

How does the chase scene in 'blade runner' use semiotic codes to create sympathy ...



My aim in this essay is to look at how Ridley Scott uses various techniques to create sympathy for a character which at first impressions appears to be a killing machine. I will focus on the chase scene as this, coming close to the denouement, leaves us with our ultimate view of ' Roy'. I will also look at how Scott plays with ideas of Good versus Evil; Human Vs non-human; Appearance versus Reality and combines them with film noir and science fiction to create sympathy and empathy for a character who's first appearance gathers somewhat different views.

I will consider the films use of signification through the technical, cultural and symbolic codes Scott uses in his film. A prime example of Scott's use of symbolic codes is seen as the chase scene develops, ' Roy' begins to howl, this is one of the symbolic codes used throughout the scene and is a signifier for ' Roy's' pain. The howling can also be interpreted as ' Roy' acting as a predator seeking his prey.

Indeed many of the codes used in the film have several interpretations and in some cases very contrasting ones. At this stage ' Roy' is still portrayed as an ambiguous character, especially as there are many other examples that refer to " Roy' as' or use an image of, an animal. An example can be found nearer the end of the scene when ' Roy' releases the white dove from his hand.

The dove symbolises ' Roy' making peace with ' Deckard' and yet a further example which develops the idea of ' Roy' as an animal, symbolically and culturally, is when ' Roy' rams his head through the wall. This symbolises ' Roy' as a trophy head, while the cultural connotation being that ' Roy' is a

trophy for the hi-tech culture to which he belongs and thus separated from the theme of nature which other earlier images connote. ' Roy' is not only presented in an ambiguous fashion but also as a very complex character and not simply a killing machine.

The dove which " Roy" releases suggests he has a soul and the possibility of spiritual dimensions to his person but in contrast, the idea of ' Roy' being a victim of the society from which he was produced suggests ' Roy' as a product and this combined with the idea of isolation de-humanises ' Roy's' character therefore creating pity and empathy for him. The chase scene takes place in a derelict building where we see numerous bars which ' Roy' has to avoid when pursuing ' Deckard'. These bars symbolise ' Roy' as being imprisoned or trapped by the inevitability of his death; here is another link to the film's cultural codes.

The bars can also signify ' Roy' trapped in the technological society, this is represented by the frequent use of neon logos throughout the film. For example, we see the ' TDK' logo behind ' Roy' as he releases the dove, and when ' Deckard' is being helped onto the ledge by ' Roy' a red and yellow neon sign can be seen below ' Deckard'. Here, the neon sign, with its violent colours, acts as an artificial hell and thus signifies ' Roy' as a saviour figure lifting ' Deckard' from his death. This along with the prospect of ' Roy's' death creates sympathy for him, and suggests ' Roy' as just a product to the technological society outlined above.

We also feel a greater loss when ' Roy' dies as we see him learn the value of life, through the loss of his own friends, this is further highlighted when we

see him teach this to ' Deckard' by saving him in the scene mentioned above. The link between ' Roy' and the nature of his society is also signified by the setting of the chase scene. The building, decaying and corroding, parallels the moral decay of the society around ' Roy' and " Roy's" character gains much sympathy at this point.

Not only is ' Roy' seen as an object, but also because of the parallels, suggested by the set's technical and symbolic codes, make the viewer question what kind of a society would want ' Roy' dead and why. In the early frames of the chase scene, ' Roy' and ' Deckard' begin to fight. We see ' Roy' break ' Deckard's' fingers but though it is a violent scene we are made to know that what ' Roy' is doing is what ' Deckard' deserves and he is doing it because he is grieving the loss of his friends. The first cultural code we see in the chase scene is when ' Roy' introduces a game theme into the scene.

He does this by using rhyme, ' 4, 5 time to stay alive '. From then on throughout the chase scene ' Roy' refers back to the situation been a game for instance, ' Roy' uses the phrase ' it's not very sporting to fire on an unarmed opponent'. He does this to alert the viewer that he is at a disadvantage and vulnerable a reflection on his life and the situation he is in. Another keynote in the chase scene is the idea of ' Roy' as an angel or saviour figure. I briefly wrote about ' Roy' as an angel in my analysis of symbolic codes but will now go onto explore this further.

Roy' pierces his hand with a nail which he has removed from a drain. He does this in the chase scene to increase his adrenaline and to keep him going. But the cultural connotation of the act suggests ' Roy' as a saintly

figure. Here we see the introduction of biblical connotation to the scene. The piercing of the hand with a nail can be compared to the crucifixion of Jesus and the sacrifice he made to achieve knowledge similarly to 'Roy'. In contrast 'Roy' can be portrayed as a Nazi at the beginning of the chase scene due to the clothes that he is wearing and the stereo-typical blonde hair blue eyes.

However, when he removes them the blonde hair blue eyes have new symbolic connotations and we see 'Roy' again as a biblical character and also a child-like figure. A technical code we see used in the chase scene is the weather. A pathetic fallacy of the rain, thunder and lightning in the chase scene are a reflection of "Roy's" emotions. Regularly when Scott uses soft focus he also uses slow motion to create pathos for 'Roy'. We see an example of this when 'Roy' releases the dove. The cultural connotation of this is "Roy's" soul been released and representing his freedom.

Technically the slow motion and soft focus helps to increase the audience's sympathy for 'Roy'. Again here we see soft focus used for the establishing shot of the scene, to create atmosphere. A gentle mood is created by the soft focus which contrasts the violent content which follows. This technique is used to make the violence more dramatic and shock the viewer therefore increasing the sympathy for 'Roy'. Similarly the use of lighting in each scene has significance to "Roy's" emotions and health.

We see blue filters used throughout the chase scene to show and create sympathy for 'Roy'. Indeed in many of the frames with 'Roy' in, blue is the dominant colour. For example in the closing frame when 'Roy' is dieing the

blue filter creates a feeling of sadness. Further more in part of the chase scene the lights are flickering and this is used technically to reflect "'Roy's" life flickering out. When ' Roy' leans over the body of ' Pris' the blue filter is replaced with white back-lighting to shift away from sympathy to death.

The darkness in the film shows that it is nearly impossible to tell who are the replicants and also the difficulty of distinguishing between good and evil.

This creates sympathy for ' Roy' because ' Roy' is judged as been the ' bad guy' when really it is the society which created ' Roy' that is evil. ' Roy' asks a rhetorical question to " Deckard": ' Aren't you the good guy? ', which makes the viewer ask themselves whether ' Roy' is the bad man again creating sympathy for him. Sound is also used in the chase scene to further intensify the audiences' sympathy for ' Roy'.

When ' Roy' and ' Deckard' are on the roof there is church music playing in the background. This links to the idea of ' Roy' been a saintly figure and also to the prospect of his death. Drums are used at the start of the chase scene to build up tension as the scene moves away from the playful aspect and becomes increasingly more violent. When ' Deckard' hits ' Roy' round the head, ' Roy' doesn't retaliate but says ' that's the spirit' again referring to a game theme. This creates sympathy for ' Roy' because we see him as meaning no harm but yet still being hurt.

Overall " Roy's" character is not at all what it seems, as under the outer casing of an apparently simple killing machine we find a complex character that expresses real emotion. The techniques employed by Ridley Scott enable him to create an ambiguous character and although he first appears

as a dark, cold-blooded killer the character develops and the audiences' sympathy with it. ' Deckard' would normally be perceived as a hero as he killed the ' bad guy' but the successful techniques used by Scott to develop sympathy for ' Roy' make the viewers question this.

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