

I. AN INTRICATE PLOT AND NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION

What is first striking about the movie *Drive* is its intricate plot and narrative construction weaving all the characters together within an elaborate spider web. The protagonist played by Ryan Gosling is a stuntman buttering parsnips by doing extras as a getaway driver: a stuntman during the day, a driver at night helping heisters escape after a robbery. He gives them five minutes, refuses to take part to any heist or to carry a weapon. He also works as a mechanic in a garage, the boss of which, Shannon, also runs the stunts that the driver performs. Shannon was a victim of local mobsters who broke his pelvis in reprisals of a deal that went wrong.

The driver (by the way, does he have a name??) meets a young woman, Irene, whose husband is in jail. She brings up their son, Benicio, on her own and works hard as a waitress to provide for their needs. Benicio takes a liking to the driver; the three of them (the driver, Irene and Benicio) spend "*a perfect day*" —to refer to Lou Reed's song— together. And one thing leading to another, Irene and the driver fall in love with each other.



The driver's boss, Shannon, is aware of having a high-skilled professional at hand. He thus has plans for both of them. He asks a lone shark, Bernie, to invest in a business venture he has come up with: having the driver take part to races with a pimped collection car that Bernie is supposed to buy. But Bernie is also involved with a local mobster, Nino.

In the meantime, Irene's husband, Standard Gabriel, is released from jail. The driver gets acquainted with him and soon finds out that the latter is indebted to some mobsters for whom he has to perform a job as payment. The mobsters are blackmailing Standard into heisting a pawnshop lest they should take revenge on his family.

Worried for Irene and Benicio, the driver decides to help Standard in that undertaking. But the heist goes wrong, everything goes haywire. Not only does Standard get killed but the driver soon understands they have been double-crossed from the start.

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He will thus not rest or relent until he has untangled the web and ensured Irene's and Benicio's safety. He starts hunting down all the people involved whom he soon finds out are no less than Bernie, the lone shark involved with his boss, and Nino, the local mobster.

The movie escalates into ever greater violence as the driver takes it upon himself to clean up around Irene and Benicio. **The whole narrative track of the movie is thus aimed at reuniting all the characters into the same circle, or rather, the same spider web at the end, quite a masterpiece of narrative construction often fraught with irony.**

II. IRONY IN DRIVE

Irony takes several forms in the movie

1) Subtle irony is first conveyed through the language, through puns or double-entendre or dramatic irony.

The first occurrence of irony is when the driver wears a cop uniform in one of his stunts, pretty ironic as the viewer knows what he does to supplement his income. When the viewer knows something that is significant and that the other characters do not know, this is precisely dramatic irony.

Another example of irony is to be found in double-entendre: when the driver shrinks from shaking hands with Bernie because he says "*my hands are a little dirty*", he uses the word in a literal way. When Bernie answers "*so are mine*", he uses it in a metaphorical way.

Then, when the driver watches a cartoon with Benicio, he asks him who the bad guy is. It turns out that the bad guy is a shark. This ironically echoes with the plot of the movie as, precisely, in *Drive* too, the bad guy is the lone shark.

Eventually, the irony also lies in the plot itself, as Shannon unwittingly gives the driver and Irene away, thus triggering his own death in the process.

This subtle use of irony at different levels is also what makes *Drive* a great movie, as is the use of time.

2) Time is of the essence.

Time is of the essence and is also a factor of irony in the movie because events are often ill-timed, mocking the characters and toying with them.

The driver first appears as a perfect master of time: this is blatantly demonstrated in the opening scene of the movie which occurs even before the credits. The driver allots five minutes to the heisters, no more. In the course of those five minutes, he is able to handle and control the situation. In a stunt, mastering time is a matter of life or death. This is also the case in a heist because the longer it takes, the higher the risks of getting caught! Hence the close shot on the watch! But the watch is also a signifier to warn the viewer that the question of time is going to be crucial in the movie where time is mostly crunch time.

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The only moments when time is not crunch time are those spent with Irene and Benicio, those blissful moments when time is suspended and when he can be *"a real human being"* as said in the central song of the musical score. But even more ground-breaking, is the mixture of crunch time with time suspended as we can see in the elevator scene when the driver kisses Irene just before giving free range to his perfectly controlled wrath and rage, literally beating Nino's hitman to pulp.

Apart from those beautiful moments of time suspended, try as he might to reverse the tendency, time, for the driver, is always crunch time as we clearly see in the pawnshop heist which goes wrong. The reason why he manages to somehow keep control of the situation is precisely because he knows how to handle crunch time: that's what he does when he contrives a way to go after Nino and kill him. The problem is that however much he endeavors to control crunch time, there is often a glitch in the mechanism as when Shannon unwittingly gives him away or as when Bernie stabs him first although he had perfectly anticipated the latter's move!

The thing is that the moments of time suspended are very often also connected with the elevator scenes, which are equally significant.

III. THE AESTHETICS OF DRIVE

To refer to Arthur Garcia's (KH) intervention, what makes the true quality of the movie is its aesthetics, with its play on camera shots, light, photography and sound to convey this journey into the underworld.

1) Elevation and downfall: into the underworld

The movie is all about elevation, metaphorically conveyed through the elevator scenes, which are central to the movie. The driver meets Irene in the elevator, he kisses Irene in the second elevator scene. Irene stands for his ability to elevate himself, to rise as a human being by forgetting his own interests to care only about Irene's and her son's. Briefly playing the part of the family man with Irene and Benicio, he finds a meaning to his life. For them, he fulfills the promise of the credits' song: *"becoming a real human being and a real hero"*. Here is the reason why he refuses to recognize the man who comes to talk to him in a bar and who is no other than one of the former heisters he successfully helped to get away. At that moment, it is clear that he wants to change lives and walk the line; he decides that never will he do that kind of job again.

Yet, paradoxically enough, his yearning for elevation is also what causes his downfall. By helping Irene's husband, and then Irene, he loses everything: he loses his job, he loses his safety, and eventually, he loses his life..or does he? But this was worth it! This downfall is also another form of elevation.

Downfall is also clearly epitomized in the parking lot scenes. It is in the parking lot that the driver finds Standard covered in blood, which is a clear sign that the latter has relapsed into monkey business. It is also going down to the parking lot that Irene finds out about the driver's violent nature. The camera focuses on Irene's appalled horrified look as the elevator doors are closing, a fine instance of the use of subjective camera.

2) Subjective camera and the point of view technique

The confined space of the elevator is also a good metaphor for whatever goes on within his brain,

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as often is the confined space of the car from which many of the scenes are shot through a subjective point of view, with the camera often placed behind the driver showing his hands while his face appears through the rear view mirror.



The sprawling roads and highways of Los Angeles, a city revolving around the use of the automobile, is also a good trope for the meanders of the driver's brain, struggling as he is through a maze of circumstances which he has a hard time handling. Within the confined space of his car, he is like a little fish hunted down by dangerous sharks whom he has to outwit. The environment in which he moves around is the shady parts of the Los Angeles underworld, pretty far from all the glamor of the movie industry. This shady underworld is also perfectly evoked through sound editing in the movie.

3) The sound of *Drive*.

The sound editing plays a momentous part in the quality of the motion picture. It was achieved by sound editor Lon Bender and his company Soundelux. It is widely instrumental in emphasizing the character's mood and feelings, and sound itself, is a signifier which conveys meaning, as much as images do.

For instance, in the opening scene before the credits, the heist first takes place in silence, with only the background noise of the radio reporting a baseball game mixed with the sound of the police radio frequency to which the driver is also connected. By the way, the viewer wonders why, in such a moment of stress, he would bother listening to the game. Then we hear a gunshot, and the car starts with the sound of tires creaking or squeaking. And gradually, all sounds are amplified into an escalation of noise: the sirens of the police cars, the helicopter, the radios (the game and the police intertwining), culminating into an apex stressing the adrenaline shot that the driver is bound to experience until... the viewer eventually understands why the driver was listening to the game: to be right on time for the end of the game, park the car and mix with the supporters, getting away unnoticed by the police! Moreover, according to Myriam Joseph (ECE1), the music

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sounds like heartbeats, thus conveying the strain and the tension felt by the driver in this opening scene.

Another central scene for the use of sound is the elevator stomping scene. The scene starts with the elevator creaking; then, as the characters are going down, the driver notices a gun in the pocket of the hitman. When he spots the gun, the sound stops, lights dim and the driver kisses Irene. Time and sound are suspended. Not for long! Sound is back when he starts hitting the hitman; we hear the crashing sound of the man's head being forced into the wall, followed by seventeen stomps ending up into an ominous squashing sound. No need to show anything here: the viewer understands that the hitman's head has been stomped to pulp!

Sound thus conveys all the violence laying low within the protagonist in the first part of the movie, then unleashed in the second part when his beloved is in danger. Sound also accompanies the blissful sunny moments when he drives Benicio and Irene through the empty canal; moments bathed in light, sunshine and music contrary to the greater part of the movie which takes place at night.



4) Photography and light

Photography in *Drive* relies on a series of contrasts in light, between the night scenes, or the elevator scenes shot in a dim light, especially the one in which the driver kisses Irene, or the scenes taking place in the corridors of the building where they live, and the brightly lit scenes in which the driver spends happy moments with Irene and Benicio. The final stabbing scene in which it is the shadows of the two main characters which are shown in a downward shot and in a sharp contrasting light is very striking.

How far is this significant? Could it imply that the driver himself is nothing but a shadow, a mere ghost, as Vivien Mossely (ECE1) suggested? Anastasia Parfait (ECE1) imagined a past for this character who arrived in L.A six years before: he could have been a former mobster or gangster, as obviously, he does not shrink from using extreme violence. To Vivien Mossely, and to Thomas

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Duvernay, the fact that the driver has no name emphasizes the universal character of the protagonist. Couldn't he, as pointed out by Thomas, be a modern representation a a new super-hero? After all, he bears all the characteristics of it: the costume (the jacket with the embroidered scorpion), and the mask. Does he really die at the end? The question remains open, as Lea (ECT1) remarked?

The Driver embodies the myth of the American hero (or anti hero) endeavoring to steer the course of his life in a certain direction, which he is constantly hampered from doing by an antagonistic course of events, exactly like the heroes of Greek tragedies, relentlessly steering his wheel into the wall of fate.