Changing the (Semantic) Frame: Intermodal Contrast as a Narrative Means in Film

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> "They used to say that a child conceived in love has a greater chance of happiness …
> They don't say that anymore."
> *Gattaca, 00:09:12-20*

The film *Gattaca* (1997, dir. A. Niccol) is set in a dystopian future in which eugenics is the social norm, and "naturally conceived" children have become an underclass. In a flashback scene, the main protagonists' parents are shown happily embracing, while he sadly explains that he cannot understand why his parents eschewed in-vitro-fertilisation for his conception.

This filmic example shows a subtle use of semiotic resources to illustrate, and comment on, cultural change: soft-focus images, as well as uplifting string music, demonstrate the "old" ideal of conception as an act of love, whereas the commentary accepts and embraces the rule of eugenics. This multimodally expressed contrast can be linked to changes in the frame "Conception and Birth", including the rise of prenatal diagnosis in the late 1990s, and the discourses surrounding these changes.

In the analysis of this example, the presentation connects multimodal discourse linguistics (Bateman/Schmidt 2011; Wildfeuer 2013) with frame theory (Minsky 1975; Fillmore 1982), and shows how cultural change can be modeled via semantic frame change.

Two further examples from *Gattaca* demonstrate that intermodal contrasts can be used for other narrative functions as well: for the separation of narrative voices, for purposes of story development, and for perspective-taking and the construction of intentional spaces.

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