



A Level Film Studies

'City of God' / 'Cidade de Deus' (Fernando Meirelles/ Katia Lund, Brazil, 2002)

COMPONENT 2: GLOBAL FILMMAKING PERSPECTIVES

Section A: Global Film

Written examination: 2.5 hours

35% of qualification

AO1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of elements of film

AO2 Apply knowledge and understanding of elements of film to:

analyse and compare films, including through the use of critical approaches

evaluate the significance of critical approaches

analyse and evaluate own work in relation to other professionally produced work

CONTEXTS

Production | Social and Political | Critical Debate

Brazil is part of the "developing world" and the largest country in Latin America, covering about half the continent. It is the fifth largest country in the world in terms of both land area and its population of about 163.7 million. An estimated 20 % of the population (32 million) live in absolute poverty. The disparity between those living below the poverty line (who receive 2% of the GDP) and the top 10% (who receive 50.6%) is greater than most other countries in the world.

Brazil was colonised by Portugal in the 16th century resulting in almost genocidal subjection of the indigenous people. Struggled for independence, which was then gained in the 19th century. Economy partly founded on the transport of huge numbers of slaves from the west coast of Africa, a practise abolished in the second half of the 19th century. Their multi-ethnic communities are today made of the descendants of these slaves, together with immigrants from all over the world.

Economically dependent and dominated by the USA in the 20th century. In 2002, the year the film was made, ex-metalworker Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva was elected as President on his fourth attempt. Head of PT, the Worker's Party, he led the first left-wing government to be in power for more than 40 years. He promised economic prosperity fairly distributed to all Brazilians.

The use of digital editing allowed Daniel Rezende to experiment and try out new ideas. He claims that many of the interpretations of the characters were created at the editing stage. Different results could be obtained with the same footage "all the scenes evolved from the actor's improvisations, and of course each one was unique." *City of God* was financed by TV Globo, Brazil's biggest TV channel, and O2 Filmes, Brazil's biggest commercials company. The international distributor was Miramax, the company founded by Bob and Harvey Weinstein in 1979. Their involvement with the film was a continuation of successes they had with international and so-called independent films. Beginning as promoters of rock and roll concerts their reputation as "art film brats" was founded on their involvement with some of the most interesting and challenging films of the 1980s and early 1990s.

SYNOPSIS

City of God is Brazil's most critically acclaimed film of recent years. Based on the book of the same name by writer Paulo Lins, which in-turn was based on a true story, *City of God* (Cidade de Deus) is a violent, fast-paced movie that tells the tale of the residents of this Brazilian favela (slum). Events are seen through the eyes of Rocket, a poor black youth who is too scared to become an outlaw but too smart to get saddled with an underpaid, menial job. He grows up in an extremely violent environment and watches as many of his peers are easily sucked into a life of crime and drugs. It seems the odds are against him. The film follows the lives of many characters that live within this small, ramshackle shanty town. In particular we see two small boys grow up to take two very different paths: one a photographer, the other a drug dealer.

TERMINOLOGY

MISE EN SCENE

DIEGETIC SOUND

NON-DIEGETIC SOUND

AUTEUR

NON-PROFESSIONAL ACTORS

IMPROVISATION

NATIONAL CINEMA

REPRESENTATION

AUTEUR

City of God's director Fernando Meirelles satisfies the concept of author in terms of being the person responsible for giving coherent form to a film and, in this case, for bringing an autobiographical authenticity to the treatment of the subject.

Of the film's overarching style and treatment of its subject, Meirelles made an interesting comment in an interview with *Slant* magazine around the time of the film's release saying that:

"Pulp Fiction is quite different from City of God because Tarantino uses violence as an amusement, something funny and spectacular. City of God does the opposite."

IDEOLOGY AND THEMES

City of God has been considered within the context of an idea of how Brazil is constructed, communicated and received as a place of 'primitivism'. Key to the film's ideological position, as Lamartine Ferreira explained:

"Our goal with *City of God* was to do away with the prejudice that exists about favelas. Yes, there is crime in Rio, and we portrayed that, but we wanted to show that people from the slums can lead normal lives and improve their situation if they take advantage of their opportunities."

KEY SCENES

Opening sequence 'The Flying Chicken'

The story of the Tender Trio

The story of Lil Ze

the runts

The assault on Knockout Ned, his girlfriend & his family

Rocket as reporter

The Apartment

Bene's Farewell Party

Final shootout

LANGUAGE AND MISE EN SCENE

Sound | Lighting | Editing | Cinematography

The film depicts the changing nature of the slum, the *favela* itself features as a major character that grows and changes. The open environment where there are spaces to play football gives way to the closed one with the cramped and narrow streets confined by apartment blocks, tin roofed shacks, and graffiti spattered walls. The characters become more and more hemmed in by the encroachment of these walls and barriers, their dimensions emphasised by overhead shots. The characters are imprisoned, the killings are speeded up.

NARRATIVE | GENRE

City of God can be considered as crime film, action film and recreation of a real experience that interweaves documentary sensibilities with the drama. Following in the tradition of realist cinema, it is a film that aims to represent how people interact and behave, *City Of God* is notable for including non-professional actors and by invoking some of the visual sensibility of Italian neorealism.

SPECTATORSHIP

All films manipulate audiences, and this is one fundamental reason why we chose to watch a film. It is because we want to experience a change in our emotional condition. We may want to be provoked to laughter, tension, sadness, fear or happiness. Certainly, *City of God* may surprise audiences expecting a crime and gangster film that 'celebrates' and fetishises guns and masculine violence. Instead, *City of God* offers a startling alternative.

PAST EXAM QUESTIONS

(a) With close reference to the **two** films you have studied, explore how **either** performance **or** mise-en-scène create meaning. [40]

Or,

(b) With close reference to the **two** films you have studied, explore how **either** editing **or** sound create meaning.