

À margem da imagem / On the Fringes of São Paulo

Directed by: Evaldo Mocarzel
Editing: Marcelo Moraes
Produced by: Ugo Giorgetti
Date: 2002
Running time: 72'
Country: Brazil
Language: Portuguese (English subtitles)
Availability in the UK: Queen Mary, University of London

À margem da imagem is a documentary about the everyday lives of people who live in the streets of downtown Sao Paulo because they are homeless. Through a social survey, it is estimated that 9,000 *Paulistas* [citizens of São Paulo] live in the streets. There is a culture and an 'architecture' created by these homeless people from the city's leftovers. The film explores the ethical dimension of the aestheticization of poverty. There is an important reflection on the process of representation in this film, and on the ethics of representing deprivation and the poor.

The opening images show a group of homeless men sitting on the pavement. One has a guitar and plays, while the rest sing a song. As they start drinking alcohol from a plastic bottle, the camera crew obtain permission from them to film and pass over some money. This opening sequence highlights the fact that there is always a contract – implicit or explicit – between the documentary makers and the documented, and that this contract has to be as reciprocal, clear and explicit as possible.

The documentary shows the homeless living in their own habitat: constructions made from cardboard or pallets, or just the street, and the community kitchen where they eat. There is an interview with the manager of a soup kitchen telling a story about the famous photographer Sebastião Salgado who wanted to take pictures of a scene at the soup kitchen, but they had refused as they felt all he wanted to do was to exploit the scene. There is an implicit discussion here about the ethics of image making.

The film also explores the causes of homelessness in São Paulo. The film crew interviews many homeless people to find out why they ended up on the street: most of them respond that they lost their jobs and became poorer. But some of them keep on working informally or occasionally. In only a few cases, their homelessness was caused by other reasons such as alcoholism, disease or accidents. This is revealing in terms of the centrality of unemployment as a specifically economic cause of homelessness, rather than marginality. This could be a clue to the difference in the causes of homelessness in a country like Brazil, as compared with First World countries, where it seems to be more associated with alcoholism, drug abuse, severe mental illnesses and other cases of extreme marginality.

Towards the end, we see the same homeless people being filmed in their cardboard shelters and being given money by the photographer. There are also images of 'The Homeless Association', where the homeless prepare the food, clean the toilets, etc., because they need to comply with social rules and regulations. *À margem da imagem* ends with the homeless depicted in the documentary being invited to watch the film in the cinema; each of them talks about how they feel about the finished version, what they liked and what they

disliked. This ending highlights the ethical issue of the importance of a clear two-way contract in every process of documentary making (and of image making in general), which should be based on explicit consent, reciprocity, communication and discussion.

Real characters are presented on location.

RELATED INFORMATION

Other documentaries by Evaldo Mocarzel include:

Os invisíveis / The Invisible (2006)

À margem do concreto / On the Fringes of Concrete (2005)

Do luto à luta / From Grief to Struggle (2005)

Mensageiras da luz - Parteiras da Amazônia / Messengers of Light (2004)

Publications on Evaldo Mocarzel include:

'Special Brasilien', *Film-Echo/Filmwoche*, n° 6, 7 February 2004, pp. I-XII. [article about the Brazilian film industry which includes details of 14 Brazilian films including *À margem da imagem*]

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