

Reviewing fernando meirelles and katia lund's movie, city of god

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Knockout Ned

“ City of God”, directed by Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund, soundtrack by Luiz Melodia, takes place in the 1970s in the lawless favelas of Rio de Janeiro following the story of an aspiring photographer, Rocket, and the power-hungry drug dealer, Lil’Ze. Rocket, wanting to make a break in his career to leave the slums of Brazil, deals with this crime and brutality all his life, however, this is the way that he’s able to launch his photographs. He uses photos of Lil’Ze and his gang to finally get the attention he needs while Lil’Ze is able to become the intimidator he desires. Lil’Ze’s rivals, Carrot and Knockout Ned cooperate towards putting stress on Lil’Ze’s prosperity. The film was able to stay genuine through shooting on location in Rio de Janeiro’s poorest neighborhoods and hiring locals by teaching them basic acting skills. Through Foley, sound effects, ambient sounds, narration, and non-diegetic music, the viewer is given a sense of urgency and adrenalin from the events of Knockout Ned’s story.

The scene starts at 1: 31: 44 with a sound effect of a thud that introduces the text “ THE STORY OF KNOCKOUT NED” . The camera transitions from an extreme close-up shot of Knockout Ned’s profile to shooting at an extreme close-up with a dutch angle of the road speeding by. The rhythm of the pavement as a car drives on it at a high speed transitions with a fade in, sound amplified. Although the exaggeration of the sound does not exist in the world of the characters, the viewer starts out with a sense of urgency, contrasting the mellow scene beforehand with Carrot and the hoodlums. The shot of the fast-moving pavement shows the source of the sounds , giving a

literal sense of stress and speed: there is a destination and the “ hoodlums” are anxious to get there. In previous scenes where action and intensity of the situation need to be captured, the sound of gravel, synchronously and asynchronously, would be emphasized and embellished in order to feed into the stress of the moment without having to interrupt a shot or abruptly stop a conversation taking place. Likewise, in this scene the repetitive rhythm of the gravel during the quick shot of the pavement addresses the hasty behavior of the characters Carrot and Knockout Ned within the transition of scenes.

1: 31: 50, the off-screen, a voice yells through the bank “ This is a hold up!”, image blurred and dialog asynchronous. The audience then sees Knockout Ned. At 1: 31: 53, the ambient music starts, layered on top of the screaming of the civilians. Urgency is introduced.

The layering of music and action is constant throughout the film, although the music would commonly mirror the dialog and movement in order to emphasize. This is the first time in the film that contrast of auditory and visual elements to underscore themes is represented. Music can directly express its participation in the feeling of the scene, by taking on the scene’s rhythm, tone and phrasing. Music can then participate in cultural and emotional codes for things like sadness, happiness and movement. On the other hand, music can also exhibit prominent differences in the situation, by progressing in a steady auditory backdrop of indifference and alienation from the violence. This juxtaposition of image and music does not have the effect of negating the fear of the civilians, but rather intensifies it by the

juxtaposition to background. The screaming, yelling, and glass smashing underneath the force of a gun in the hands of Carrot's hoodlums gives the immediate sense of violence. The camera pulsing through the scene gives an illusion of the viewer being in set, synced with the rhythm of the sound and the progression of the steps of the hoodlums. The camera is assumed as a body in the space although the music is non-diegetic. This type of urgency and stress is through the ambient music mentioned where the rhythm is pulsing with the movements of the gang members, creating violence even when the actual music is a pleasant upbeat sound which alienates the audience from the psychology of the characters. Something that could be danced to outside of this specific realm is now perverted into a melody of stress.

At 1: 31: 58, glass starts to shatter, isolated from the music from its sharpness. The bursts of spinning close-ups of the yellowing light fixtures and the counter tops and certain gang member's faces as they yell orders to the civilians feed into this emotion of urgency during their raid. The shattered glass is diegetic and is expected to be heard, but attention is still brought to the sound from how the camera refuses to address the source or interact with the action. The refusal of showing specific important shots is important to the idea before of the " camera as a body" in the realm of the film. The viewer cannot see what the characters do not specifically address and what the characters do not see as significant even though we know it to be important to the progression of the plot. The stress of the situation is

reinforced through this because of the sensations that the viewer is not allowed to address.

At 1: 32: 04, the narration of Rocket's voice is non-diegetic, asynchronous, and emotionally untouchable. The narration throughout the film usually gives a sense of a relief from the auditory stress that comes from the realm of the film. The volume and variety of noise coming from the scene is temporarily cut when Rocket's narration of the events comes in. Rocket simply states the facts of Knockout Ned's life. The tone is unwavering, even as words move between Carrot yelling about guns over shattering glass. At 1: 32: 32, the first gunshot comes from a clerk crouched on the ground. The composition and volume of the music is then altered. After each gun shot, the music pauses, almost as a breath, and then continues once there is dialog again. At 1: 32: 33, Carrot's gun is shot, the music is briefly stopped and the audience hears the narrator come in again along with the music. Rocket unemotionally states, "...Carrot saves Knockout Ned's life". In the second bank, the music changes but stays in the same tempo and nature. The overlay of the camera motions in this scene create a multi-second composition that plays into the urgency.

The motions of the camera following each gang member for a few seconds, just to get a high-speed glimpse of everything that is happening in these raids creates the same kind of stress of trying to keep up with it all. In the second bank, starting at 1: 33: 02, the camera is tracking between the gang members instead of the quick shots until Knockout Ned shoots the cop rushing in, where the focus shifts only to Carrot and Ned's relationship,

tracking the camera back and forth between them. When the dead cop falls to the ground, the amplified thud occurs while the camera is on Knockout Ned's back, making the relationship prevalent. Rocket, still as the voice-over, continues with his detached narration, "The third time [killing], the exception becomes the rule". The lyrics from the ambient music come in right when Rocket is done speaking and camera is on Carrot's expression of Knockout Ned shooting the gun. The lyrics are relaxed and the melody is more easy and swayed, indicating the end of Knockout Ned's internal conflict and stress with the gun. He has chosen to utilize it.

At 1: 36: 40, the audience hears the clicking and fidgeting of guns being inspected and displayed off-screen. The camera stays on Carrot, surrounded by his hoodlums. There is an internal dialog that the narrator does not illustrate, but is emphasized when the sounds of the events happening in the world of the characters does not match what is on-screen. 1: 37: 04, Knockout Ned indicates the gun he is looking for, camera swaying from Carrot to Knockout Ned. This is a version of Knockout Ned that hasn't been shown before. He is comfortable in his decisions around crime and violence. Face confident, amplified sound of the clicking of the guns being maneuvered between the salesman and the hoodlums, the audience can imply the new found confidence in Knockout Ned's hood actions. He holds the gun in his arms at 1: 37: 07 and the camera moves along the length of the barrel with a winded sound effect, air whipping from where Knockout Ned's hand meets the trigger until the end of the barrel, until it meets at an extreme close-up shot of Knockout Ned's face. The hoodlums are excitedly

talking and laughing off-screen about the enthusiasm of their new equipment. The ambient music played during the second bank robbery plays to establish the progress of Knockout Ned's identity as a hoodlum. The camera stays in the extreme-close up shot of Knockout Ned, displaying his thoughts, this time without Rocket's narration.