

Textual Analysis Film: *City of God* (2002)

Directors: Kátia Lund, Fernando Meirelles

Sequence Running Time: 00:37:20 - 00:42:20

Word count: 1550

In this paper, I will analyze an extract from Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund's *City of God* (2002) that reflects the social, historical, and economical situations by the use of mise en scene, colors, editing, and cinematography to construct the themes of power, poverty, and "the waste of life" (*Why I love ... the depiction of the favela in city of god*) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This extract is important because it reflects the change in the identity of the favelas in the 60s to 80s Cidade de Deus by showing the change in a drug dealer's apartment, the choices, and the life paths of the characters. "Leaving the favela is shown as going from darkness into light." (*Why I love ... the depiction of the favela in city of god*). shows the manipulation of film elements in order to represent the meaning, in this specific extract of the movie. The purpose of the filmmaker was to raise awareness by presenting the tragedies in Brazilian daily life (*Sophia A. M Clennen - jstor.org*).

City of God takes place between the times 60s to 80s and it is about the main character Rocket's dream of becoming a photographer in the dangerous streets of the favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The events in the film were based on a real favela called "Cidade de Deus" that is built in the 1960s to provide accommodation for black, poor people in Rio De Janeiro (*City of god - film education*). However, the shooting was not in the real favela (*City of god: Digital traditions*) because of police intervention to the social situation where drug gangs were interested in being the owner of the favela (*Where children rule with guns*) and the record of 62 homicides

per 100,000 people in Rio, in 2002. As in word of an actor in the film Alice Braga “We couldn't shoot at Cidade de Deus, the real City of God slum, though. It was too dangerous because it was in the middle of a drug war. Instead, we shot at Cidade Alta (Higher City), a similar-looking slum, using community members as security guards because they wouldn't let us bring our own.” (*How we made city of god*). The themes of poverty, drug dealing, violence, crime, gun culture, gangs, and power that are seen in the social context of the film were reflected by the use of mise en scene and editing to show the change, and cinematography to show the character paths in this particular favela. This segment of the film is crucial since it contains the identity development of the city and the gangster character Lil' Ze by addressing the favela culture from the 1960s to the '80s.

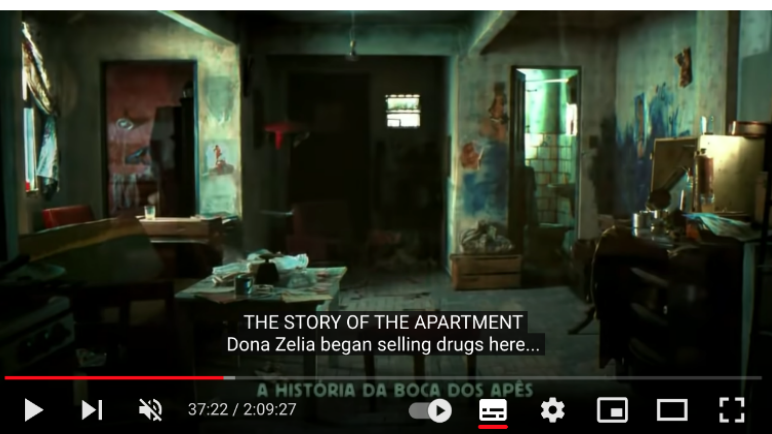


Figure 1: the recent shot of the apartment

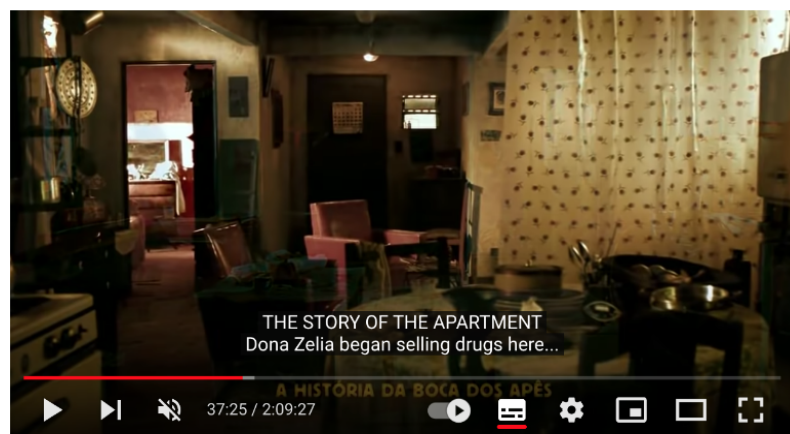


Figure 2: the past shot of the apartment

The segment starts with “The Story of The Apartment” that presents the the change in the apartment in time with the increasing rate of crimes, owner change, and the revolution of the favela’s identity by the use of mise en scene. The past look of the apartment where Dona Zelia owns the drug business is more organized, decoration is like a normal apartment which gives the idea of a “tidy, clean, that runs a crime very amateur. However, in the recent look of the apartment, ripped paper walls with messy decoration and a randomly captured form gives a more creepy,

scary, and dirty look with more crime. The recent version of the apartment without a character sets the more spacey, moderately dense image, and looking through a window form of the apartment. However, the past version of the apartment is more condensed, the decoration is staged more on the midground and background rather than only the background. The staging of the characters change according to their action and the change in time and character. The movement of only the subjects; the dominant image in the frame always changes in order to show the change in the mise en scene by highlighting the change in the favela over time.



Figure 3: The subject staged on the left edge, foreground.



Figure 4: The subjects are nearly on the center, background.



Figure 5: The subjects are on the left edge, background.



Figure 6: The subjects are on the right edge, midground.



Figure 7: One of the subjects is on the right edge, one of them is on the center, foreground.

The attempt of government in the 1960s to displace favelas with public houses failed and it resulted in the growth of the population, crime, and poverty. The filmmaker's intention was to show the change in the favela by showing the changes in the decoration, props, and mise en scene by using only location to connect the context to real life.

The scene's colours are also used effectively to show the change of the owner of the house. The color pallet of the past form of the apartment represents the characteristics of domestic house decor of the 60s which has the colors burnt sienna, teak, and natural (* *Color schemes in the 1960s and how they relate to modern design*). The warm, homey, feminine atmosphere was abandoned with the objective woman representation (*Section A: City of god – key scene analysis*). The golden color and bright lightning in the past version of the apartment also represent the hot temperature and the golden age of the favelas where the favela has fewer people, crime, and no developed technology (*City of god analysis*). The recent version of the apartment has the brown and grey colour pallet with dark lightning which represents the second era of the favelas that are more crowded and has more crime. The representation of the war of the drug dealers in both the real world and the film was represented by the use of colour which can be seen in the whole of the

movie where childhood of Rocket shows the golden era, and the older version of Rocket represents the war of the dealers.



Figure 8: The childhood times of the main character Rocket.

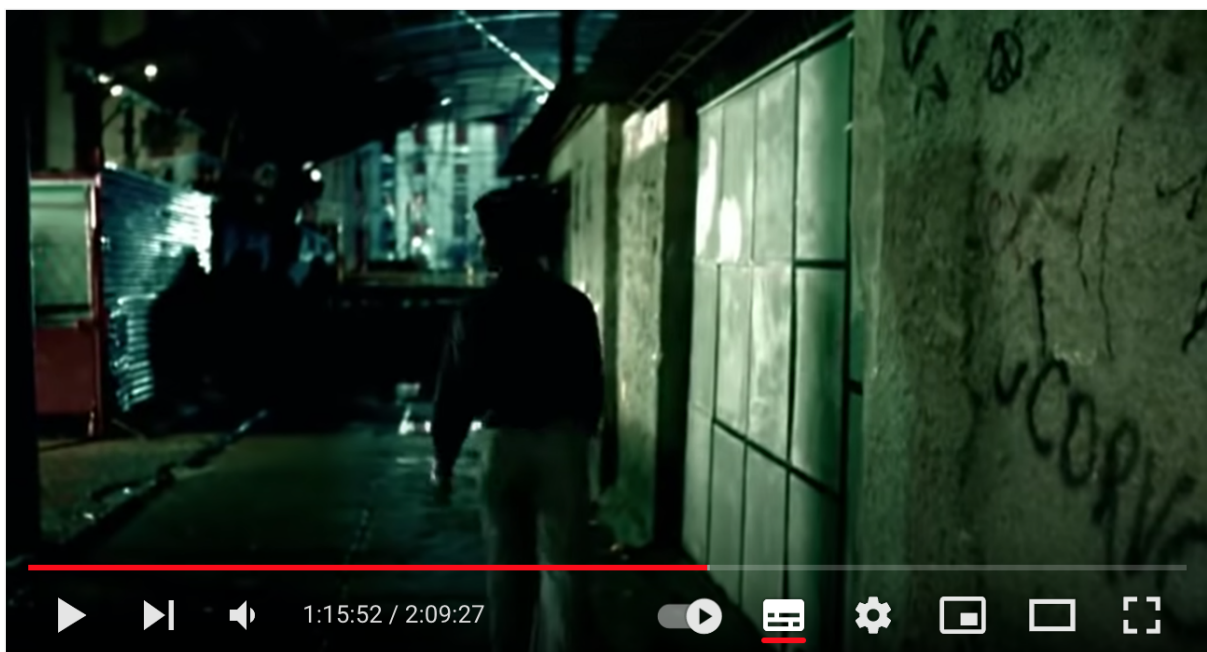


Figure 9: The older version times of the main character Rocket.

The efficient use of cinematography resulted in constructing the eras of favelas. The fixed position of the camera, wide angle, and neutral angle remain the same as the point of view is the observer; to make the audience like an observer of the environment (*City Of God/Cidade De Deus*). The recent version of the apartment has darker lighting, more negative space, and a less dense image with a low key, low contrast image that gives the tone of more suspicious and dangerous feelings. As time goes in the scene, the key light is placed further away while the fill light and backlighting decrease. The more mood and atmosphere changes according to the social problems and dangerous environments, high key- low contrast lightning turns into high key high contrast. These changes were made in order to the rate of the increasing crimes at that time.



Figure 10: Big boy and the neighborhood kids dealing.

In this shot the main focus was on the Big Boy and the child who was working for Big Boy. Using the center stage foreground for the child creates the discomfort for the audience to see a child dealing which is a reality in 1960s Brazil.

During this time youth gangs took over the slums and didn't gave it back until mid 1980s (*City of god - film education*).

The flashback to show the beginning look and the story of the apartment was created by a dissolve transition. The main editing technique in the whole movie was based on simple cuts, and freeze frames, to give the impression of Rocket's taken photos such as figure 13, and fade-to-black transitions (*City of god analysis*).

Dissolving was used to link the same location, and narratives by also representing the time passing this quick dissolves after the deaths show how death is easy to react in 1960-1980s Cidade de Deus.

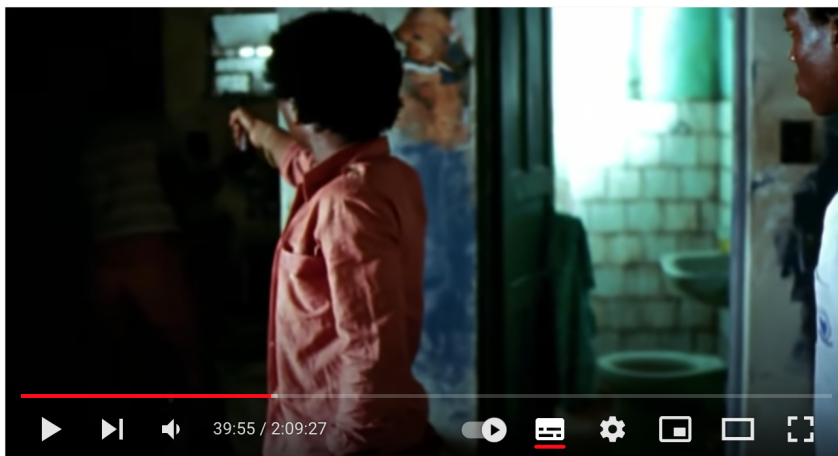


Figure 11: Blacky hears a voice from the door.

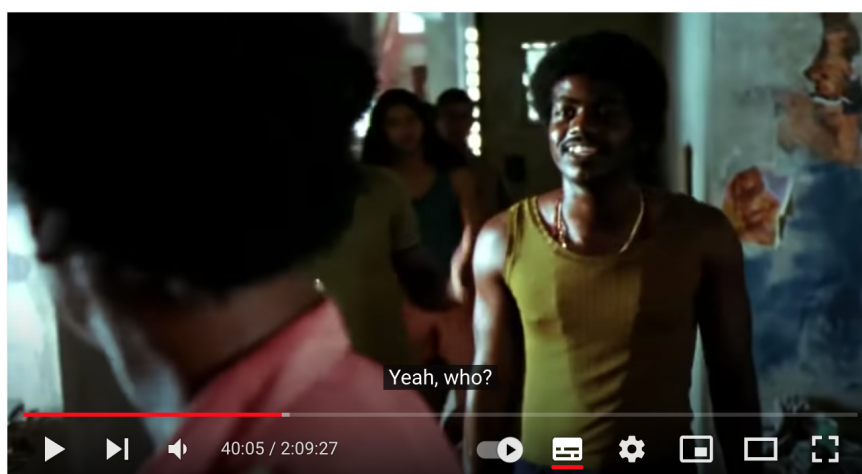


Figure 12: Lil Ze enters.

The arrivement of Lil' Ze introduces the viewer a new main character by lowerin the gun to create more free space in the frame to present a new main character by the rule of thirds (*City of god - scene analysis*). As Lil Z appears in the appartment the dissolve transition becomes cuts, rythm of the film changes, the camera movement changes into steadycam, the camera is not only an observer but also takes places in the actions and more in the situation.

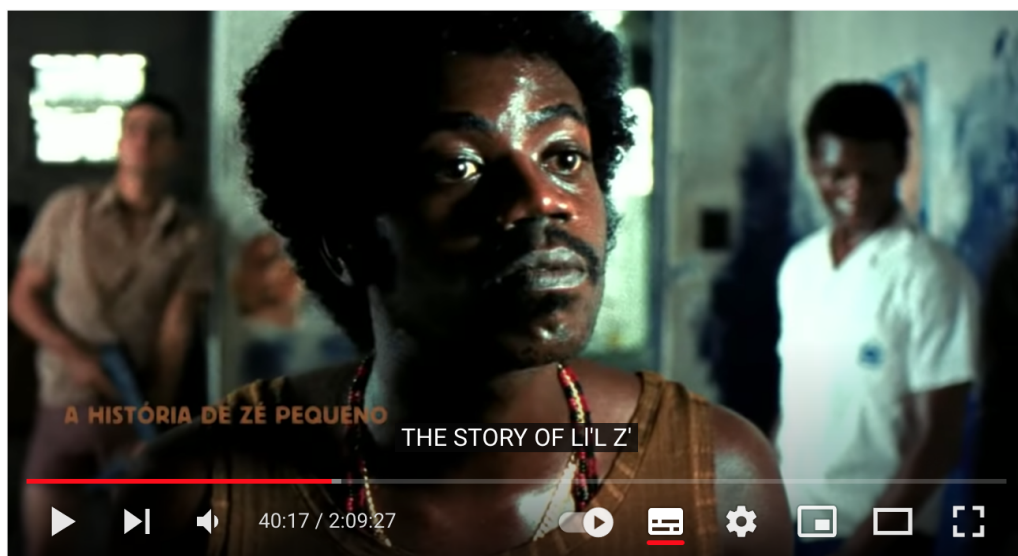


Figure 13: The still image of old Lil Ze.



Figure 14: The still image of young Lil Ze.

Introducing Lil Z' was started with a close-up shot, a still photograph of Lil Z the impression of Rocket taking the picture. The flashback was made by the dissolve transition to the childhood of Lil Z. The morphine transition that shows the child version of Lil Ze, has a dark twist which is created by a half face lit up, high contrast, and dramatic effect (*City of god - scene analysis*). Cuts and montage with wide angle actions create a chaotic atmosphere to set the scary characteristic of Lil Z. Killing people from the motel by coming out of low key, high contrast door and laughing after shows the excitement of Lil Z and his passion for being a gangster when he was a child.

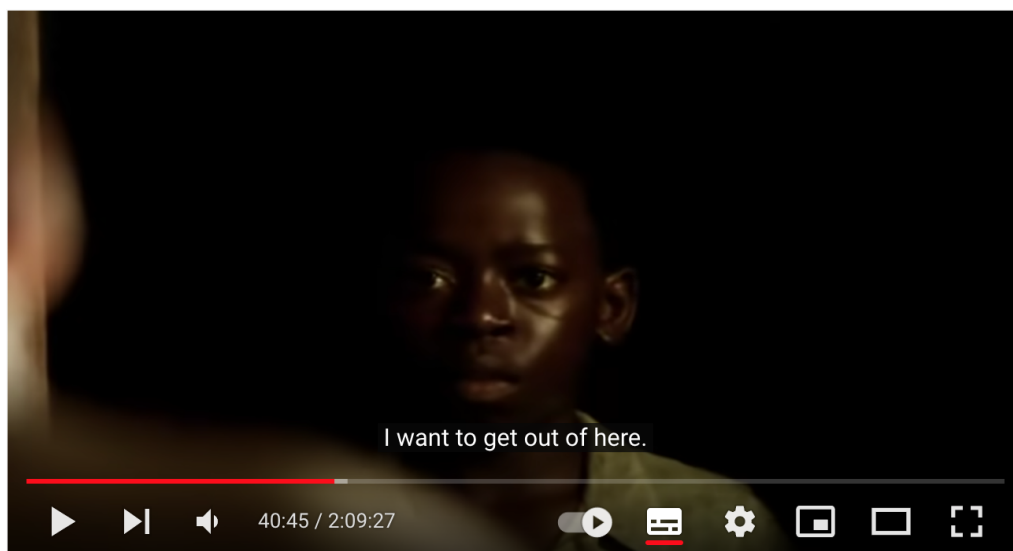


Figure 14: Lil Ze, before killing the couple in the motel.

The scenes where Lil Z kills Goose and kills many people from the same low angled shot, with the same facial expressions over Lil' Z reflects the film manifesto "Eztetyka da fome" ("Aesthetic of Hunger") by Glauber Rocha, in 1965 (*Sophia A. M Clennen - jstor.org*). Rocha's film theory was the idea of hunger as the state of craving, need,

desire, such as violent expressions and the need of source for critical power (*Sophia A. M Clennen - jstor.org*). The film theorem of gangs having this “hunger” was shown by the character Lil Z’s exxagerated facial expressions, jump cuts between the killing scenes, non changing enthusiasm, and laughing expressions that occur from the lowkey light.

The themes, storyline, and message of the film was influenced by cinema novo which is the film movement in Brazil that presents the country’s social and economic realities through an artistic language (Matt). Featuring problems in everyday of life, filming on location, and using unknown actors were the common features of the film *City of God*. In the casting for the movie, there were 200 non professional actors that were coming from the favela. They were asked to improvise most of the time in the film. This improvisotary acting from typage characters was to construct the feelings of immogrants and the atmosphere in the 60s-80s fearful streets in favelas. The film City of god influenced the films Elite Squad by its cinematic elements (Lowes).

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