

AI Fictions /IA Fictions International Conference 2021
Proposal

Title: Rethinking the Meaning of *Minority Report*
Author: Gerald Sim

Abstract

Since its release at the dawn of the data revolution, the 2002 film adaptation of Philip K. Dick's *Minority Report* has drawn continual acclaim for its predictions of technological trends and vivid visions of surveillance culture. Steven Spielberg's work of design fiction is also often cited as a text that works through issues related to data ethics and privacy. This paper argues that the film's significance transcends the extent to which its prognostications have been corroborated by reality. As a work of design fiction, the film's place in technology and film history was established in pre-production, when Spielberg instructed production designer Alex McDowell to assemble a creative team to furnish the script's dramatic narrative with technological trappings. McDowell's "idea summit" was headlined by human-computer interaction specialist John Underkoffler, formerly of the MIT Media Lab, and included a slew of scientists, engineers, philosophers, and writers closely tied to cyberculture. Their collective ideations about information technology provide the intellectual context with which to understand the themes of *Minority Report* as well as those in Underkoffler's other design contributions to cinema. He went on to work on the production design for *Iron Man*, a central character in the film industry's dominant franchise for more than a decade. These are epistemes that circulate in our data imaginings. The vision of the idea summit thus modulates the film's reputation as merely a prescient projection of the future—our present. As a favored point of reference in the world of mobile and online advertising for example, *Minority Report*'s illustration of biometric microtargeting effaces the impact of behavioral economics and programmatic buying on modern advertising strategy. Relating such differences to how advertising has left its Freudian consumer models behind in favor of data-driven approaches, I discern the film's ideological messaging on privacy, surveillance, biometrics, targeting, tracking, and prediction. Those conclusions subsequently inform a secondary set of reflections on the film's phenomenological place in professional fields such as advertising and engineering, as well as in academic disciplines like science fiction and science and technology studies (STS).

Bibliography

- Atanasoski, Neda and Kalindi Vora. 2019. *Surrogate Humanity: Race, Robots, and the Politics of Technological Futures*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Haraway, Donna. 2016. *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kirby, David. 2011. *Lab Coats in Hollywood: Science, Scientists, and Cinema*. Cambridge Mass: MIT Press.
- Licklider, J.C., 1960. "Man-computer symbiosis." *IRE Transactions on Human Factors in Electronics*, 1, pp.4-11.

Weinberger, David. 2019. *Everyday Chaos: Technology, Complexity, and How We're Thriving in a New World of Possibility*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.

Author Bio

Gerald Sim is Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies at Florida Atlantic University, and the author of *The Subject of Film and Race: Rethorizing Politics, Ideology, and Cinema* (Bloomsbury, 2014) and *Postcolonial Hangups in Southeast Asian Cinema: Poetics of Space, Sound, and Stability* (Amsterdam UP, 2020). His essays on new media and the digital appear in *Projections, Convergence*, and *The Netflix Effect* (Bloomsbury, 2016).