man." The uproar leads to the intervention by the store manager, who after hearing the shopper's complaints, labels Andre as *irritaginho* and ominously promises it won't happen again. This sequence is one of Furtado's most complex and evocative scenes for its collagelike use of black-and-white film representing Andre's aspirations and for the sharp contrast with the color reality of his job as a bagger at the supermarket. The intrusion of the irate shopper into the black-and-white fantasy simultaneously evokes and rejects mythical stereotypes of black success, whereas the black-and-white contrast with André's current job in color points to his limited options. Furtado employs even more daring mixes in portraying Andre's cartoons. Used as a source of authenticating his subjecthood, most of Andre's images of women consistently reproduce white, fair features. Complicating this reflection of self-identification is the fact that some of these images are seen through the view of a lens, which suggests that they are the result of Andre's snooping. Thus, one of the mechanisms the director uses to indicate narrative authenticity projects the invisibility of blackness as a result of its physical absence (suggested by the lens) as well as its discursive absence (André's imagination is incapable of reproducing it). Both strategies serve to filter daily life for André; his is a presence that cannot be spoken or represented, subsumed as it is into the discursive reality of national identity in which blackness is out of "space."

Many scholars, since Gilberto Freyre enunciated his concept of *embranquecimento* (also *embranqueamento*) and the concomitant practice of *mestiçagem*, have remarked on the different ways *Casa-grande e senzala* has functioned as an ideological framing of Brazil's hybrid nature.[17] One interpretation of Freyre's text as proof of Brazilian inclusiveness—racial mixture implies nonracism—has been displaced by current acceptance of exclusion, a counterideology supported by census data and socioeconomic indicators (Telles 2004, 216). In what he describes as "the enigma of Brazilian race relations," Telles (2004, 4–6) suggests the simul-

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17. Although Freyre's 1933 work *Casa-grande e senzala* has been the source of opposing interpretations, it is widely accepted that this work exposed the absurdities of the biologism of race and has propounded a transcultural fluidity of Brazilian society (Lund and McNee 2006). For Lund (2006, 142) this text "radically altered the dominant Brazilian discourse on race and national identity." It is interesting to note that Freyre never used the term "democracia racial" as has been attributed to him since the publication of his *Casa-grande e senzala*. Lund (2006, 145) notes that "Freyre makes two or three comments on the 'democratic' aspects of Brazilian society (more common descriptors include 'patriarchal,' 'aristocratic,' 'authoritarian,' 'anarchistic,' and 'sadomasochistic'); nowhere in the text does he explicitly announce Brazil's status as a '*racial* democracy.'"

taneous existence of both ideologies—of inclusion and exclusion—arguing that mestiçagem cannot be a myth because of the reality of the shades of skin color (Telles 2004, 223). In a nation in which official census data exist for only three groups, *branco, pardo,* and *preto,* researchers have found from around forty to a hundred different shades of color by which individuals identify, a remarkable color continuum that bears witness to this mixture.[18] However, the belief that this racial mixing—which Telles (2004) terms *horizontal relations*—implies the absence of racism and inequality, vertical relations, is illusory. As Moutinho (2004, 13–15) notes about the foundational ideology of mestiçagem, little is said about the sexual implications of the process. In the classic literature she examines, there is a preponderance of white males with nonwhite females, whereas the reverse (nonwhite males with white females) is represented as "pollution" and the relationship often portrayed in tragic terms.[19] Mestiçagem is thus about the sensuality and seduction of the black, Indian, and mulatto female in the eyes of the white colonizer. This, she observes, leads to an "absence" of the black male within that ideology (Moutinho 2004, 22). Although Brazil has come a long way from its colonial days, the myth of mestiçagem continues, but it is increasingly challenged by loss of the white-male dominance in contemporary sexual relations.[20] One way of dealing with this challenge is the creation of a taboo on the issue of black male–white female relationships, a taboo that is rationalized under the view of social mobility (*ascensão social*), in which blacks also aspire to the whitening ideal through miscegenation (at least for their descendants). This view of social mobility, a derivative of the whitening ideology, holds up whiteness as the ideal, and the category of "mixed" as an intermediate step toward the eventual elimination of "black" and the achievement of a "white" society.[21] Twine (1998, 89) points out that the mass media in Brazil is particularly guilty of this idealization of "whiteness" in its portrayal of markers of European ancestry. André's own drawings and the use of cartoon images that predominantly show a white Brazil appear to be a testament to this incapability of representing blackness, a contradiction sharply brought to the fore in Furtado's play on André's all-too-visible black presence in

18. Reichmann (1999, 8–9) also notes that the researchers who observed this color display ascribed it to an avoidance of blackness.

19. Aluísio de Azevedo's classic text *O mulato* (1881) "is at once a daring criticism of Brazilian racism at a time when Brazil was not yet prepared to officially recognize its mixed origins, and a reflection of elite views of the mulatto. . . . Raimundo, a light-skinned mulatto with blue eyes, falls in love with a white woman, but is eventually killed because he dared to dream that such a union was possible" (Davis 1999, 17).

20. Lund (2006, 141–143) affirms with regard to racial democracy that labeling ideas as myths has been a "largely ineffective strategy against the tenacity of institutional racism in Brazil" because it enables them to be glossed over but still serve as a "negated unconscious. . . . Everybody recognizes the mythic nature of racial democracy, yet everybody still draws on the power of its discursive truth."

21. Reichmann (1999) highlights the shift from Oliveira Vianna's explicit embrace of whitening as a means to progress after the 1920 census to Freyre's repudiation of this attempt to eliminate blackness, calling it a vital part of the miscegenation process. Hanchard (1999, 4–6) coins the term *racial exceptionalism* to describe a similar subtle ideological shift from a commonsense belief of an absence of racial antagonisms to a qualified recognition of discrimination, prejudice, and subordination in Brazil. This, he believes, is proof of the black's exclusion from Brazil's modernity project: the exclusion of the black from the public sphere (Hanchard 1999, 60–61).

the film in contrast with discursive absence. *O homem*'s interracial romance is at once a reversing of the earlier miscegenation paradigm and a debunking of the social mobility rationale.

The romance narrative in *O homem que copiava* thus weaves together the discourse of social mobility in the two poles of poverty and race. Silvia—according to the current view of interracial relations in Brazilian society—visually represents the desire for social mobility that would solve André's dual concerns: elevating his social and his economic status. The film shows this to be false, as Silvia is only marginally better educated than André is and works at a job that doesn't pay much better than his. Silvia is as equally desirous of social mobility as is André, and from her point of view, André represents a change in her social status: escape from her abusive stepfather and dead mother. Telles (2004, 231) notes that a system of status exchange operates in relations between interracial couples, in which whiteness is valued for the social and biological advantages conferred by the lighter spouse but also ensures enhanced diligence, devotion, and class status from the darker spouse. Furtado's choice of a black male for his central protagonist thus confronts and explodes the taboo of black male–white female relations in Brazil in several different ways. First by playing up the visual presence of a black actor in a city in which he is demographically underrepresented, and away from the favela space that is typically symbolized as his "natural" environment, *O homem que copiava* is at once the play of the black's absence in normative discourse (outside of samba, *carnaval,* and *futebol*) and yet presence in Brazil's racial dynamic, even at its core. Second, the romance of the film hints at miscegenation but upturns the traditional process that has produced this mixture—white male–nonwhite female—and delights in setting up the white woman as a seducer and bearer of sensuality (André is able to visualize the blonde Marinês in her underwear even though she makes it clear that she is out of his reach). Silvia's confession to the audience at the end of the movie of her attempts at encouraging André in his courtship (unbeknownst to him, she also spies on him in return and follows him around) emphasizes this subversive role of the white female body as sensual object traditionally absent in public discourse. Third, the violence that this romance (and its suggestion of racial harmony) spawns brings to the fore a violent space—the favela—that is physically absent, though re-created in André's attempt to subversively enact the foundational myth of mestiçagem.

Jorge Furtado's *O homem que copiava* centers on two plots both based on accepted social discourse: how to escape lower-middle-class poverty and the perennial question of the obstacles to love. These two plots are intertwined when the love quest is made to depend on the former; that is, success in love is predicated on success in social mobility. Although this stretches the logic of reality, it still points to the psychological dynamics involved in following the path of social conventions and the economic repercussions of the developmental stages mapped out by institutional forces. Social mobility is less urgent for the single individual with fewer financial responsibilities than it is for families. As in any society, social mobility in the Brazilian context depends on the availability of opportunities for advancement, which in turn requires a combination of skills—education and/or talent—and a level playing field. In making André's character black, Furtado

confronts the question of race with these two discourses, both enough of a problem even in homogenous populations and more so in Brazil's mixed lineage. In a geographical space in which blackness can be no more than symbolic (given the racial composition of Porto Alegre), the choice of André in the central role heightens this absence in official discourse, portrayed mimetically in the film by the total absence of references to André's skin color in the context of educational and employment opportunities, as well as in race relations. The film underscores the role of education (or the lack of it) in excluding marginalized groups from this discourse while exploring the underside of the mestiçagem myth (a variant of social mobility) by bringing to the fore the now more commonplace black male–white female relationships in Brazilian cities like Rio and Sao Paulo. The popular tour site of the Corcovado visited by André and Silva at the end of the film provides glorious views of Rio but is also home to several of the favelas in the city, famous for their depiction as the locus of crime and violence. Well removed from the favela stereotyped as the dwelling for blacks and the locus of violence and crime, *O homem que copiava* implies that the conditions that created slums are also present in the city center, and blackness is central to its solution.

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