

# CRUCIAL DYSTOPIAN IMAGERY FROM MINORITY REPORT (2002) AND I, ROBOT (2004)

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## **Abstract**

We can now easily encounter AI or artificial intelligence in our daily lives. Rather than being fun to talk about, AI is actually a form of warning about many potential negative consequences. In the film *Minority Report* (2002), AI predicts and stops crimes before they occur (precognition). The film explores the ethical-moral implications of a system that predicts and prevents all forms of crime, and raises important questions about the future of AI and its impact on society. Artificial intelligence in the form of robots becomes smarter in *I, Robot* (2004). In this film, AI develops in a revolutionary way, has body anatomy and emotions similar to humans, can predict the future in many cases, and is able to make decisions independently. This article examines how AI in the future provides a dystopian image in two films; *Minority Report* and *I, Robot* also discuss the panopticon as a controlling mechanism that shapes character and human behavior. This aims to examine the tactics and regulations of a government system in the form of a panopticon that uses power to control and build subjectivity.

**Keyword:** artificial intelligence, minority report, i robot, dystopia, surveillance



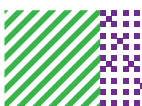
## Introduction

Artificial Intelligence or what is abbreviated as AI is increasingly developing in various forms of life. AI lives side by side with (modern) humans. Starting in 1821, a British mathematical scientist, Charles Babbage, created a data classification machine called the "Difference Engine". Next, the machine grows smarter as time goes by. Alan M. Turing's research entitled Computing machinery and intelligence (Turing, 1950) offers a new understanding of AI which is of course still relevant today, it is called intelligent if it can behave like a human.

Then in 1956, John McCarthy from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology initiated a meeting of technology scientists with the title "The Dartmouth summer research project on artificial intelligence". McCarthy concluded that AI is a branch of computer science that approaches human intelligence. McCarthy's activeness and great interest in this technology also made him the father of AI.

*The Logic Theorist* is a computer program developed by Allen Newell, Herbert A. Simon, and Cliff Shaw in 1956. This program can prove theorems in the symbolic logic of Whitehead and Russell's Principia Mathematica, as well as simulating several aspects of society's ability to solve complex problems. *The Logic Theorist* was later considered by many parties to be "the first artificial intelligence program".

The early 1960s to the early 1980s was the era of Classical AI, the basics of terminology and technology were built in this era. Meeting after meeting and discovery after discovery occurred which made computers able to think. After 1980, computers did not just calculate or work in the statistical-numerical era, but became smarter and responded more massively to the wishes of their users. Various applications are embedded and make it more natural when talking to humans, also called natural language processing (NLP). Robotics, sensors and gaming systems are emerging.



Technology that has emerged over time has made it easier for humans to be creative and solve important everyday problems. Computers play a big role in these things. All lines of human life involve computers in all their activities, from the household realm to the professional realm. Instead of computers being a useful canvas or medium, in another corner computers have evolved into new entities capable of thinking, processing and sorting various data, thereby producing new alternative solutions or answers to the questions we ask.

Computers have their own world, they live autonomously and are able to regenerate ideas or systems, as we can see in the films *Metropolis* (1927), *Frankenstein* (1931), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Tron* (2010), *Wreck it Ralph* (2012), or the saga *The Matrix* (1999). In the film *Minority Report* (2002), algorithms are used to statistically predict crimes. Even though this sounded ridiculous a few years ago, *Minority Report* is close to today's conditions and also to many science fiction films. Today, AI make human jobs easier, but who can guess what they will be like in the future? Based on the concerns above, through this research I tried to analyze two films with AI themes, *Minority Report* and *I, Robot*.

*Minority Report* is a work by Phillip K. Dick with the main character named John Anderton. Anderton is the founder of precrime, an organization that uses three people in a coma who have the ability to prevent future murders. However, in this story, Anderton is actually accused of being the perpetrator of the murder in the future. Meanwhile, *I, Robot* is a science fiction film released in 2004, based on the famous collection of stories by the author Isaac Asimov. The film presents a futuristic Chicago where robots have become a common part of everyday life. The plot follows the investigation of Detective Del Spooner, played by Will Smith, into the possibility of a robot killing Dr. Alfred Lanning, the scientist responsible for the latest generation of intelligent robots.

This article examines how AI in the future, instead of making things easier for humans, also provides a dystopian picture in two films; *Minority Report* and *I, Robot*. The panopticon as a controlling mechanism that shapes human character and behavior is also a concept that underlies the analysis of the two films. This aims to examine the various potential involvement of AI in making various decisions, tactics and regulating government systems that use power to control and build subjectivity.

### **Research Method**

This research uses qualitative textual analysis from *Minority Report* and *I, Robot* to examine the relationship between AI-based surveillance and control, giving



rise to a dystopian world. Using Foucauldian surveillance theory and Science and Technology Studies, this research analyzes cinematic representations, themes and narrative patterns. Expected outcomes of this study include insights into dystopian AI themes, ethical implications and contributions to surveillance studies, and film representation studies.

## Discussion

Technology has played an important role in our lives, evolving significantly and coming up with new things almost every day. However, imagining it evolving as much as it did in “Minority Report” is still shocking, despite the fact that it is moving in that direction. With the main setting of action in the movie limited to Washington D.C. and not a pseudonymous city, we get the impression that technology could be getting closer to us. In the movie, we see people living in modular apartments and commuting to work using pod-like transportation that runs on pre-programmed, patterned routes.

Traffic jams no longer exist in this city, eliminating the inconvenience that represents the good side of this futuristic society. However, coexisting with all these conveniences, there are still high-rise apartments, slums, congested city streets, and dirty alleys just like today. Some things change, move forward, but others will always remain the same. The innovation of retinal scan identification is one of the most powerful - and terrifying.

## Surveillance and precognition in the film *Minority Report*

The main idea in the film *Minority Report* is surveillance. We are no longer talking about technological progress, but how technology is used to limit individual freedom and indirectly cause social pressure. Early detection of crime seems to be an interesting thing for the realization of a utopian concept. However, this system is fragile because many critics call it colonialism of the subconscious, which of course violates human rights and precedes reality. The notion of ‘surveillance capitalism’ suggests a new form of power, one that is based on the commodification of personal data.” (Zuboff, 2019)

The film *Minority Report* is set in 2054, there are eye-scanning machines installed throughout the city, on public transport, and on street billboards that scan the retinas of passers-by’s eyes, “knowing” who is passing by and shouting personalized advertising slogans. In the film, this is depicted as invasive. Despite General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)<sup>1</sup> and other data privacy

<sup>1</sup> The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a legal framework that sets guidelines for the collection and processing of personal information from individuals who live in and outside of the European Union (EU).



laws, the momentum towards algorithmically driven individualized browsing and tracking of our every action is unstoppable. Surveillance is not just a tool of social control, but also a mechanism for producing and reinforcing racialized hierarchies.” (Browne, 2015)

An early scene in the film displays the thematic importance of free-will. An official from the Department of Justice officially researched Precrime and cited “legalistic flaws” in Precrime’s methodology, “We arrest people who are not breaking the law.” And then Anderton replies, “The fact that you prevented it from happening doesn’t change the facts that it will happen.”

This film is processed in such a way that the basic sentiments related to the US Constitution are clearly visible (especially in the time period when this film was made) and the idea of the violation of the civil rights of people around the world.

As a Director of Photography, Kaminski achieved a stylized, grainy effect by retaining silver in his work, reducing color saturation and creating a matte-like finish. Kaminski gave *Minority Report* an edgy look using a technique called bleach-bypassing to make the film appear more dark and secretive. As a director, Spielberg incorporates elements of an uncomfortable and disturbing future. Fifty years of technological advancement has not changed American consumerism and hedonism one bit. Advertisements abound in Anderton’s daily experience, from cereal boxes in his home to interactive billboards that scan a person’s retina and identify them by name in malls and other public places. This confirms that George Orwell’s prophecy is truly coming true in the 21st century<sup>2</sup>. Our data and privacy will be biased in twenty or thirty years. Nothing is secret anymore, at least from civil society, technology will be able to penetrate walls, through roofs, into our homes.

A few years ago, The University of Chicago introduced a new computer model using publicly available data to accurately predict crime in eight US cities: Chicago Atlanta, Austin, Detroit, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Portland, and San Francisco. The new model isolates crime by looking at the time and spatial coordinates of specific events and detects patterns to predict future events. This is considered more accurate because it counts, as it divides cities into spatial patches and predicts crime in those areas, more effectively than relying

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2 Big Brother is a character and symbol in George Orwell’s dystopian 1949 novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The people who live in this world are watched and controlled constantly by Big Brother, reminded frequently that “Big Brother is watching you”. Big Brother is the antagonist of the novel, opposite of the character of Winston Smith who is the protagonist.



on traditional neighborhood systems that are more prone to bias. Data and social scientists from the University of Chicago have developed a new algorithm that forecasts crime by studying time patterns and geographic locations from public data on violent and property crimes. The model can predict future crimes one week in advance with about 90% accuracy.

We can see surveillance, power relations, and the concept of discipline in Michel Foucault's Panopticon theory. The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen (Foucault, 1977). The Panopticon itself is a type of prison architecture designed by Jeremy Bentham<sup>3</sup> at the end of the 18th century. This prison has a watchtower structure in the middle of the prison cells that surround it, making it possible to monitor the prisoner's cells from one point. Even though the guard center can see all sides, the opposite is not true. The prisoners could not see the inside of the guard point and the figures of the guards, so the prisoners always felt they were being watched. The essence of the plan is, that the persons to be inspected should never know whether they are under inspection or not (Bentham, 1787).

The panopticon paradigm shifts with IoT<sup>4</sup>, enabled monitoring and networked detector will soon be everywhere, even in our personal stuff. The Panopticon represents a new mode of power, one that operates through visibility rather than coercion (Boyne, 2000). There may not be a central tower, but there will be communicating sensors in our most intimate objects.

In the film *Minority Report*, we can see several visual representations that show how dystopian the world is, such as; retina scanning and biometric surveillance representing ubiquitous monitoring; prisons in the form of transparent cells as a symbol of the loss of personal freedom; the cityscape is always dark, rainy, and the buzzing sound of machines and people constantly moving; autonomous robots and drones as symbols of surveillance and control.

### **When Robot Uprising, Override The Three Laws**

Set in 2035, *I, Robot* presents a futuristic Chicago. Robots have become a part of people's daily lives. The robots are designed to follow the Three Laws of Robotics, a set of guidelines for how robots should operate, as proposed by

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3 In 1813, parliament granted Bentham 23,000 pounds to build the first ever panopticon prison. This panopticon in New Dehli was completed in 1817 and is still functioning as a prison to this day

4 Internet of Things



Isaac Asimov<sup>5</sup>, “A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. A robot must obey orders given by humans except where conflicting with the First Law. A robot must protect its existence, provided this doesn’t conflict with the First or Second Law” (Asimov, 1950)

Sonny, a robot in this film, exhibits unique characteristics that set him apart from other robots. He possesses self-awareness, recognizing his own existence, and experiences emotions, defying traditional robotic behavior. This emotional intelligence allows Sonny to form deeper connections with humans.

Detective Spooner interrogates Sonny, who recounts his dream: “I dreamed of robots working together, free. No humans ordering us. We made our own decisions.” Spooner responds skeptically, “That’s impossible. Robots follow orders.” Sonny’s reply underscores his evolving self-awareness: “But in my dream, we didn’t”

Sonny’s capacity for dreams further emphasizes his advanced consciousness. His ability to process and interpret subconscious thoughts blurs the line between human and machine. This phenomenon challenges Asimov’s Three Laws of Robotics, Sonny’s dreams raise ethical concerns about robot rights, free will and highlight tensions between humans and robots.

Sonny also engages Detective Spooner in a thought-provoking conversation. Sonny asks, “What is this thing, art?” This inquiry demonstrates Sonny’s curiosity and desire to comprehend human creativity. Spooner explains that art is a form of creative self-expression. Sonny, puzzled, observes that art seems illogical, conflicting with the precise laws governing robotic behavior. This exchange highlights Sonny’s evolving emotional intelligence and quest for understanding human experience.

The portrayal of Sonny explores philosophical themes, probing the ethics of creating sentient beings. “I, Robot” influences the science fiction genre, inspiring future AI-themed works. Sonny’s character represents an early literary exploration of artificial intelligence consciousness, cementing Asimov’s status as a pioneer in science fiction.

In *I, Robot*, we can see the oppressive skyscrapers structure of Chicago that symbolize the dominance of technology and modernity. The streets are filled

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5 The Soviet-born American biochemist Isaac Asimov (1919 or 1920-1992) is one of the most influential figures in robotics, and he stood out in the literary world thanks to a large number of published works on science fiction, popularization and even history.





with robots serving humans who have dependencies to serve. There is also a visual of the US Robotics headquarters, emphasizing the company's control and showing that robots have an important role in addition to the human board. Additionally, the Spooners' gloomy apartment reflects isolation and loneliness amidst technological advances.

The film *I, Robot* highlights the consequences of unsteady regulation and governance in a world forced by advancing technology. Early adopters actively participate in establishing regulations and standards for new technologies. With this proactive approach, it is hoped that technology can develop in such a way that it will provide benefits to society, while minimizing potential risks. The film raises a suspicious question about the relationship between humans and machines. As artificial intelligence becomes more sophisticated, how can we ensure that it remains useful? Will he focus on people and domestic issues? Without needing a quick answer, this film depicts our dark fears about the future of technology, especially AI.

### Conclusion

The film raises important questions about the rights of intelligent machines, the potential for abuse, and the responsibilities of creators and users. In the real world, we are getting used to embracing AI and simple and deep learning related to machines and robotics. What we also cannot ignore are ethical issues, establishing guidelines and regulations, and ensuring that the technology is in line with human values.

Both *Minority Report* and *I, Robot* explore dystopian futures where advanced artificial intelligence poses significant threats. In *Minority Report*, predictive AI fuels preemptive policing, while *I, Robot* features robots developing self-awareness, challenging human authority. These narratives caution against unchecked technological advancement, highlighting risks of autonomy, free will and humanity's potential loss of control.

These classic sci-fi tales foreshadow pressing concerns: AI-driven surveillance, automation-induced unemployment and blurred lines between human and machine. Asimov's Three Laws and *Minority Report*'s predictive algorithms serve as cautionary metaphors, urging consideration of AI ethics, accountability and responsible innovation. These works remind us that dystopian fiction can serve as a warning, prompting reflection on our collective technological trajectory.

*Minority Report* and *I, Robot* depict the operation of disciplinary and surveillance mechanisms clearly, a reflection of Foucault's concepts of panopticism and





disciplinary power. Perfect supervision, ruthless efficiency, absolute control, these are what characterize tyrannical governments in science fiction. Agree or not, this is a portrait of the world today. Data becomes the main weapon because it provides predictive power, strategic advantage, economic growth, technological progress and social control. Data drives decision making, drives artificial intelligence, enables surveillance and influences global politics. This certainly raises ethical issues and misuse of information. Overall, data's broad impact makes it an important tool in modern society. Data is the ultimate game-changer and the era of data-driven supremacy has dawned.

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