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Review of documentary film focusing on domestic violence in Brazil by Holly Mosher.

Hummingbird

2004

Directed by Holly Mosher

48 minutes, color

Distributed by Hollywoodnt Productions

LLC 612 Flower Ave. B.

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I am captured by their eyes. The street kids of Recife, Brazil portrayed in this film are fiercely engaging as they look directly into the camera asking for handouts, telling their stories or just jostling for a moment of camera-time. The question of how to deal with the utterly disenfranchised and violated young members of any society is a difficult one. Holly Mosher's film *Hummingbird* provides us with a brief glimpse into the world of two non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Recife, Brazil where we meet some dedicated women who are trying to help these kids get off the street and off sniffing glue. It is an uphill battle, at best.

When asked to describe their program's philosophy, the founder of one shelter says that their work is based on the "pedagogy of affection." The *Casa de Passagem*/House of Passage and the *Coletive Mulher Vida*/Women's Life Collective provide safety, food, classroom instruction, counseling and love to the ex-street kids and their mothers. *Hummingbird* moves through three main sections addressing "The Children," "The Teenagers," and "The Women." We are given a brief cross-sectional view of the girls and women who have come to the two shelters described in the film. A few young boys are interviewed in the beginning of the film, their absence in the later sections is, perhaps, telling. We get a sense of the kids growing up far too fast, the stories told by even the youngest are about lethal violence and the unending cycles of addiction within which they find themselves trapped. Beyond telling and acting out their stories, we don't see the abusive battering, the pains of drug withdrawal, or the lingering deaths from HIV/AIDS. We don't hear the gunshots or the sirens. The kids are cute, streetwise youngsters that grow up into the sad teenage girls and women who tell the filmmaker of the abuses that they have endured and of the abuses that they themselves have given out. Tearfully, one young mother states repeatedly that her anger makes her want to kill her children. The group of older women that we see towards the end of the film looks shell-shocked and distant.

Hummingbird is conceptually anchored around the story of a twenty-two year old woman named Adriana who tells us that she was on the street by the time that she was six years old and that she had given birth to her baby girl by the time she was eleven.

Adriana now works as a maid and maintains a small apartment where she lives with her daughter. She is off drugs and no longer works as a prostitute. Adriana's testimony is a positive one; when she was pregnant, Adriana found refuge in a shelter similar to the ones in the film and now, in turn, helps other women and girls who are encountering similar life problems. Like the brave hummingbird that single-handedly tried to put out the forest fire in the parable told by the director of *The House of Passage*, Adriana is doing her part to make the world a better place. The testimony of a survivor is an effective manner of providing encouragement to individuals in settings such as these shelters and I hope that *Hummingbird* will be distributed among NGOs in Brazil and in other parts of the world. The movie is technically sound with engaging music and will appeal to diverse audiences. It would be particularly well suited to undergraduate courses on the anthropology of development, urbanization, applied anthropology and Latin America.

Early in the film, Mosher poses the question, "can these kids who have grown up in such violence and poverty become part of a society that has rejected them?" I am left wondering about that question at the end of the film. We see only glimpses outside of the shelters. Where do the kids sleep at night? How often do they come to the shelters? What are their families and friends like? What will happen to them in six months or a year? Realistically, what are their options for training, education and being able to earn a decent living? Lives lived in extreme poverty, such as those in the film recall Nancy Scheper-Hughes' richly detailed ethnography, *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (University of California Press, 1993). Indeed, the film would provide an interesting point of departure for discussion with students after they read the Scheper-Hughes' ethnography that is set in this same region of Brazil.

Anthropologist George Foster described the hummingbird of eastern Brazil as a creature that hoarded Water, keeping it from humans until the Caingang and Botocudo Indians took Water away from the little bird (*Funk & Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, Marie Leach, ed., Thomas Crowell Publishing, 1972:510). Foster's hummingbird myth is different and certainly harsher than the one described in the film, but it may be more realistic with respect to the case of the street children of Recife. The kids in *Hummingbird* clutch onto their hard-won moments of affection as if that affection is a kind of water that could sustain them in the hot and unforgiving Brazilian *nordeste*. That affection will most likely be snatched away from them all too soon. These children are rejected by society and they have little hope for a better future unless major economic, political and social changes are made. The value of a film such as *Hummingbird* is that it makes the viewer care about the street kids and the women who are trying to help them—with any luck, this kind of compassion will help fuel a future generation of engaged anthropologists.