

# 19 Intermodal Contrast in Film

## Looking for the Aesthetics of Intermodal Relations

*Martin Siefkes*

This is not ‘like TV only better’. This is LIFE. [. . .]

You’re there. You’re doing it. You’re seeing it. You’re hearing it. You’re FEELing it.

—*Strange Days*, 00:21:08–24

### *Gattaca*—When Intermodal Contrast Tells the Story

The film *Gattaca* (Andrew Niccol, 1997) describes a “not too distant” future in which eugenics and discrimination based on genetic testing are widespread. In-vitro fertilization is the order of the day, and embryos are thoroughly tested and selected. Early in the film, the main protagonist Vincent tells the story of his childhood in a series of flashback scenes:

NARRATOR (VINCENT): I was conceived in the Riviera—not the French Riviera, the Detroit variety. They used to say that a child conceived in love has a greater chance of happiness [. . .] they don’t say that anymore. I’ll never understand what possessed my mother to put her faith in God’s hands rather than those of her local geneticist. Ten fingers, ten toes—that’s all that used to matter. Not now. Now, only seconds old, the exact time and cause of my death was already known.

(*Gattaca*, 0:09:00–0:09:45)

He tells us this in a flat voice that betrays some traces of irritation and sadness, but mostly sounds resigned. The bitterness of his words is explained when the viewer learns that due to his supposed “chronic illnesses”, he experienced discrimination and exclusion from an early age. There was no chance that he would be allowed to realize his childhood dream to train as an astronaut.

While Vincent’s bitterness seems to be justified, the images tell us a different story. The scenes that show Vincent’s parents as lovers and his birth are characterized by warm colours, natural light, slow cross-fading between shots, and close-ups with soft-focus background, all of which gives them a quiet beauty. Furthermore, these scenes are accompanied by an emphatic

violin motif which—for the average film viewer who has been treated to dozens of comparable motifs—confirms the impression of calm and happiness.

While the perception of music, images, and speech may vary somewhat between viewers, there can be little doubt that, in this scene, the narrator's commentary and the images and music don't tell us quite the same story. While the images indeed *show* us the events which Vincent describes, they *evaluate* them differently, focusing on the beauty, hope, and promise entailed in every love story, conception, and birth. The music strengthens this impression. If the film whole-heartedly (and whole-modally) accepted Vincent's negative perspective ("I'll never understand what possessed my mother"), a darker music and mood would prevail.

Peter Verstraten has pointed out that intermodal contrast can be interpreted as a partially unreliable narration. Commenting on an analysis by Seymour Chatman (1990, p. 136), Verstraten writes:

Chatman discusses *Badlands* (Terrence Malick, 1973), Holly's retrospective on her flight as a young girl with her murderous boyfriend, Kit. During the film, we hear her as voice-over, but her account is far more positive than the images warrant. Chatman suggests that she is a naïve adolescent living in a fantasy world. That is why her words are an overly romantic interpretation of their adventure. On the one hand, this hypothesis seems legitimate, but on the other, Chatman uses an invalid argument to support his analysis. Film distinguishes itself from literature because the auditive track can clash with the visual track. *Badlands* demonstrates such a conflict, which makes the narration partially unreliable.

(Verstraten, 2009, pp. 135–136)

The visual track could therefore be unreliable just as well as the auditive track. The visuals of *Badlands* may present us with a negative interpretation that conforms to the external perspective of society, perhaps disregarding the positive and romantic moments the couple experience. Similarly, the choices of colours and framing in *Gattaca* may be attributed to an implied "visual narrator" (Verstraten, 2009, p. 96) whose perspective is at odds with Vincent's narration.

However, Vincent's commentary is not simply the tale of an unreliable narrator. The events shown in this scene are certainly overshadowed by the possibility of discrimination through technology—we see how the baby is taken from his mother and unceremoniously pricked with a needle, before his supposed life expectancy of 30 years is read out by the nurse. Nonetheless, the viewer can only miss the hopeful dimension of Vincent's birth by choosing to ignore the aesthetic quality of the images, the lighting, the colours, and the music—and of course the connotations of his Latin name, "the one who is winning". The irony here is that Vincent would not have been born if his parents had trusted their "local geneticist" to select a

supposedly perfect embryo, a procedure that is used for Vincent's younger brother, Anton.

Vincent's anger and desperation is relevant for the narration. Even if he hadn't been treated as an "invalid" person, he would probably still not have been accepted in a normal astronaut training admission procedure; later in the film, viewers learn that Vincent has a weak heart and bad eyesight. Because of the discrimination he experiences, he feels entitled to cheat and take over someone else's genetic identity, becoming what is called a "borrowed ladder" (0:33:36). Vincent is then accepted for the astronaut training programme without any further tests (0:31:50).

### Interpreting Intermodal Relations

Relations between modes can give rise to interpretations that otherwise might not occur to viewers, but this may not be their whole relevance. In their introduction to film art, Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell develop the notion of film style (Thompson & Bordwell, 2012, p. 308). They point out that a film's specific style consists largely in the choice of techniques employed in various areas such as *mise-en-scène*, editing, and sound. For the perception of a film's individual style, it is important that the viewer perceives connections between the various formal means employed by a film (Thompson & Bordwell, 2012, p. 309).

The example from *Gattaca* shows that relations between modes contribute to the overall meaning of a film. Identifying one specific intermodal relation, such as intermodal contrast (Siefkes, 2015, p. 115), may be an adequate starting point for an analysis, but it is not sufficient for understanding the role of intermodality in a film. Interpretations rarely stop at the diagnosis of a contrast between two aspects of a film, but rather try to make sense of it.

Traditional hermeneutic interpretation has been criticized for relying too heavily on the assumed unity of textual meaning (for example by literary deconstruction; cf. Siefkes, 2008, p. 1)—and rightly so, because contrasts and incongruities have to be noted and taken into account. Nonetheless, in the interpretation of films (or other multimodal artefacts), we are rarely satisfied when we find two aspects of meaning that do not fit together, allowing for two mutually exclusive explanations. Rather, we try to find unity on a higher level, for example by constructing an unreliable narrator, by identifying two different narrative perspectives, or even two levels of consciousness in the same narrator.

The important point here is that, depending on which interpretation path the viewer takes, she will identify different intermodal relations in this scene. To perceive the serene qualities of the music and the images as a bird's-eye perspective correcting the anger and desperation of Vincent's spoken commentary is one possible interpretation. However, some interpreters may simply stop at the intermodal contrast, and other viewers may not even notice anything out of the ordinary.

So far, we've talked about meanings and interpretations, but does the intermodal contrast in this example also have an aesthetic function? Arguably, the narrative function also leads to an aesthetic complexity that would not be there if the commentary—with its cynical view of things—had been absent. The aesthetic qualities of the images and music could easily appear as a cliché if the words didn't provoke a different, more complex perspective.

Let us look at another scene from *Gattaca*. Later in the flashback scene, Vincent remembers how he and Anton grew up together:

NARRATOR (GROWN-UP VINCENT): By the time we were playing at blood brothers, I understood that there was something very different flowing through my veins, and I'd need an awful lot more than a drop if I was going to get anywhere. *Vincent (the child) takes a shell, cuts his thumb with it and gives it to Anton, who holds it next to his thumb, hesitates with a fearful (disgusted?) expression, and throws it away.*

(*Gattaca*, 0:13:15–0:13:45)

Again, the images tell a slightly different story than the narrator: While Vincent's commentary implies that his brother felt repelled by the idea of mingling their blood, the images show a boy who wants to cut himself, but winces and cannot bring himself to do it. We see Anton's hand shrinking back from the sharp shell, whereas Vincent did not hesitate. The images are at least ambiguous: They could be interpreted to mean that Vincent is more courageous than his brother (Figure 19.1).

We can only guess at the younger Vincent's feelings; we have just the commentary of his grown-up self. Maybe Vincent the child had an inkling that his brother's arrogance was only hiding his weakness? If so, his older self seems to have forgotten about it. Viewers who notice the discrepancy may come to this conclusion, or may decide to ignore it.



Figure 19.1 Vincent's brother Anton flinches, then throws the shell away

Source: Screenshot, *Gattaca*, 0:13:36

We could call this a case of *modal pluralism*. We can choose which mode we want to privilege in our interpretation: the narrator, who personally witnessed the scene and seems trustworthy, or the images (and more specifically, Anton's facial expression and gesture, i.e. the kinesic mode embedded in the images).

Modal pluralism in a multimodal text prompts us to think about possible interpretations, and to trust our own emotional response. It can also help to keep a film interesting in a second or third viewing. Knowing about the later events, where it becomes important that Vincent does go through with his plans even when he's afraid (for example he submits to a painful operation, 0:27.20, and crosses a busy street without his contact lenses, 1:02:10), the subtle message of Anton's and Vincent's body language may be evaluated differently.

### The Aesthetics of Intermodality

It is probably time for a more detailed look at whatever secret business is going on between those modes. What are intermodal relations, anyway?

Arguably, this question lies at the heart of multimodality. If a text or artefact uses various modes, they cannot be understood independently of each other, because they are combined into a coherent whole. For example, in face-to-face interaction the modes speech, gesture, facial expression, and body posture form an integrated stream of communicated meaning which cannot be explained as the sum of the meanings conveyed in the separate modes (Mondada, 2013). Intermodal relations contribute to the overall meaning of a multimodal text or artefact.

Some differences in terminology should be noted. In linguistics and semiotics, the terms *intermodality* and *intersemiosis* are often used, whereas psychological studies tend to speak of *cross-modal interactions* (cf. the articles in Calvert, Spence, & Stein, 2004). Intermodal relations have also been called intersemiotic relationships (Jewitt, 2014, pp. 26–27) or intermodal relationships (Burn, 2014, p. 380). A number of models and theories for describing and annotating intermodal relations have been developed (e.g. Royce, 1998; Oviatt, 1999; Wildfeuer, 2012; Siefkes, 2015). Many approaches focus on specific areas of intermodality, for example on image-text relations (Marsh & White, 2003; Martinec & Salway, 2005; Liu & O'Halloran, 2009; Bateman, 2014) or on the influence of music on the perception of film (Pavlović & Marković, 2011; Cohen, 2013). Intermodal relations can also be investigated experimentally (e.g. Siefkes & Arielli, 2015). Siefkes (2015) proposes a formalized model of intermodal relations that assumes three strata for each mode, namely expression (form), semantics (content), and style. Intermodal relations are not only possible between the same strata, but under certain circumstances, one stratum in one mode may interact with another stratum in a different mode (Siefkes, 2015, p. 126). For verbal language, syntactic relations between speech and gesture have been described

(Fricke, 2013); for example, a co-speech gesture can take on the function of an attribute in a nominal group.

In the present chapter, *intermodality* is understood as the ensemble of intermodal relations in a given multimodal text or artefact, including their contributions to the overall meaning, aesthetics, and structure of the text. In film studies, it is nothing new to consider images, speech, or music separately; intermodality may therefore be the real “added value” of multimodality.

One approach to the contributory modes, then, is decomposition, asking what the specialist role is of a particular resource in the wider context of the moving-image text. However, the distinctive insight offered by a multimodal approach is to see how the modes work together, looking across and between modes, asking how they connect to make meanings. (Burn, 2014, p. 377)

Modes can enter into various types of relations with each other. One mode can contrast with, complement, or emphasize the meaning conveyed in another mode. Information given in one mode can specify how another mode is to be understood, for example when a film sequence showing a wolf is accompanied by a verbal commentary which talks about an individual wolf, or about wolves in general (cf. Siefkes, 2015, pp. 123–124). The film sequence may, for example, inform us about conditions in a specific zoo, or talk about the evolution of wolves. In the former case, we might assume that the wolf is an individual living in that zoo and look for signs of mistreatment; in the latter, we might consider the image as an illustration of wolves in general and ignore properties of the individual.

How can we relate intermodality to aesthetics? Aesthetics is an extremely wide field, and there are many different definitions of and approaches towards it (cf. for an overview Gaut & Lopes, 2013, part II). From a narrow perspective, aesthetics is concerned with our likings and preferences. In a more general sense, it includes all effects that go beyond our understanding and interpretation of the content of a semiotic artefact. For example, if I feel elated or saddened by a film scene, or if the technical brilliance of a complex sequence of shots impresses me, these can be understood as aesthetic effects of the film on me. In Siefkes and Arielli (2018, Chs. V and VI), the relationships between aesthetics, style, and multimodality are discussed in more detail. Styles have been described for many aspects of human cultures and behaviours. Siefkes and Arielli point out that style and aesthetic perception are not co-extensive, but they are related, since style depends on choices of semiotic resources that are not determined by the function and content of a text or artefact, and such choices are often aesthetic in nature. For example, the lighting and camera perspective of a scene are often relevant for a film’s style, while the characters and their actions usually are not.

Aesthetic perception focuses primarily on the stylistic aspects of an artefact. Styles have been studied in many different semiotic modes, such as

language, images, gesture, music, and typography, but it has rarely been investigated how these contribute to the overall stylistic perception of a multimodal artefact. Furthermore, stylistic relations between modes, for example stylistic unity or contrast, influence the overall style of a film (Siefkes & Arielli 2018, section V.3). Stylistics offers a rich tradition of methods and results which are applicable to multimodal artefacts and pertinent to aesthetics. However, we should keep in mind that aesthetic perception is not only influenced by the style of a film, but also by its content, for example by the plausibility and originality of its narration.

Intermodality is only one part of the aesthetics of a multimodal artefact. The aesthetic quality of the separate modes *does* play a role. In the case of film, it is by no means unusual to evaluate the aesthetic quality of modes separately. Many film reviews give aesthetic and qualitative evaluations of specific modes, e.g. mentioning the ‘haunting music’, the ‘impressive visuals’, the ‘clever dialogue’, or the ‘brilliant dancing/martial arts scenes’—or negative evaluations of these modes. We can assume that such judgements refer to *mode-specific aesthetic qualities*. In regard to mode-specific judgements, we will often be somewhat influenced by the presence of other modes, which may distract us from or focus our attention on certain aspects. Nonetheless, there is no reason to doubt that we can and do judge the aesthetic qualities of specific modes.

In many cases, the overall aesthetic judgement of a film will be related to the judgement of its separate modes. A film that we judge to possess elegant images, subtle colours, clever dialogue, and a moving score will usually please us more than one which only possesses one or two of these mode-specific qualities.

How much it pleases us depends, however, on intermodal relations. The aesthetics of a film cannot simply be calculated by summarizing the aesthetic qualities of its modes. In the case of *Gattaca*, the relations between the modes contribute significantly to the complexity of the aesthetic experience. However, the intermodal contrast between the images and the narrator’s speech is only a special case; there are certainly other intermodal relations that are aesthetically relevant. In order to arrive at a more general picture, we will look at two further examples.

### ***Strange Days*—the Effects of Intermodal Unity**

We stay true to the genre with another dystopian science fiction film, still in search of fascinating tech . . . ahem, intermodal relations. The film *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995) investigates the idea that experiences can be recorded and replayed with special headsets: a kind of virtual reality experience, but of real events that happened to others while wearing recording equipment. The technology is illegal and used as a drug (“wire tripping”).

Lenny Nero (Ralph Fiennes) is a dealer of this nerdy drug. Early in the film (0:20:00–0:24:00), we observe him as he swoops down on a potential

new customer, Keith, a well-to-do attorney who hasn't experienced wire tripping before. In a dark nightclub, before a background of coloured party lights, dancing, and a video projection screen, he explains the wonders of the technology.

LENNY: This is not 'like TV only better'. This is LIFE. (*extra-diegetic music sets in*) It's a piece of somebody's life. It's pure and uncut, straight from the cerebral cortex. (*background noise of the nightclub slowly fades out*) I mean: You're there. You're doing it. You're seeing it. You're hearing it. You're FEELing it. Keith (*nervously, while smoking with trembling fingers*) What kind of things—exactly? Lenny: Exactly anything. Whatever you want, whoever you want to be. [. . .] It's [. . .] (*pauses, gets up and moves nearer to Keith; the music gets louder*) It's about the stuff you can't have, right? The forbidden fruit. Like running into a liquor store with a .357 magnum in your hand, feeling the adrenaline pumping through your veins, huh? Or [. . .] see that guy over there with the drop-dead Filipino girlfriend? (*shot of the couple; flute motif appears in the music*) Wouldn't you like to be that guy for 20 minutes—the RIGHT 20 minutes? Yeah. And I can make it happen—and you won't even tarnish your wedding ring. (*shot of Keith's hand with the ring*) Keith: Sounds good. (*Strange Days, 0:21:08–0:22:16*)

Shortly before, Lenny had already correctly identified Keith's line of work. The cited passage shows that he is a keen observer and an excellent salesman. At the right moment, he quickly moves over and sits next to Keith, setting up an intimate situation and implying that he is going to share sensitive information. The film supports his intentions, providing the right music and even adapting it to what he says, fading out the background noises, and supplying the right shots (of the Filipino woman and of Keith's hand with the wedding ring). Otherwise, Keith is shown in close-up, which allows us to focus on his words and his facial expressions. Obviously, all of this is for the benefit of the viewer, who is drawn in by Lenny's salesman's tricks, sharing in his sleazy promises of illegal "cerebral" pleasures (Figure 19.2).

We can analyse the effect of this passage as it is produced by *intermodal unity*. The diffused lighting, dark colours, and close-up shots of Lenny's smiling face before a blurry background produce the impression of intimacy and confidentiality in a turbulent, dangerous world. Lenny is the experienced friend who initiates us into the rites of an underground community.

Keith leaves in a hurry shortly afterwards and doesn't resurface, which deprives the scene of a narrative function, apart from explaining the technology to us and establishing some aspects of Lenny's personality. Given that all modes support Lenny's sales pitch concerning the wonders of wire tripping, and that the question of whether he convinces Keith is completely irrelevant for the story, it looks as if the viewers are supposed to be drawn in and fascinated by the technology as well.



Figure 19.2 Lenny expounds on the joys of wire tripping. (See page 62 for the colour image.)

Source: *Strange Days*, 0:21:11

Intermodal unity does not preclude the possibility that the modes provide complementary meanings and therefore “perform their own distinctive kinds of semiotic work”, as Burn (2014, p. 380) points out. For example, the visuals provide details of the surroundings and the music supports a suitable atmosphere. In some cases, intermodal unity can put a strong emphasis on what happens in one specific mode, which could therefore be described as the *leading mode*. In the scene from *Strange Days*, Lenny’s words are clearly the leading mode, and the music and visuals supports his message. While it may be legitimate to insert a scene just to explain a complex technological premise, the film arguably goes out of its way to impress its viewers. At least in this case, the strategy of using intermodal unity has its drawbacks. It takes away the opportunity to open up different roads of interpretation, to allow for ambiguity or irony, and to invite the viewers to think for themselves.

### ***Minority Report*—Direct and Indirect Relations Between Modes**

*Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002) is a clever parable of the problems and contradictions connected with surveillance. A specialized ‘PreCrime’ division has been set up in Washington, DC, which prevents murders with the help of three individuals gifted with precognition. The opening sequence of the film shows us how the PreCrime system works. Images extracted from the precogs’ visions are transferred onto transparent screens, where they are manually sorted, enhanced, and connected with other data in order to identify the locations of the murders. We see the film’s hero John Anderton (Tom Cruise) in an elegant control room (Figure 19.3), as he skilfully manipulates various types of images and data with motion-capture gloves (the film famously anticipated gesture control technology, including multi-touch



Figure 19.3 Anderton uses gesture control to ‘scrub’ the precog’s visions, looking for relevant information

Source: *Minority Report*, 0:05:06

gestures). Before Anderton begins to ‘scrub’ the images for information, he starts the music (0:03:41): we hear the famous G major theme from the first movement of Schubert’s *Unfinished Symphony*.

What aesthetic effect is achieved here? The images are overlit and desaturated, with strong contrasts and fuzzy backlighting. They show humans that are focused on their work, using advanced technology. The theme of the *Unfinished Symphony* is lovely—simple and moving. Intradiegetically, this doesn’t tell us much, apart from the fact that Anderton likes classical symphonies, which is borne out in later scenes. Arguably, the moving simplicity of the melody contrasts with the horrific visions of a double murder, resulting in an intermodal contrast. At the same time, it emphasizes the formal elegance of Anderton’s gestures, and the way they make the images dance on the screen, revealing order in what at first seemed confused and mysterious.

We could choose to integrate it with an analysis of the symphony, where the lovely G major theme, after having been repeated once, suddenly breaks off in mid-phrase. After a general pause that comes as a complete surprise, a dramatic and dissonant sforzato tremolo of the strings heralds the beginning of a much darker passage. While this sudden breakdown of the bucolic G major theme is not heard in the film, it is so memorable that it could influence the perception of those viewers acquainted with the symphony.

Therefore, the relation between music and images in this scene has various dimensions. The music *contrasts* with the brutality of some of the events shown and *emphasizes* (Siefkes, 2015, p. 126) the elegance of the gesture recognition technology and the well-trained police officer using it. Indirectly, it may also *connote* the fight between hope and despair, between instincts that seem to be uncontrollable, and the belief that humans can choose to abstain from a murder at the last second.

Intermodal relations can be even more indirect. *Minority Report* director Steven Spielberg has claimed that the film was explicitly designed to look like the classical noir films of the 1940s. Furthermore, the music by composer John Williams was intended to match this connotation.

[John] Williams decided not to focus on the science fiction elements, and made a score suitable for film noir. He included traditional noir elements such as a female singer in the Anne Lively scenes [. . .]. Spielberg said that he ‘wanted to give the movie a noir feel. So I threw myself a film festival. *Asphalt Jungle*. *Key Largo*. *The Maltese Falcon*’. [footnote omitted] The picture was deliberately overlit, and the negative was bleach-bypassed during post-production.

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minority\\_Report\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minority_Report_(film)))

For both music and visual style, therefore, explicit references were made to *film noir*. This is an interesting example of an indirect intermodal relation that is created, because for both modes, a previous school or genre of film-making is alluded to. In this case, both the visual and musical mode allude to the aesthetics of film noir. It is important to note that the qualities in question are conventionalized aspects of the specific school or genre. For example, the use of female singers for certain scenes would not refer to the use of high contrast, overlit images, and the desaturated colours (effected by bleach bypass), apart from the knowledge that both are elements of film noir aesthetics. If you don’t know about film noir, or don’t recognize the aesthetic allusion in *both* modes, you’ll miss the alignment between music and images in this film.

The analysis of *Minority Report* has shown that both direct and indirect relations between modes can influence the aesthetic perception of a film. *Direct relations* can be experienced by a viewer of a film without additional background knowledge. Their effect can be seen in the intro, which has been lauded for its formal complexity (Buckland, 2006, p. 198). It certainly profits from the contrast between the gruesome murder images and Schubert’s air, which at the same time emphasizes the elegance of Anderton’s gestures. *Indirect relations* can only be inferred on the basis of background knowledge. Both types of relations are used to create a feeling of unity, making a film into an aesthetic whole.

## Conclusion

What, then, are the lessons for multimodal aesthetics? Which role does intermodality play for the overall aesthetic quality of a multimodal text or artefact?

We have seen that the aesthetics of a film depends to some degree on mode-specific aesthetic qualities, but that the overall aesthetic experience

also depends on how mode-specific aesthetic qualities are related to each other. A film with the visual neo-noir aesthetics of *Minority Report* would not necessarily profit from dialogue that is judged as excellent because of its subtlety or philosophical wit, because the overall result might appear inconclusive. Aesthetic qualities of the modes can cancel each other out, if the relations between the modes do not work. Conversely, low aesthetic quality of the separate modes can even enhance the general enjoyment—think of so-called trash films like *Sharknado* (Anthony C. Ferrante, 2013). And once again, this effect can easily be spoiled if one or more modes are actually “good” in an aesthetic sense.

In the first example from *Gattaca*, we saw that the aesthetic qualities of one mode (images) can contrast with the content and emotional pitch of another (speech). Furthermore, even intermodal relations which do not concern aesthetic qualities, such as the intermodal contrast between the content of the images and the content of the narrator’s speech in the second example from *Gattaca* (the blood-brother scene), may influence the aesthetic perception of the whole film: arguably, they emancipate the modes and contribute to the experience of complexity and depth.

What, then, does intermodality add to the aesthetics of a film? In the examples we have looked at, intermodal relations are employed to very different effect. In both scenes from *Gattaca*, they create a subtle ambiguity, reminding the viewers of their role as meaning-makers. In *Strange Days*, they are used to make us believe in the film’s premises and promises, when the film aligns itself with its hero, peddling us the well-known illusions of the entertainment industry: “this is LIFE”, “pure and uncut, straight from the cerebral cortex”. In *Minority Report*, they serve to create a multi-layered aesthetic experience which sets elegance against brutality, order against chaos, dark and unclear visions against strong and simple emotions—prompting the viewer to ask if they necessitate each other.

Intermodality, then, is neither here nor there, neither good nor bad. It is the in-between, the area where demands are made both on the producer and the receiver of a multimodal message. Its aesthetic value derives from its openness. It can be used for irony and subversion, for provoking thought and for pluralism, or for closure and for creating an intense experience.

Whatever the choices, all intermodal relations contribute to the artistic unity of a multimodal artefact, drawing its semiotic resources together and creating a whole. Intermodal contrast can be just as effective in this regard as intermodal unity, and possibly even more so, because it provokes the viewers to ‘negate the negation’ and to find a solution. The quest for hermeneutic unity—for an interpretation that explains all the details and hints in all the modes—is as strong as ever, as witnessed by endless chat-room discussions by fangirls and fanboys on how to resolve seeming contradictions. The increasingly multimodal nature of storytelling has added a further dimension to the openness of fiction—the openness between modes.

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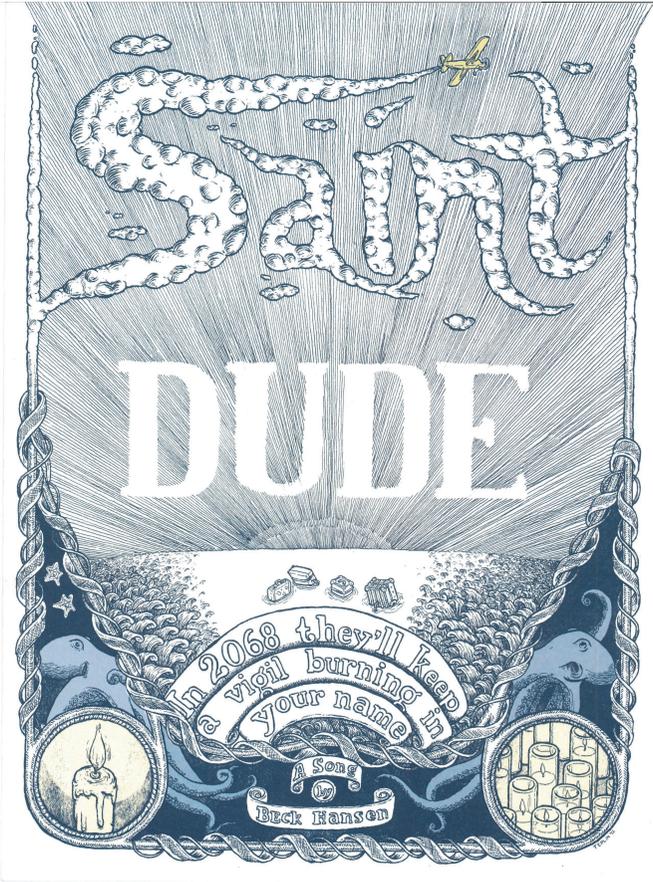


Figure 18.1 Cover Artwork to 'Saint Dude'.

Source: Reproduced with permission from McSweeney's



Figure 19.2 Lenny Expounds on the Joys of Wire Tripping.

Source: *Strange Days*, 0:21:11