

Formal elements in city of god



**ASSIGN
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In Fernando Meirelles' film *City of God* (2002) the audience is introduced to and follows the life of Rocket, and his affiliation with Li'l Zé (formerly Li'l Dice), a gang leader in the City of God. In one of the final scenes of the film, a continuation of the opening scene, a battle breaks out between the two rival gangs in which Rocket is caught in the middle. Shots are fired on both sides and police become involved, resulting in the arrests of Carrot and Li'l Zé. Through the lens of Rocket's camera, the audience witnesses the police take Li'l Zé's money and possessions as bribes and set him free. Upon his being freed, Li'l Zé is approached by the Runts who brutally murder him both with the intent to take over the drug business, and out of revenge for the murder of one of their own. After the Runts are gone, Rocket approaches Li'l Zé's bullet-hole-riddled body, and captures the only images of the take down of the tyrant gang leader.

Meirelles uses several formal elements to heighten the authenticity of emotion throughout the film. In the final few scenes in particular, Meirelles utilizes shadow and low angles to depict the clumsiness and nervousness that Rocket is experiencing as he witnesses Li'l Zé's interaction with the police and the Runts. Rocket is seen only through the cutouts in the wall with his face obstructed by either the presence of his camera or the wall itself, as the policemen, who are cast entirely in shadow, walk down the stairs toward Li'l Zé. After snapping a few pictures, which are caught in brief freeze frames as he takes them, Rocket is seen hurriedly attempting to adjust the settings on his camera from a low angle initially, and then a close-up on his fingers as they fumble with the dials in an attempt to make sure he gets every shot he can and does not miss a single detail.

Another interesting choice of formal element Meirelles uses in the film, is the idea of the camera capturing all of the action of this scene through the lens of Rocket's camera. The audience experiences this event quite literally through the eyes of Rocket as he is attempting to capture these crucial moments for the City of God. The lens of the camera produces a white circle in the center of the shot as a means of focusing the image, and the audience experiences this. The viewer is able to see the shift in focus of the image as Rocket attempts to steady his hands and the camera in order to get the perfect shot through the cutouts in the wall; which often obstruct the view of the camera in a blurry outline. In between pictures, the camera will switch points of view from Rocket's to an objective view where the audience catches a glimpse of Rocket through the cutouts in the wall, with his camera ready in his hands and his eye peaking just over the lens at the events unfolding.

Lastly, Meirelles utilizes diegetic sound to capture the snap of the camera over the sound of the conversation between Li'l Zé and the police officers. While the conversation is still audible, the click of the camera takes precedence over the mumbled conversation when Rocket's point of view is in effect. Meirelles does this for two reasons: the first, is to solidify the audience's understanding that this is all taking place in Rocket's point of view, and the snap of the camera is going to be louder to his ears than the conversation taking place. The second, is to further drive one of the main themes of the film; a picture is worth a thousand words. In most cases, the images Rocket is capturing say more about life in the City of God and the corruption of the police than any interview with a citizen or officer could.

Through the use of several formal elements, Meirelles was able to heighten the authenticity of emotion within the film and further the audience's understanding of the corruption in the City of God. The utilization of shadow over the police officers as they walked down the stairs evoked a sense of fear of being caught within the audience. The low angle and close-up shots of Rocket fumbling with the camera presented feelings of anxiety over being caught and urgency to capture the next image. Anxiety could also be felt every time the camera clicked, for fear that the police or Li'l Zé would hear it and come after Rocket. However, none of these elements would have had nearly the same emotional impact on the audience had the camera not been in Rocket's point-of-view for the near entirety of the scene. Meirelles' choice to film through Rocket's lens made this scene the most impactful piece of the film.