Gattaca

Post-Production Shotlist & Analysis

1:27:07 – 1:30:20

We will be examining Andrew Nicchol’s “Gattaca,” a 1997 science-fiction film starring Ethan Hawke, Jude Law and Uma Thurman. The film examines human genetic engineering and the moral ambiguities through a dystopian future where children are selected, pre-implant, by their genetic makeup to ensure they possess the best qualities from their parents. This creates a society where citizens are labelled either ‘invalids’ or ‘valids,’ with invalids relegated to menial labour. An invalid, Vincent, impersonates a ‘valid’ by buying his DNA samples (hair, eyelashes, skin cells, etc.) to fulfil his dream of becoming an astronaut with Gattaca, the titular spaceflight conglomerate.

In this scene, Vincent and his valid (or genetically superior) brother Anton come to a head in the beginning of the climax of the film. Following a series of childhood contests, Anton challenges Vincent to one final swim out to sea in a game of ‘chicken,’ determined to prove that their last swim (in which Vincent was victorious, pulling Anton back to shore) was a fluke.

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| Shotlist - Gattaca | | | | | |
| **Timecode** | **Visuals** | **Music** | **Sound Effects** | **Voice** | **Comments** |
| 1:27:07 | 127 Frames. Full Shot, Establishing. Beach, Waves crash over the rocks. Camera shakes, slightly. Highlights (waves) bright, top of frame (water) unlit. | Strings, dramatic beginning approx. halfway through shot, no music at start. | Waves crashing, wind blowing | N/A | 1 |
| 1:27:12 | 489 frames. Two Shot, Medium Shot. Vincent and Anton stand in front of the rocks, staring out to sea (left side of frame, out of shot.) Anton undresses’ and walks towards the ocean, Vincent’s eyes follow him out of frame. Light cast across character’s faces from right of frame. Backlight behind characters. | Strings continue, sombrely | Vincent sighs. | 2 |
| 1:27:32 | 350 frames. Full shot, Two shot. Negative spaces of waves with characters in centre. Camera pans upwards to track their movement. Vincent & Anton disappear under the waves. | N/A | 3 |
| 1:27:46 | 98 frames. Medium Shot, Shot from Below, Underwater. Light source is above water. Vincent & Anton swim past. | Ambient ‘underwater’ noises, bubbles | 4 |
| 1:27:51 | 225 frames. Medium to Close-up. Shot from in front of Vincent as he swims towards the camera. Shot at sea level, seaweed in front of camera. | Strings continue, sombrely | Water splashing, wind, characters swimming/strokes | N/A | 5 |
| 1:28:00 | 221 frames. Transitions through water splash to Medium shot of Vincent and Anton swimming from left to right. Shot at sea level. | 6 |
| 1:28:09 | 375 frames. Close Up. Cuts between Anton & Vincent as they speak. Camera at sea level. 7 jumps between two characters. | Music dips for dialogue, still rising. | Water splashing, strokes. | -Vincent! Vincent! Where’s the shore? We’re too far out!  -You wanna quit?  -We’re too far out!  -You wanna quit?  -No! | 7 |
| 1:28:24 | 173 frames. Anton swims on. Shot from behind (OTS?) Camera at sea level. | Music raises again, stays at steady level. | N/A | 8 |
| 1:28:31 | 170 frames. Shot from above, Birds eye view. Wide shot. Anton and Vincent swim from left to right. Centred in frame. | 9 |
| 1:28:38 | 102 frames. Underwater shots from below, no character in focus. Light source from above characters/sea level. | Ambient underwater noises, bubbles. | 10 |
| 1:28:42 | 381 frames. Close Up on Anton as they speak. Camera at sea level. One shot. Sea water splashes in front of camera, blocking view occasionally. | Music dips for dialogue | Splashing of waves | -Vincent! How are you doing this, Vincent? How have you done any of this? We have to go back!  -It’s too late for that, we’re | 11 |
| 1:28:57 | 101 frames. Wide shot, Two shot. Characters below water, facing each other, centred. Lighting grows dark. | Closer to the other side!  -What other side? | 12 |
| 1:29:01 | 225 frames. Close up on Vincent. Water splashes in front of camera. Camera jostles for position, Vincent speaking to left of frame. | -You wanna know how I did it? This is how I did it, Anton. I never saved anything for the swim back. | 13 |
| 1:29:10 | 250 frames. Close up, Anton. Water splashes in front of camera. Anton facing camera but eyes to right of frame, turns swims away in centre of frame. Camera at sea level. | N/A | 14 |
| 1:29:20 | 224 frames. Close up on Vincent. Water splashes in front of camera. Camera jostles for position, Vincent speaking to left of frame. | Music quiet for dialogue | Splashing of waves | N/A | 15 |
| 1:29:29 | 50 frames. Birds-Eye View, Wide Shot, Vincent in centre of frame swimming to left side. | Music slowly reaching crescendo, strings grow more urgent | 16 |
| 1:29:31 | 305 frames. Close up on Anton, who looks around then ducks under water, drowning. | 17 |
| 1:29:43 | 198 frames. Shoulders up, close-up. Vincent swims from right of frame to centre then disappears below eyeline, Camera bobs slightly above water. | 18 |
| 1:29:51 | 149 frames. Underwater shot, medium shot, camera from below. Characters in shadow, Vincent swims down to pull Anton above water. Only lighting is above sea level. Two Shot. | Bubbles, Ambient underwater noises | 19 |
| 1:29:57 | 126 frames. Camera below characters, sea level, Anton/Vincent appear from below the water, struggling to stay afloat. Close up. Two Shot. | Music becomes barely audible. | Water splashing | Anton and Vincent breathing deeply, struggling | 20 |
| 1:30:02 | 101 frames. Long shot, Vincent/Anton right of frame, facing to right, struggling to stay afloat. Two Shot. | Music dim, quiet then slowly gets louder. | 21 |
| 1:30:06 | 124 frames. Camera above, high, pans from left to right to centre on Vincent/Anton barely staying afloat. Two Shot. | Music stays at constant level, strings slightly more urgent. | 22 |
| 1:30:11 | 106 frames. Shot ‘ground level’ of night sky, camera zooms in. Clouds float across view. | 23 |
| 1:30:15 | 125 frames. Camera above, high, pans from left to right to centre on Vincent/Anton barely staying afloat. Fades to black. Two Shot. | 24 |

Analysis

When examining this scene from Gattaca, a clear pattern emerges within the shots. Not only do they mimic each other, they also mimic earlier shots of Vincent and Anton having the same race as teenagers and children. In these previous scenes, Anton wins as a child and Vincent (though Anton is loath to admit,) once, finally, as a teenager.

The shots above mimic the previous scenes through repetition of two constant visuals:

* That of Anton and Vincent swimming from left to right across the screen from a high angle, in a wide shot, And
* That of Anton (previously Vincent in earlier scenes) stopping to ask his brother to turn back.

Both these shots are highly evocative of the relationship the two brothers struggle with. Even in the previous scene and the beginning of this scene Anton is determined to complete the swim, pushing forward (eerily similar to Vincent’s mention of ‘never saving anything for the swim back.’) The two, though estranged for many years, are locked in a power struggle Anton is destined to lose through Vincent’s sheer determination.

In this scene alone, however, we can observe the following patterns of structural elements:

* Familiar Image:

2 Birds-Eye-View, Wide shots of Anton/Vincent Swimming ‘across’ the screen (#9 & #16)

2 Medium/Close Up shots of Anton talking to Vincent as it cuts across to each Character (#11-13, #7)

3 shots from underwater looking up at the characters, with moonlit shadows/no underwater lighting (#4, #10, #19)

* ‘Isolating’ Imagery:

Vincent/Anton swimming (wide, bird’s eye view shot) together, and yet alone, then Vincent swimming back to Anton alone (#9 & #16)

1 Shot of the night sky, appearing to zoom out, creating an almost claustrophobic image

* Multi-Angularity:

In the shots of Anton drowning (#17-#24), the camera shifts from above the water to below as Vincent moves through the action of saving his brother, then the camera is brought back above the surface to finally settle on the night sky.

By examining how these shots form the final scene we can draw some conclusions on its meaning relative to the rest of the film. Anton, consumed by the knowledge that his brother beat him despite his genetic inferiority, challenges Vincent to a final game of ‘chicken,’ who readily accepts. The scene then mirrors the two previous scenes already mentioned. The scene readily shows the social dynamic between the two brothers; Vincent, despite being the ‘lesser,’ outdoes his brother in every way; he is physically stronger, and he works at Gattaca, a prestigious space corporation.

The scene itself echoes a familiar image in the film; that of isolation or ‘standing out.’ In the film, often characters are shown in shots by themselves with large areas of negative space surrounding them, this scene uses this imagery as the two swim together; they are together in frame, and yet widely apart. This is used again when Vincent swims back to his brother; he is alone in frame again.

The camera is often shown at sea level, ‘behind’ the waves; symbolizing that Vincent and Anton are at the same level, or equals, for once, despite Vincent’s apparent inferiority. Another aesthetic point of note that in Gattaca, the scenes are structured in ‘hard’, vertical lines (for example, every scene shot in GATTACA, the space company, is shot with a heavy focus on bold lines running across the centre of the screen) this is one of few ‘fluid,’(eg. The characters are not always centred, and the camera moves with the scene instead of being static) scenes which creates the idea of ‘realism’ or ‘truth,’ in these fluid, not so structurally complex scenes; Vincent is being ‘himself’ in the water.