

# [Cinematography]

## General terms

**Syntagmatic meaning-making** Describes the effects produced by film stories as a result of the way narrative material is sequence' through, for example, the choices made by script writers and editors in shaping the narrative flow of the product.

**Paradigmatic meaning-making**

- The second function, is less concerned with the way a story builds or changes direction, but in the way that single shots relay meaning.
- Cinematographic decisions provide filmmakers with the 'how' of storytelling.
- Cinematographic choices are often paradigmatic – certain types of shot construct or connote specific meanings.
- The language of cinematography is closely aligned to developments in camera technology.
- Cinematographers create meaning through the use of depth-of-field, camera movement and shot distance.

**Paradigmatic resistance**

- Cinematography inevitably works alongside other microelements (editing, sound, lighting, mise-en-scene) to produce meaning.
- Cinematography works in conjunction with other macroelements (principally narrative and character) to produce meaning.
- Filmmakers stylise or hallmark their films via the use of cinematographic choices.

**Microcodes** Film Form (cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing, lighting, sound).

**Macrocodes** Wider narrative themes, character arcs, representations, ideologies, wider context..

**Technology effects** Film equipment used, era of filmmaking, studio production freedoms/restrictions.

**Auteur-based effects** Distinctive stylistic signature of director, author's methods and intentions of representation, director's application of film form, repeated macro elements.

## Angle/tilt

**Low-angle tilt** Points up to the subject being filmed so that they appear powerful or dominant.

**High-angle tilt** Looks down upon the subject being filming, making them appear powerless or weak.

**Dutch angles**

- Uneven composition that suggests character instability or can connote anxiety, tension or terror.
- Can also generate a dynamic or energetic tension.
- Can be used to depict dream states or hallucinations.

## Depth of field

**Deep focus**

- Foreground, mid-ground and background are all in focus.
- Deep focus compositions prompt viewers to think about the symbolic significance of the settings in which actors are placed.
- Can be used to emphasise the space or distance between objects/actors.
- DF photography can also produce strong diagonally configured compositions that inject energy into a scene.
- DF photography injects realism as a result of its mimicry of human vision.

**Shallow focus**

- The ability to control the focus of a shot so only the background or foreground is held in focus.
- Holding only foreground characters in focus directs spectator's attention on the actions/dialogue of that character.
- A sense of alienation, claustrophobia or separation can also be constructed when characters are depicted using shallow depth of field compositions.

**Rack focusing**

- Shifting of focal depth during a shot – can be used to alternate audience attention from foreground to background elements – literally shifting the focal point of the frame mid focus.
- Slows down the editing tempo of sequences, omitting the need for cuts or shot changes, and can intensify the dramatic qualities of a scene during moments of character interaction.

## Camera movement: cranes and tracks

**Crane-up**

- Shots that lift upwards produce emotional uplifts or underline a spiritual subtext of a filmic moment.
- Fast moving crane-ups can disorientate the spectator or produce a sense of vertigo.

**Crane-down** Dropping the spectator into a scene with the slam of a crane down produces a grounding effect or can be used to suggest a downbeat emotional moment in a scene.

**Motivated track**

- Track shots are said to be motivated when they follow a subject as they move across the frame.
- Usually used to reinforce character alignment or to help audiences identify significant characters in a scene.

**Scene track** Movement where the camera tracks towards or away from a static character and are often used to suggest the enormity or scale of a location, or to emphasises the immobility of a character in a scene.

**Track-right** Shots that move from left to right are usually said to move in the correct direction, mimicking the way that we read a book – track-rights might suggest adventure, purpose or optimism.

**Track-left** Shots that track from right to left move in a way that feels hostile or alien to viewers – they can suggest a return to the past, nostalgia, a potential meeting with danger or can connote impending tragedy.

**Dolly-outs** Takes place when camera tracks outwards from the frame towards the spectator – dolly-outs pull audiences into unknown threats or distance them from framed characters.

**Dolly-ins** Moves spectators into the frame, magnifying the drama or to intensify the film moment.

## Camera movement: additional

**Handheld camera work**

- Suggests the perspective of a character.
- Allows filmmakers to engage a subjective film view or explore a scene with a sense of human frailty.

**Steadicam shooting**

- Smooths out camera movement for free-flowing style (often used for long takes).
- To enhance chase sequences or produce a dreamlike feel.
- Subjective form of filmmaking suggesting the viewpoint of a hidden character.

## Shot distance

**Long-shots**

- Framing characters in the expanse of a location – location more significant than characters.
- Emphasises character vulnerability within a dominant location.

**Close-up/ECU**

- Emphasises character emotion, injecting drama/intensity by overwhelming frame.
- Diminishes character physicality and reinforces character emotionality.

**Mid-shot** Generally used to communicate dialogue or provide spectator relief.

# [Mise-en-scene and performance]

Translated means “placing on stage” and refers to how visual elements – props, sets and costuming – are styled. Control of mise-en-scene is devolved to director of photography, who coordinates set and costume designers, location support personnel as well as electricians, joiners and artists to realise the look and feel of a film.

## Purposes of mise-en-scene

<b>Construct the film environment</b>	Directors use carefully orchestrated mise en scene to construct the world of their film – whether built on realist or fantastical portrayal - the construction of a film’s overarching setting outlines a set of tonal qualities.
<b>M-E-S decisions reinforce or challenge genre based expectations</b>	Genre recognition establishes a sense of familiar and may hybridise elements– consider: Westerns (desert landscape, cowboy hats, horses), Thrillers (urban locations, suits, spy-based gizmos) – multiple genre-based traits create polysemic meanings.
<b>Suggests character traits and archetypes</b>	Black (character villainy), Proppian Princesses (conventional beauty) – M-E-S can also symbolise internal world of character inc. props.
<b>Outlines a character’s relationship with their surroundings</b>	To what extent does the character operate in the film’s world harmoniously or disharmoniously, especially with other characters? This is often inferred through mise-en-scene decisions.
<b>Positions the audience to react with specific emotional responses</b>	Audiences do not read films, they feel them – use of mise-en-scene is central to the construction of audience emotion – horror (claustrophobic settings), romcom (primary colours, high-key lighting).

## Acting Style

<b>Voice quality</b>	Tone, volume, dialogue fluency – range of performance meanings.
<b>Body language</b>	Microgestures of actors, eye contact duration, submissive/dominant – shifts underlying intent of scene.
<b>Pose</b>	Subliminal details – action/reaction – meaning without dialogue.
<b>Classical Acting</b>	Script as central agency of performance – no improv, high control.
<b>Chekhov Acting Technique</b>	Underlying character motivation – detailed gesture codes.
<b>Method Acting</b>	In depth preparation to become character – psychological insight.
<b>Meisner Acting Technique</b>	Reacting to the cues of fellow actors – build as a collective unit.

## The symbolic function of film locations

<b>Urban jungles</b>	Busy city worlds that imprison their protagonist are constructed – often forced to join gangs to survive – dehumanising effects of urban life.
<b>Inhospitable lands</b>	Characters placed in desolate landscapes forced to draw upon their inner strength to survive – escape, loneliness – characters compelled to flee.
<b>Social realist settings</b>	Gritty urban settings to explore the effects of poverty – setting: often run-down council estates or inner-city locales – trapped characters in bleak crime-driven worlds where human morality is pushed to its limits.
<b>Magic realist settings</b>	Fuses the real with the imaginary – often uses fantasy-based elements to outline character desires and motivations.

## The purpose of props

<b>Character symbolism</b>	Props can be used to identify characters (or relay symbolic information) about a character without the need for dialogue.
<b>Hermeneutic prop</b>	Enigmatic objects that reveal interior world of character or narrative.
<b>Chekhov’s gun functions</b>	“If in the first act you have hung a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired. Otherwise don’t put it there.”
<b>MacGuffins</b>	Prop-based device that acts as a profound catalyst to the narrative.
<b>Genre reinforcement</b>	Specific props conventionally relate to certain genres: Thrillers (guns, fast cars), Sci-fi (lasers, robots), Westerns (rifles, revolvers).
<b>Genre-driven narrative function</b>	Some props are used to enable a set of genre-driven narrative functions in films. Supernatural horror (portal props to connect spirit world with real).

## Setting types and impact

<b>Verisimilitudinous worlds</b>	Settings appear real/natural – everyday life logic of film context.
<b>Non-verisimilitudinous worlds</b>	Escapist and otherworldly – beyond everyday reality.
<b>Partial verisimilitude</b>	Supernatural and metaphysical representations blur lines between verisimilitudinous and non-verisimilitudinous worlds.

## Composition

<b>Closed frame</b>	Edge of shot framed by object – trapped characters.
<b>Open frame</b>	Frame edges left open – freedom/liberty, isolation.
<b>Asymmetrical</b>	Left/right position – disharmony, dominance, function.
<b>Symmetrical</b>	Balanced composition – centralise subject, harmony.
<b>Character positioning</b>	Often left/right positioning for shot/reverse dialogue sequences – left (empathy), right (conflict).
<b>Leading lines</b>	Strong diagonals inject energy/drama into shots.
<b>Rule of thirds</b>	Actors in top thirds are dominant in composition.
<b>Off-screen space</b>	Actors gaze out of shot – someone beyond frame.
<b>Eyeline control</b>	Imaginary line horizontally across frame.

## Costume and make-up decisions communicate...

<b>Character archetypes and stereotypes</b>	Heroes, villains, princesses, anti-heroes all have conventional costume as signifiers of character.	
<b>Communicate social identity</b>	How rich or poor are they? Middle class (suits), Outsider (unkempt), Married (ring, necklace), etc.	
<b>Emotional outlooks</b>	Colour connotations establish dynamics.	
<b>Shape actor physicality</b>	Costuming inserts/padding can enhance presence, oversized clothing to shrink character.	
<b>Help to build the world of the film</b>	Historical drama (period costume), culturally specific costumes, genre-driven costumes.	
<b>Proppian character types</b>	Hero	Lighter costume coding.
	Villain	Darker costumes.
	Princesses	Traditional beauty ideals.
	Femme fatale	Dark hair, black dress, red lips.
	Anti-heroes	Scars, blemishes, washed out.

# [Editing]

## Purposes of editing

- To shape film space**
- Film has an ability to tell stories using multiple settings.
  - Editing plays a vital role in connecting/relating settings so that audiences can make sense of the locations used to establish action.
  - Establishing shots locate action at the start of a scene while off-screen gazes coupled with eyeline matches orientate character action within the imagined space of a film.

- To shape time**
- Editing concentrates film action, removing dead time from story lines to produce narrative excitement.
  - Editing also enables storytelling to span durations of months/years/longer, while elliptical edits can consolidate key moments in those periods into concentrated sequences of film action.
  - Editing can stretch time, with slow-motion treatments used to add dramatic intensity to key moments.

- To privilege viewpoints and create audience identification**
- The order in which characters are presented, or indeed the way that character reveals are structure can align audiences to the viewpoint of specific characters.
  - Dialogue sequences that give more weight to the reactions of one character over another can lend weight to that character's viewpoint.

- Enigma and revelation**
- Editing constructs audience engagement through the presentation of shots that arouse audience interest followed by moments that offer explanation.
  - Some shots are used to pose questions or enigmas, while others provide resolutions to those questions.
  - This twin pulse of enigma/resolution works like a binary switch or series of question/answer moments in a film.
  - Microlevel – binary switch might provide immediate resolutions (two-character shot-reverse shot Q&A dialogue sequence) but disequilibrium/equilibrium can work across a whole narrative (lingering close-up of significant prop – repeated motif as an editing setup and payoff – narrative info supplied and withheld).
  - Editors control flow and sequencing of setups and payoffs.

## Approaches of editing

<b>Continuity editing</b>	Match-on-action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joining two film clips that end and start with the same action but are filmed from different angles – match-on-action cuts enable filmmakers to suggest continuity without the need for long takes.</li> </ul>
	Eyeline matches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To suggest a connection between characters and/or objects – eyeline matches show a character looking at something followed by a shot of the object or character they are looking at – eyeline matches also help to privilege viewpoints of characters within matched edits.</li> </ul>
	Shot/reverse shot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dialogue exchanges between two or more characters sequenced with back-and-forth cuts between characters in exchanges.</li> </ul>
	Scene set-ups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scenes introduced using establishing shots of scene location, followed by a wide shot to outline characters present in the scene.</li> </ul>
	Scene progression routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once scene locations are established, edits close in on actors, using mid-shots and close-ups to progress action – moving from establishing shots and mid-shots to close-ups helps to inject intensity as the scene progresses.</li> </ul>
	Continuity variations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>The overriding approach that filmmakers use in adapting and disrupting continuity editing expectations</b> – films establish their own editing routines and adapted versions of continuity editing templates – key shots might be held or repeated for dramatic effects or other meaning-making reasons.</li> <li><b>Moments that demonstrate internal variation</b> – filmmakers use familiar patterns of shots in films to narrate action or dialogue-based sequences – internal patterns establish a familiar rhythm, helping spectators to engage and understand essential plot points and characterisation – filmmakers construct moments of editing variation, authoring subtle changes in those patterns when the film story demands a different approach.</li> </ul>
	Editing tempo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Overarching editing tempo</b> – films that deploy long takes give audiences time to process scene action or allow for slow-moving performances – a slow-tempo approach is best suited to character-driven dramas where dialogue-heavy scenes necessitate longer clips or where audiences need time to process character action.</li> <li><b>Tempo variations</b> – editing tempos vary across the narrative arc of films – scenes pick up speed as they progress to inject narrative energy, while the editing tempo towards the end of films also tends to increase to concentrate narrative climaxes – tempos might noticeably decrease during significant plot points too – where character revelations/important narrative info needs to be communicated to the audience.</li> </ul>
	Star/primary character entrances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Distance-based delays</b> – long-shot sequences might be used where a star's distant presence stalls audience recognition – extreme close-ups too can be used to obscure or disguise a star's profile before any final reveal.</li> <li><b>Object/character-based delays</b> – often filmmakers reference a star/lead character's presence in advance of a reveal via the use of what are known as synecdoche props – objects that are associated with a well-known character – objects that suggest the presence of that character in advance of their appearance in an edit – filmmakers might foreground reaction shots of secondary characters before star personas are fully revealed to audiences – awe, fear, elation etc – might guide audiences towards similar reactions when lead character is unveiled.</li> <li><b>Slowed editing tempos</b> – Strategy widely used to delay star entrances – preceding shots held longer than necessary or effect scene-based cutaways before a lead character is fully introduced.</li> </ul>
<b>Expressive editing</b>	Cross-cutting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Parallel cross-cutting</b> – progresses action in two or more separate locations without the promise that the action will meet.</li> <li><b>Collision cross-cutting</b> – infers that timelines of cross-cutting strands will meet, usually used to suggest that protagonists/antagonists timelines will collide in a climactic battle.</li> <li><b>Reflective cross-cutting</b> – similar to parallel action, but where the events in separate timelines mirror one another – magnifies moments of jeopardy or heightens action by bouncing between timelines.</li> </ul>
	Jump-cutting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Godard's jump-cut montages were once seen as anarchic or overly disorientating yet jump cutting is now common practice – continuous shots spliced together after part of the shot is removed breaking 180 degree continuity editing line of action – abrasive and self-conscious technique used by French New Wave's Godard in 1960 film 'Breathless'.</li> </ul>
	Juxtaposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Scale and composition based juxtaposition</b> – switching between contrasting shot distance or jarring frame-based compositions (close-up to long shot – disruption/conflict, switched focal points in composition etc).</li> <li><b>Colour/lighting juxtaposition</b> – contrasting colour palettes or lighting styles – switching between high-key/low-key lighting abruptly, from warm/cold colour palettes – disrupts continuity and infers symbolic meaning.</li> <li><b>Sound-based juxtaposition</b> – gentle transitions in soundscapes with cross-fades and subtle volume changes swapped for abrupt transitions to realign audience perception – contradictory emphasis for effect.</li> </ul>
	Montage edits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Metric montages</b> – time-based edits that sequence shots – even, high tempo editing pulse – often used in narrative climaxes.</li> <li><b>Rhythmic montage</b> – time-oriented editing with varying individual shots according to action depicted – varying pace during build up to murder scene then climactic action sequence.</li> <li><b>Tonal montage</b> – disconnected imagery to build or concentrate one single meaning or emotion – Eisenstein's montages build emotional intensity (see: Battleship Potemkin).</li> <li><b>Intellectual montage</b> – sequenced imagery that isn't immediately related – make connections between contrasting subject matter to infer symbolic meanings that arise from contrasts – montage juxtaposition between positive and negative imagery (contrapuntal quality) build symbolic or intellectual meanings rather than emotional effects.</li> <li><b>Overtonal montage</b> – combines two or more of the effects identified above.</li> </ul>
	Long-take disruptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Static long-takes</b> – maintain held vantage point that invites audiences to explore interior of frame – long takes can be combined with actor movement entering/leaving frame to effect variation.</li> <li><b>Circular long-takes</b> – Steadicam technology where camera starts and ends from same vantage point – to circle central point of reference.</li> <li><b>Linear long-takes</b> – horizontal tracking shots used to suggest expanse of scene and explore a film moment with an epic event.</li> </ul>

# [Sound]

General terms		
<b>Diegetic sound</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sound that belongs to the world of the film depicted.</li> <li>Aural cues inc. dialogue, noises from screen-based action (ie. Footsteps, slamming of doors etc), post-production foley sound.</li> <li>Diegetic sound can be both on-screen (principally connected to character action) and off-screen sound (background or ambient noise)</li> </ul>	
<b>Non-diegetic sound</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sounds not present in the world of the film.</li> <li>Voiceovers or film scores – instrumental choice, volume, tempo and pitch control all play a vital role in connotative effects.</li> </ul>	
<b>Dialogue</b>	Volume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loudness/quietness – connotative effects – voices that struggle against background noise infer a loss of control, whispering infers intimacy, secrecy or shyness – character privilege can be communicated through greater presence of actor delivery in dialogue exchanges.</li> </ul>
	Reverb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amount of echo applied to vocal components and subtly applied to some degree in most films.</li> <li>Reducing voice reverb can suggest character confinement – excess reverb can suggest expanse/emptiness or to deliver hollow/distant feel.</li> </ul>
	Physical reproduction of sound	Panning – process of placing sounds to the right, left, rear or front of audio mixes – reinforces on-screen character positioning – voices can be grouped to the left or right of soundtracks to infer character allegiances.

## Film ambience

<b>Concrete ambience</b>	Sounds applied to underline scene location – traffic noise, bird calls – city setting, rural setting.
<b>Room tone effects</b>	Ambient room tone can communicate underlying emotion of scene – car horns in traffic in the distance, mechanical sounds of a tractor disrupting rural harmony – high tempo ambiances can suggest conflict or disorder – heightened use of bass/treble heavy ambiances can inject fear or emotional uplift.
<b>Metaphorical ambient cues</b>	Soundscapes offer more direct auditory significance, with single sounds applied at crucial moments to reinforce on-screen action – off-screen dog bark might be applied to underline a moment of impending danger – rain sounds might fall harder when character dialogue increases in intensity – these cues anchor narratives, pushing audiences towards a specific emotion reaction at key points in the film.
<b>Silent ambience</b>	Dampening of ambience can be as significant as background noise – little/no ambience to suggest character isolation, suppressed foreground dialogue to draw attention to significant moment of character action – ambience fades into a scored soundtrack can change narrative transition.

## Music and scores

<b>Emotional significance</b>	Choice of instruments, volume/rhythm creates a sonic backdrop to the emotion subtext of the scene – high tempo piece used to construct drama, soft tempo piece to underpin character connection or narrative resolution.
<b>Cultural signification</b>	Ready-made significations and pre-existing songs rather than original scores – politically/culturally relevant tracks to the context of the film.
<b>Continuity effects</b>	Connecting scenes/locations to one another by smoothing out transitions between scenes – lilting minor key score to signify death – continued motif might be used in film to connote the effect of this death on various characters in the film.
<b>Narrative cueing</b>	Leitmotif is used to signal the entrance of key characters in the film – bass-driven timbres suggest power, fear – harps/pianos suggest innocence.
<b>To parallel action</b>	Sound can be described as empathetic when used to mirror/intensify screen action – car chases/fight scenes augmented with musical scores.
<b>To juxtapose scene action</b>	Sound contrasting screen action (contrapuntal sound) – used for ironic or deliberately comic effect

## PART I – FILM FORMS

# [Lighting]

## General terms

<b>Natural lighting</b>	Used to construct a realistic or everyday film style, achieved by using natural lighting and external shoots.	
	Golden-hour shoots	Just after sunrise/just before sunset – red glow creates warm tonal compositions – sun's position produces low-angle 'raking' lighting style that softens shadows.
	Blue-hour shoots	Just before sunrise or just after sunset – diffused/softened lighting – colder/darker feel of blue colour tones that lighting style emphasises.
	Backlighting dominance	Position characters with backs to the sun (no squinting) – illuminated character edges.
	Use of 'practicals'	Light sources found in scenes – streetlamps, table lamps, car headlights etc.
Lens effects	Wide angle lens works with natural light setups – lack of light creates shallow focus.	
<b>Expressive lighting</b>	Applies artificial lighting to add shadow, colour or focal points – lighting is usually controlled within a studio environment, using key lights to provide character illumination or backlighting to separate characters from sets – expressive lighting can shape meaning, adding drama or abstract layers of meaning to scenes.	
	Artificial lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Key lights</b> – illuminating actor profiles from a high angle to mimic natural sunlight – hard-lit subjects that create hard shadows if used without fill or backlights.</li> <li><b>Fill lights</b> – balance out shadows produced by key lights – diffused light source.</li> <li><b>Backlights</b> – positioned behind actors to create rim of light around profile.</li> </ul>
	Directional lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Backlighting</b> – spiritual glow around characters (halo effect) to connote innocence.</li> <li><b>Underlighting</b> – from beneath characters usually used for antagonists.</li> <li><b>Overhead lighting</b> – above actors eyes in shadow (antagonists/anti-heroes).</li> <li><b>Side lighting</b> – partially bathed in shadow/light, chiaroscuro – character interiority.</li> </ul>
	Low and high-key lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Low key lighting</b> – backlights and key lights- emphasises shadows and black tones (horror, sci-fi and thriller) – illustrates protagonist crisis and disequilibrium.</li> <li><b>High key lighting</b> – reduces shadow emphasising colour – optimistic (comedies, romcoms) – reinforces narrative harmony and positive action.</li> </ul>
	Diffusion: hard and soft lighting	Diffusion screens dampen the presence of shadows – spotlights or focused key lighting – hard lighting produces defined shadows and clean, clinical lighting ambience – creates dreamy, muted or subdued tonal effects.
	Colour filters and colour temperature control*	Colour gels applied or just key, fill and backlights to illuminate specific parts of a scene with a particular colour.
	<b>Identifying the stylised application of lighting by filmmakers can help us determine:</b>	Auteurial markers
Character-oriented meanings		Generate important cues for audiences when watching films – use of shadow tells us about the moral direction of a character or help define a character's role in the narrative – even lighting direction to give connotative clues the underline/supplement character action.
Emotional impact		Film exploits natural fear of darkness (shadow, low key lighting) to construct horror, panic or alarm – expressive lighting to paint compositions with connotative colour palettes (ie. Golden hour shoots) to produce warm red and orange tones.
Application of genre		Lighting decisions can subvert/conform genre expectations – horror (low-key, chiaroscuro lighting), comedies/romcoms (high key setups).

# City of God / *Cidade de Deus*

(2002, Fernando Meirelles/  
Katia Lund, Brazil)

## Component 2: Global Filmmaking Perspectives

### Core Study Areas: Key Elements of Film Form Meaning & Response The Contexts of Film

#### Rationale for study

- *City of God* is an example of Brazilian national cinema. It is also an international film that secured worldwide distribution and critical acclaim. Its settings in a Rio de Janeiro favela are 'authentically' Brazilian and the language is Portuguese, but there are enough genre characteristics to invite comparisons with Hollywood 'hood' films. The flamboyant and stylish spectacle of violence and poverty is narrated by a man/boy/observer of the action Buscapé/Rocket the photographer.

#### STARTING POINTS - Useful Sequences and timings/links

- Opening sequence 'The Flying Chicken' 00:00:44 - 00:05:50
- 'The Story of the Apartment' 00:35:00 - 00:38:11

## CORE STUDY AREAS 1 - STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

### Cinematography

- Cinematography César Charlone. 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.
- Camera in a fixed position for 'The Story of the Apartment', spectator watching from a place in the stalls of a theatre, not entering the Apartment or seeing things from the characters' points of view, a marked contrast to the highly mobile style of most of the film. A wide-angle lens and deep focus give an exaggerated perspective to the room where figures appear large in the foreground, small in the background. The story is told with a series of dissolves where people appear, disappear and reappear in different parts of the room. In the Apartment

the characters watch themselves. The walls change colour, the furniture moves, and objects change. The lighting gets darker and darker. The story appears like a series of tableaux.

- The atmosphere created by lighting, cinematography and camera movement can be illustrated by looking at the disco scene where Bené is killed. Shots of the dancing crowd from the dancers' eye line contrast with high angle shots from Rocket's point of view as he puts discs on the turn table, emphasising his position as an observer and not a participant.

### Mise-en-Scène

- 'The Story of the Tender Trio' retains some of the romantic, warm imagery of the earlier poetic representations of outlaws, social bandits, echoing the *cangaceiros*, the revolutionary outsiders of earlier Brazilian films but there is often a disjunction between the image we see on screen and what we hear Rocket say. The image of Bené and Dice with their arms round each other laughing will recur later in the film as a sepia coloured insert, the recollection of a lost more innocent time.
- A montage of shots of six images that turn the boy Dice into the man Zé. His rebirth is through a candlelit voodoo christening ceremony that evokes the dead. A priest in a wheelchair gives him a magic amulet that seals his pact with death and sanctifies his violent behaviour. God has forgotten him and he can gain power through Exu the devil "the light that shines forth". The glimpse of slum dwellers wearing gold jewellery, with their cars and girls bears some relationship to the understood paraphernalia of the gangster film.
- In contrast to this Rocket is seen in an atmosphere of normality and freedom - working in the newspaper office, riding around in the newspaper delivery van with the open aspect of the mountain in the distance.

### Editing

- Daniel Rezende editor "*What we tried to do with the editing was attempt to use 'effects' whenever we thought that this could bring something extra to the sensation or emotion that we were aiming to evoke. If the situation is tense, and there's no time to think, we speed it up and make it even tenser. If the character is going to be important later, then we freeze the face to commit it to memory. If both things happen at the same time then we split the screen,*

*so as not to lose anything. In the third part of the film, we especially welcomed anything out of the ordinary for the editing style. If a 'badly made' cut could increase levels of discomfort in the viewer then we incorporated it."*

- The 'restless' style, characteristic of the film, announces itself from the start. It begins not with the customary establishing shot but with flashes that illuminate a series of close ups - knife, hand, and stone - with a cut to black between each shot. Another photographic flash illuminates Rocket with his camera. He zooms out from behind a network of bars, which collapses down into his image. This is in fact a flash forward to the scene that will replay very near the end of the film, where we will see then that the reverse shot has denied us here, with Zé bribing the police after his gun battle with Ned and subsequent arrest. He has been introduced as a key player in the drama, but still only a fragment. The montage of conflicting shots and the collision of the fast paced editing now gives way to the spectacular circling shots which will morph Rocket from a young man to a boy, and the *favela* to its former days of low rise shacks and open spaces. The meeting between two of the principle characters initiates the story; the circular shot will provide the bridge between what they were and what they will become.
- The series of tight close ups zooms in and out on further fragments of street life - faces, a guitar, a tambourine, hands with tumblers of drinks, hands scraping and chopping carrots, chicken feet and chickens being lowered into the cooking pot. The first mid shot of the film is of a live chicken on the table, tethered by its leg. A cut provides the first long establishing shot of the film. The chicken jumps down off the table making a bid for freedom. Brazilians describe a situation that appears to have taken off and be going but will soon crash to the ground as a "flying chicken". This apparent freedom is illusionary - the chicken might try to fly but it can't get very far. A close up low-level shot from the chicken's point of view shows a plate of blood on the ground, a reminder of the chicken's fate.

### Sound

- The use of the first person narrator places us in a particular position in regard to what we might describe as the narrative "truth" of the film. The use of various cinematic devices that insert us into the text and privilege our understanding - point of view, shot-reverse-

shot, eye line match – are sometimes undercut by the voice over that contradicts that position.

- Diegetic music documents the era. Bené dancing to James Brown's *Sex Machine* emphasises his new found persona. *Kung Fu Fighting*, a song about controlled power played at Bené's farewell party, is an ironic counterpoint to the real violence that erupts there.
- The music then often acts in a similar way to Rocket's commentary, as a seductive counterpoint to the violent images. In many films the music underscores the mood of the drama played out on the screen. A tense, violent or emotional moment will be signalled and echoed by the sounds we hear. The music that accompanies the end credits of *City of God* is what Brazilians call *saudade*, (happy/sad) leaving the audience with a feeling of nostalgia. This can be said to work against the carnage and deprivation we have been witnessing and neutralise the impact of the film.

### CORE STUDY AREAS 2 - STARTING POINTS – Meaning & Response

#### Representations

- The complex 3-story structure involves 13 major characters whose actions motivate the story, and 11 secondary characters who act as foils to the action. The rival gangs and the Runts contain some nameless characters. *City of God* has no or very few personal details. The only families we see are those of Rocket and Ned and both play very minor roles. Characters are in many ways incomplete and two-dimensional. We know nothing, or next to nothing about their background.
- Mané Galinha / Knockout Ned is assured and handsome. He has lived outside the *favela* as he served for the military, as well as this his job as a bus fare collector also takes him into the outside world. He has no thought of antagonising others. The rape of his girlfriend and the murder of his brother and father draw him back in. He contrasts with Zé in his appearance, a fact commented on by Rocket. Whereas Ned is tall and handsome Zé is *pequeno* (small). Unlike Zé, who is given no motivation other than inherent evil, Ned's fall into violence is motivated by the need for revenge. Ned is the tragic hero, drawn into gang warfare and forced to use his physical prowess and skills as a marksman when he embarks on his quest

for retribution. Described by Rocket as a hero who takes on the bad guy, initially welcomed as some sort of saviour or champion by the inhabitants of the City of God, he is transformed into a kind of terrible avenging angel.

- This is a film that centres on an aggressive definition of masculinity. The female characters have passive and peripheral roles. The women in the film - Shorty's wife, Dona Zelia, Blacky's unseen girlfriend and Ned's girlfriend are there to be the recipients of male violence and are attacked, murdered and raped. Berenice and Angélica may reject this violence but they are sucked into it as observers and mourners. They "disappear" from the narrative and what happens to them afterwards is of no consequence. Angélica, threatened by Zé, leaves Bené's body and is not seen again. Berenice, who was given the gun, is seen fleetingly as a gangster's moll. Marina's function is to provide the bridge to Rocket's entry into manhood and the outside world.

#### Aesthetics (i.e. the 'look and feel' of the film including visual style, influences, auteur, motifs)

- Fernando Meirelles was in charge of the images; Kátia Lund helped in the character development and supervised the crew. Meirelles had no experience of the *favelas* and needed someone who knew their way around the area and could negotiate with the people who lived there. Kátia Lund is the daughter of middle class American parents who now feels that she's Brazilian. They started the organisation "*Nós do cinema*" / "We of the Cinema", a workshop project for boys from the *favelas*. They chose 200 who they then trained to be actors in the film.
- From 1960 to 1964 the first phase of *Cinema Novo* "an idea in your head and a camera in your hand" established modern cinema in Brazil. It transformed its image outside the country by reason of its critical success. The Brazil that it symbolised was one of exploitation, violence and deprivation.
- Buscapé / Rocket, the documenter and voice-over in *City of God*, is based on the photographer Wilson Rodrigues. He becomes Rodrigues at the end of the film and his association with photography enhances his "neutral" view of events. The poverty and violence are seen through the viewfinder of his camera, he documents the final shoot out. He is the one who informs us what is taking place both on

a local level (the City of God itself) and at a national level (the slums of Brazil). *City of God* mixes the notion of the reporter with his objective camera that is able to reveal the truth of a sordid and violent area with the film's own highly manipulated and constructed style.

### CORE STUDY AREAS 3 - STARTING POINTS – Contexts

#### Social

- 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.

#### Historical

- 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.

#### Political

- 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.

#### Technological

- 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.*”

#### Institutional

- *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.