

## = Themes in Minority Report =

The plot of the 2002 science fiction neo @-@ noir film Minority Report concerns itself with a number of themes . The film 's plot centers around a trio of psychics called " precogs " , who see future images called " previsions " of crimes yet to be committed . These images are processed by " Precrime " , a specialized police department , which apprehends the criminals based on the precogs foreknowledge . The cast includes Tom Cruise as Precrime officer John Anderton , Colin Farrell as Department of Justice agent Danny Witwer , Samantha Morton as the senior precog Agatha , and Max von Sydow as Anderton 's superior Lamar Burgess . The film is a combination of whodunit , thriller , and science fiction .

Spielberg has characterized the movie 's story as " fifty percent character and fifty percent very complicated storytelling with layers and layers of murder mystery and plot . " The film 's central theme is the question of free will vs. determinism . It examines whether free will can exist if the future is set and known in advance . It also concerns itself with the role of preventative government in protecting its citizenry , which was apt of the time of the picture 's given America 's debates over the government 's expanding powers after 9 / 11 .

Minority Report presents a future of increasing electronic surveillance , personalized advertising , and it analyzes the role of media in a future state where electronic advancements make its presence nearly boundless , the potential legality of an infallible prosecutor , and Spielberg 's repeated theme of the broken family . Spielberg 's analysis of the familial aspect was motivated by his own parent 's divorce when he was a child .

## = = Free will vs. determinism = =

The main theme of Minority Report is the classic philosophical debate of free will vs. determinism . One of the main questions the film raises is whether the future is set or whether free will can alter the future . As critic C.A. Wolski commented , " At the outset , Minority Report ... promises to mine some deep subject matter , to do with : do we possess free will or are we predestined to our fate ? " However , there is also the added question of whether the precogs ' visions are correct . As reviewer James Berardinelli asked , " is the Precogs ' vision accurate , or has it in some way been tampered with ? Perhaps Anderton isn 't actually going to kill , but has been set up by a clever and knowledgeable criminal who wants him out of the way . " The precog Agatha also states that since Anderton knows his future , he can change it . However , the film also indicates that Anderton 's knowledge of the future may actually be the factor that causes Leo Crow 's death . Berardinelli describes this as the main paradox regarding free will vs. determinism in the film , " [ h ] ere 's the biggest one of all : Is it possible that the act of accusing someone of a murder could begin a chain of events that leads to the slaying . In Anderton 's situation , he runs because he is accused . The only reason he ends up in circumstances where he might be forced to kill is because he is a hunted man . Take away the accusation , and there would be no question of him committing a criminal act . The prediction drives the act ? a self @-@ fulfilling prophecy . You can see the vicious circle , and it 's delicious ( if a little maddening ) to ponder . " Film scholar Dean A. Kowalski argues that in this scenario free will still exists , as the perpetrators control their actions , and the precogs visions are but the facts that resulted from their choices .

The central theme of the movie is discussed in the film 's fourth scene . Witwer discusses the PreCrime system with the division 's staff . He believes that its main " legalistic drawback " is that it " arrests individuals who have broken no laws . " Jad responds , " But they will ! " When Anderton later arrives upon this discussion , he acknowledges the paradox Witwer raises ; that the precogs prevent an event accepted as fact , but one which will never happen . To show him that people regularly use predetermination , Anderton picks up a wooden ball and rolls it toward Witwer , who catches it before it lands on the ground . When asked why he caught the ball , Witwer says " Because it was going to fall . " Anderton replies , " But it didn 't . " Then confidently tells him , " The fact that you prevented it from happening doesn 't change the fact that it was going to happen . " Kowalski feels this example is faulty in the sense that the ball has no free will ; it merely acts

according to the laws of physics , but he acknowledges that if an individual were to have freely chosen to commit murder , then it would hold . Film scholar Stephen Mulhall points out that unlike the laws of physics which have a series of scientifically testable causal laws , Anderton merely has the visions of the precogs , whose psychic abilities are not fully explained by science .

Another quandary is that if the precogs visions are infallible then the future cannot be otherwise , while if they are incorrect people will be punished for crimes they will never commit . Kowalski contends that the precogs only attain knowledge of what he calls the " conditional future " . He cites as evidence two examples : the scene where Agatha steers Anderton through the mall by foreseeing dangerous events and helping him circumnavigate them , and a later scene where she tells Anderton and his ex @-@ wife what would have happened to their child if he had lived . In the first example , Agatha knows what Anderton will freely choose to do when presented with specific facts so she provides them to him , and , in the second , she knows what will have happened to the Anderton 's son based on specific scenarios throughout his life , in which she can see what he would have freely chosen to do , and what selections various people in his life would have freely made . According to Kowalski , the PreCrime unit therefore removes individuals from precise situations where they would freely choose to become a murderer .

Philosophy professor Michael Huemer says " that the only way the otherwise predetermined future seen by the precogs can be averted , we are led to believe , is by the influence of the precogs themselves . " He argues that their " knowledge of their would @-@ be future " enables them to make changes to prevent its occurrence . This means that Howard Marks , the arrested potential killer from the film 's opening scene , is destined to his fate and no action he could undertake would change it . Individuals with minority reports however , have a chance to change their futures according to Huemer , and since there was no minority report ( i.e. ; no possible alternative fate ) for Anderton , he could only change his future by having access to the precogs visions . Huemer compares the humans situation to that of a robot ; since a robot controls itself , but has a set number of programmed actions , its fate falls within those actions . It lacks free will in the sense that it cannot choose any action outside of its programming , even if one may exist . He also considers a decaying atom which has a 50 % chance of survival within the next hour , since the atom has no actions which it can undertake to change those odds , its fate is pure chance . Thus he believes a person needs a set of options , the knowledge of those options , and the ability to choose between them to have free will .

= = Political and legal = =

Spielberg said that the arrest of criminals before they have a chance to commit their crimes in the movie had some real @-@ world background in post @-@ 9 / 11 America , saying that " [ w ] e ? re giving up some of our freedom so that the government can protect us . " The future world in Minority Report of retinal scans , robotic human inspectors , and intrusive , individualized , public advertising arrived in American theaters as the country was debating how much governmental intrusion into personal matters was necessary to ensure safety of its citizens . Spielberg said he would be against a PreCrime system if it were ever possible , as he believes that if it did exist , those in control of it would undoubtedly abuse its powers . Kowalski questions what the benevolent precogs in the film could become in the hands of those who trained their skills for political intrigue . Science fiction scholar Gary Westfahl asserts that in a political context , PreCrime may be seen " a metaphor for racial profiling , and one could view the liberation of the precogs as the end of a form of slavery . "

Kowalski feels the isolation of the precogs ensures that they see their visions merely as facts , and removes them from having to justify them . The precogs ' ignorance of the results of their visions prevents them from knowing the effectiveness of the program . He feels the PreCrime officers are thus more qualified to evaluate their efficacy " than the precogs themselves . " In the December 2003 edition of the academic journal Film Criticism , scholar Mark Garrett Cooper moved past that point by asserting that not only have the precogs " yet to fully understand " their visions , but that the process by which the images are interpreted makes it so that no one individual could understand them without the use of the apparatus . The machinery is so effective and precise according to

Cooper however , that the " omnipresent system effectively makes capture more certain than the crime . " When the system targets Cruise , instead of fleeing , he remains in the vicinity in the belief that the system will , in its inexorable logic , correct itself . The apparatus is considered so infallible according to Cooper that Cruise knows once he is cleared by it , his life can immediately return to normal . In this respect , Cooper feels that " far from indicting a security state , the film legitimates one . " Gareth Higgins argues that " [ t ] he government is playing God , using an all @-@ seeing eye to prevent murder . "

The film presents a legal system where the PreCrime office gathers the images from the minds of the precogs then organizes them into a coherent order for display in front of a set of judges . The judges appear via video feeds , analyze the images , and according to Cooper , they view the images , listen to Anderton rattle off " a string of legalistic verbiage " , then give it a " pro forma ratification . " Thus the accused is never present , is not allowed a defense , and is convicted before he is aware he is on trial . The program is marketed in a similar basic fashion , as in its tag line : " It works . " Cooper says that in a typical American courtroom drama , the audience is treated as if it were the jury , but in this system , instead of desiring the hero be proven innocent , the audience seeks instead to have the guilt transferred from Anderton to Burgess . But to do so , Anderton has to disprove the system , which he does by proving the existence of the minority report . This renders the PreCrime justice system inoperable , as if there is doubt related not merely to the gathering of the images , or their ability to be interpreted , but their ability to be correct even in perfect circumstances , then the system of infallible guilt can not exist .

= = Media = =

Spielberg conceived of the idea of a future world permeated with intrusive capitalism and government surveillance after everyone at the " think tank summit " told him that " the right of privacy is a diminishing commodity " which will soon be thrown " right out the window . " According to film critic J. Hoberman , *Minority Report* " visualizes ( as well as demonstrates ) a future where the unconscious has been thoroughly colonized . " When the movie first appeared in theaters a common source of reviewers ' complaints was the film 's product placement , which they found intrusive . Film scholar Martin Hall says that the purpose of the advertisements Anderton runs into are " encouraging him to buy certain products and , by extension , affirm his place in society . " The personalized advertising is disconcerting partly because of the invasion of privacy , but also , argues Cooper , because it is cold , impersonalized , and insincere .

Cooper discusses how he feels *Minority Report* emphasizes the future importance over the control of imagery . According to him , the images captured from the precogs visions in the film bestow power on those who control their processing . He says the film warns viewers that those who control images must be carefully overseen so as to prevent the abuse of power , and that the film presents " governance as a problem of image arrangement . " The film also presents a future world where government probes use advanced media technology to monitor its citizenry . Cooper says the quandary arises when the film intimates that there will be no way to escape the media industry 's omnipotence in the future , while at the same time defending " the need for image manipulating institutions . " He feels that this logically raises another issue in that the same concern could be leveled towards image @-@ makers such as DreamWorks , and he says the " film 's virtue lies in provoking this question . " He notes that the film 's tranquil ending concludes with the Andertons looking out into a peaceful exterior with only rain visible , and the precogs reading in their isolated , idyllic farm , and both families apparently free of electronic surveillance .

= = Self @-@ perception = =

Writing in the academic journal *Rhizomes* , scholar Martin Hall , while analyzing the movie , discusses the self @-@ perception an individual develops based on the views of those outside of themselves . The academician notes that when a child first comprehends the function of a mirror , they begin to develop the understanding that their perception of themselves is not self @-@

contained , and learn partly they are what they see in the mirror . He contrasts this to when Anderson discovers the precogs vision of his future self . At the beginning of the film , Anderton shows little concern for the precogs ; when Witwer feels pity for them , he responds : " It 's better if you don 't think of them as human . " Shortly thereafter , however , Anderton is shown in tears at his home , high on the hard drug neuroin while mourning the loss of his son . Agatha enters a similar period of self @-@ examination when she has visions of her mother 's death , and is informed they are merely " echoes " i.e. a faulty image in her memory . Anderton becomes flustered when he begins to interpret the images which show him about to commit murder and begins to frantically sort through , According to Hall he begins " searching for whatever possible versions of this representation are available to him , other than the one that represents him as a murderer . " Hall says that he is sorting through the images so feverishly , as he is convinced once they are sorted properly and understood , they will not show him to be the murderer , because he is convinced that he is not a murderer . He literally becomes obsessed with himself , seeking to resolve these images with put him at " discordance with his own reality . " Previously , at peace with himself , Hall says Anderton cannot accept the image he sees in the precogs visions . Unable to reconcile the two , Hall says that he is forced to decide that " it is likely that errors have occurred " in the PreCrime system .

When he escapes the building and enters the mall , Hall feels he is disturbed by advertisements calling to him by name not only because they will give away his presence , but also because they remind him of his lost place in society , and he begins " to see through the false consciousness his ( illusory ) previous position as fixed subject had allowed him . " Spielberg said that Anderton is being punished for his previous callous unconcern for anything but the effectiveness of the PreCrime program . " He 's dirtied by the fact that he doesn 't spend much time thinking about the moral consequences . It 's just like a sporting event almost ? and then suddenly that whole sporting event makes him the soccer ball . " His doubts about his own future lead him to examine his previous life to better understand himself according to Hall . He runs through his role in the PreCrime system , and his son 's disappearance " to reconstruct his past . " After Leo Crow in fact kills himself , Anderton becomes healed , and later has " recreated himself as the subject he was previously through the knowledge that he is not a killer . " Although he has satisfactorily repaired his self @-@ image , Anderton is not the same person , as he not longer believes in the PreCrime system . Hall says that Burgess final dilemma ; namely , his desire to keep PreCrime running , his inability to bring himself to kill Anderton , and his desire to live , drives him to see his only suitable action to be suicide . " Burgess has been left truly alone by events , " argues Hall . " His wife fainted when she saw the images of the murder and Anderton has been the cause of this rupture . "

= = Broken family = =

I still carry my childhood along with me . I 'm old enough now to compartmentalise it - so I consciously try not to go too far back into my childhood , but the subconscious part of me still creates traces of it in *Minority Report* . Tom Cruise has suffered a tragic personal loss - he has lost his child and his wife has left him . It still reminds me of the divorce of my parents . As much as I try to get away from it I still can 't avoid it .

*Minority Report* also continues Spielberg 's tradition of depicting broken families . In Dick 's short story , Anderton is a childless , married man whose main motives are self @-@ preservation and preventing the disassembly of the PreCrime division . While he is also trying to save himself in the movie , his greater concern is uncovering the story behind his son 's disappearance . Spielberg would later transform his next science fiction film , *War of the Worlds* , from a story about a single man to one about a divorced father concerned with protecting his children . Buckland notes that the two tragic parent @-@ child relationships in the picture ( Agatha and Ann Lively , John and Sean Anderton ) have a common element . The movie has four shots of them submerged in water . Agatha 's face is shown in a close up shot , taken from directly above her , when she is submerged in her photon milk , nutrient bath . When photos of her mother 's submerged corpse are shown to her , the emphasized photograph is a similar image of her face taken from directly above . Anderton and his son are shown together in a pool flashback scene in which they have a contest to see who

can hold their breath longest . John is underwater when his son is taken , and later in the apartment he is shown lying motionless , immersed in a filled bathtub , in a manner Buckland finds similar to the shots of Agatha and Ann . Buckland notes that co @-@ screenwriter Frank introduced the water theme , as he wrote Agatha and her mother 's back stories while adding the bathtub scene .