

Josef Früchtl

For here there is no place that does not see you: MINORITY REPORT and art as de/legitimation

2016

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/3357>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Früchtl, Josef: For here there is no place that does not see you: MINORITY REPORT and art as de/legitimation. In: *NECSUS. European Journal of Media Studies*, Jg. 5 (2016), Nr. 2, S. 73–88. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/3357>.

Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here:

<https://www.necsus-ejms.org/test/for-here-there-is-no-place-that-does-not-see-you-minority-report-and-art-as-delegitimation/>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Creative Commons - Namensnennung - Nicht kommerziell - Keine Bearbeitungen 4.0 Lizenz zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a creative commons - Attribution - Non Commercial - No Derivatives 4.0 License. For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

For here there is no place that does not see you: 'Minority Report' and art as de/legitimation

Josef Früchtl

NECSUS 5 (2), Autumn 2016: 73–88

URL: <https://necsus-ejms.org/for-here-there-is-no-place-that-does-not-see-you-minority-report-and-art-as-delegitimation/>

Keywords: art, film, narrative truth, ocular centrism, perfection, surveillance

(1)

Rainer Maria Rilke's *Archaic Torso of Apollo* is probably one of the most famous poems in the German language, with its last lines being two of the most quoted by lovers of literature everywhere. In this lyrical report the torso no longer has a head. As museum visitors we can no longer see his eyes, or, as Rilke in his poetic zeal expresses it, 'eyes like ripening fruit'. Instead the 'gaze', the activity of visual (maybe also visionary) perception, has retreated into the torso itself. The body, the torso of a body, the torso of a body made of stone, gazes at us. According to Rilke it comes across 'like a star'. And then, after a colon, there follows the famous quotation:

[f]or here there is no place that does not see you. You must change your life.[1]

In psychological and sociological terms these closing lines can easily, maybe even flippantly, be taken as inducement to comment derisively that this poem is perfect for all those pursued by the somehow inescapable thought that they have to change their lives, be it secretly or be it dramatically. In other words, for all those who have never really progressed beyond puberty and who feel at home in an affluent, therapy-loving society. Their professorial gurus preach a new slant on spirituality, piety, and asceticism, describing these new religious phenomena in endless variations – with an elo-

quence, a love of formulae, and a head for business. Yet again, it is a case of defending civilisation against barbarism, which here means defending popular philosophy against popular culture, defending flaunted refinement against flaunted vulgarity.

Turning to aesthetics and the theory of forms, the matter is somewhat more serious. The poem closes with this ethical imperative without drawing any conclusions, which in itself is surprising. It accordingly refers generally to an achievement of art. It is art in general which confronts us with such an imperative. Rilke hints at an explanation for this phenomenon by drawing attention to the sphere of religion transformed in and through art. The torso to which ethical authority appertains is that of a god, i.e. Apollo. Another explanation is provided by Martin Heidegger, himself an intensive reader of Rilke,[2] in his essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art'. Here he clarifies that the thing we can observe as art is actually a work. A work of art 'appeals' to us in both senses of the word, passive and active, because it is more than a mere thing. Being-a-work means that it has something to say to us.[3]

Yet another (and in my chosen context the most interesting) explanation is provided by Hegel in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*. In order to explain his conception of the work of art, Hegel refers to the human form in accordance with the organological model of his time as 'a totality of organs'. He continues, now in the tradition of Neoplatonism: '[b]ut if we ask in which particular organ the whole soul appears as soul, we will at once name the eye'. Hegel then connects these two theoretical traditions, the organological and the neoplatonic, using an analogy: '[n]ow as the pulsating heart shows itself all over the surface of the human, in contrast to the animal, body,' – whereby the heart stands as a metaphor for the subcutaneous totality of the organs – 'so in the same sense it is to be asserted of art that it has to convert every shape in all points of its visible surface into an eye'. With a reference to a distich of Plato's (as so often with Hegel, the quotation is inexact), he then concludes that art 'makes every one of its productions into a thousand-eyed Argus'.[4]

Linking Hegel and Rilke for the time being, then, we can thus establish that art is assigned a feature or peculiarity originally assigned to a creature from Ancient Greek mythology (the thousand-eyed Argus), as well as to the Jewish-Christian all-seeing and therefore all-knowing God, and then much later to the surveillance state, modelled on the Panopticon according to an assumption put forward by Michel Foucault: in this social world everything

can be seen except the all-seeing authority itself (which within the religious framework, of course, was attributed to God). To this extent, mythological, theological, and state-social semantics overlap in the area of aesthetics preferred since the emergence of Modernity some 200 years ago – that is, art. Since then the state or society has also become describable as a work of art, especially when described according to the organological model of German Idealism as ‘body politic’. This analogy between the state and the soul has been familiar to Western thinking since Plato introduced it in his *Republic*. Most recently it has also occurred in so-called postmodern thinking: for Foucault in the analogy between government and self-government; and for Deleuze, albeit distorted and undermined, in the epistemological and sociopolitical ideal of a body without organs, an anti-Oedipal utopia in which everything should be paired off with everything else. For him, too, however, the model for this is art, in particular Antonin Artaud’s theatre of cruelty, in which violent experiences overwhelm the spectator *qua* subject. In painting, taking up Paul Valéry, he believes the artistic eye to be capable of making the non-visual visible to the same extent as it learns to concentrate on objects only in passing. In the sense of a radicalised Kant, we are here concerned with a play where the players, the cognitive faculties, are at odds with each other, and shed the idea of common sense like old skin.[5]

Of course, in art itself we have to remember that the topic of a seeing work in its modern profile also has the significance of an alienating reversal of the subject-object relation: a work which I have made, and which I can look at, looks at me. Insofar the object becomes a *quasi* subject. But such a description remains within the framework of subject-object thought. Instead, Jacques Lacan – figuring as an intellectual authority behind Foucault and Deleuze – suggests to regard the object looking at the subject as a *thing*, more precisely in analogy to Kant’s thing-in-itself as an entity we have to presuppose without ever being able to signify it. Lacan’s favoured aesthetic example here is a painting: Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*. Referring to a painting, or a sculpture – as it is the case in Rilke (and implicitly in Hegel as well) – makes sense if we want to give, in the literal meaning of the word, evidence to the thesis that an object or a thing is looking at me. It is much more complicated to use film, literature, or music as a respective example. In the case of film, Slavoj Žižek – without getting tired – tries to argue for Lacan’s speculative perspective. The gaze of the object, then, appears once we realise that there is a point of rupture in the cinematic technique, or in the (mostly classical) style of narration; for example, when the subjective

point of view of a character and the shot that we see in cinema diverge (Žižek's example is a key scene in *Vertigo* [Alfred Hitchcock, 1958]). But it is telling that such a gaze of the object cannot avoid the predicate of being spectral (*geisterhaft*).^[6] In any case, talking about the gaze of the object is not by chance connected to certain forms of art – figurative painting and classical sculpture. In the case of film, literature, and finally music, we need a more sophisticated technical explanation to uphold to such a way of talking.

The Rilke-Hegel connection can admittedly be interpreted in two different directions. Not only does the body politic appear in an idealised fashion as a work of art, but also art appears as a surveillance body analogous to the state. After elevating art to mythological heights and the heavens of Christian theology – in other words after awarding it with a certain accolade for both metaphysical reasons (it provides a higher truth) and ethical-authoritative reasons – it issues a fundamental imperative; it is now embraced politically in a secular form of its panoptic competence.

In what sense is this analogy truly viable? This is my question, and my answer is that this analogy works in two senses. First, art is part of a panoptic culture as long as it holds fast to an emphatic claim to truth and, by association, perfection. Second, it is part of this culture as long as it remains fixated on visuality, as is primarily the case in film. In the following, I would like to test this double assumption by analysing a popular work of art from our modern age, the film *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002).

(2)

Minority Report is constructed along the lines of a thriller. There is a hero and a conspiracy, and the hero is victorious in the face of this conspiracy. The film also belongs to the science fiction genre.^[7] John Anderton (Tom Cruise), the hero of the story, gets caught in the clutches of Precrime, a police department in Washington D.C. specialised in preventing crimes by arresting the perpetrators before an act has been committed. The department is capable of such preventive work because it draws upon the skills of so-called *precognitives*, or *precogs* for short. They are traumatised mutants with the exceptional ability to dream of crimes taking place in the future, in other words quite literally to foresee crimes, to see them beforehand. Police department experts then project the dreams onto a screen, compile an ordered whole from these chaotic sequences, and intervene in events already

unfolding in reality. In exactly this way, Anderton himself is accused of a future murder, of killing the man he thinks killed his young son years earlier. This death is his trauma. In the course of the story Anderton then discovers how this accusation could come about. His boss Lamar Burgess (Max van Sydow), the Head of the Precrime Department, finds out that Anderton has accidentally stumbled across a previously unknown murder, the murder of the mother of the most talented *precog*, Agatha (Samantha Morton) – named as a tribute to crime writer Agatha Christie.[8] Burgess committed this murder himself in order to be able to keep Agatha and not have to hand her back to her mother. Without her, he would be unable to sustain the Precrime system he has personally created. In order to prevent the murder from ultimately being exposed, Burgess manipulates the precognitive system and makes Anderton his victim. The storyline thus follows the pattern of a person whose job it is to solve crimes himself becoming a suspect. At the beginning of the film the hero knows as little about this intrigue as the viewers. The basic tension in the film is therefore that of a whodunit.

Within this basic and simple context the key question is how, in the age of Precrime, the machinator is able to manipulate the system. The answer, which we discover at the same time as the hero, is that the precogs can also see so-called echos, repeat images of murders which they have already seen. The Precrime system pays no attention to these echos precisely because they are past and not future crimes. In the early days of Precrime, Burgess hires someone to murder the mother of Agatha, the precog. As expected, the precognitive mutants, including Agatha herself, foresee this and the man is arrested before the murder can be committed. Directly afterwards, however, Burgess himself dresses up as the murderer and reenacts the scenario, really killing Agatha's mother in the process. In this case, too, the precogs foresee the murder, but the police unit on duty believe the vision to be an echo, a mere repetition, and therefore pay it no attention, again just as Burgess expected. Agatha, however, the daughter of the victim, retains her traumatic visions and thus enables Anderton, as well as a researcher from the Ministry of Justice (played by Colin Farrell), to expose the murder.

The film's opening – which lasts 14 minutes and is a classic exposition in a classical movie – is the 'most abstract and complex of any Spielberg film' so far.[9] Unprepared, we as viewers first find ourselves confronted with a murder scene – the murder of an unfaithful wife and her lover by her husband. The images are distorted and twisted, moving at different speeds and in different time dimensions. They come across as snatches of images

which have been flung out and watered down and sped up. The scene ends with a close-up of the eye of the murdered woman, which then merges into the eye of Agatha, the precognitive mutant. At this moment we realise that this scene has just played out inside Agatha's head. For the first time we become aware of the film's guiding use of metaphors pertaining to vision and the eyes. In the next scene we see Anderton in the so-called 'temple': the analysis room at Precrime headquarters, where the visions of the precognitives are projected onto a transparent screen and then com-plied in such a way as to create in a meaningful whole. The projected visions can be worked on using hand and arm movements with the aid of a special glove, as if the whole thing were technological magic. This scene could be interpreted as one of the most beautiful recent visualisations of what philosophy and the humanities do, or at least should do – hermeneutics within the constraints of time and action; Benjaminian historical philosophy under neotechnological conditions; or, less dramatically, an experimenting game with fragments, a puzzle, beneath a holistic hypothesis. Like a conductor – this scene is set to the music of Franz Schubert's 7th Symphony, the so-called unfinished one, which can be interpreted as an early indication of the unfinished nature of the only seemingly perfect Precrime system – the hermeneutically-constructing philosopher and scientist is confronted with phenomena, pushes them this way and that, tries, rejects, searches for crucial details. Unlike philosophers, the members of the Precrime Department have to operate from within the rigid corset of practical considerations and only have a very limited amount of time available; according to the prediction the murder will take place in precisely 24 minutes and 13 seconds. Three chains of events are thus intertwined in the opening sequence: fragments of the foreseen murder, hermeneutic construction, and initially everyday occurrences in the lives of the husband and wife; they have breakfast, he leaves the house, but then he watches his rival enter, creeps back in, grabs a pair of scissors as a weapon, catches the adulterous lovers in the act, prepares to kill them, and is arrested by the Precrime team.

Minority Report ultimately leads its hero to victory. He convicts the villain, proves his own innocence, and makes a pivotal contribution to abolishing this dangerous system of crime fighting. It seems that this set-up is not perfect after all. Not only does it sometimes produce a vision from one of the mutants which deviates from the others, but the system itself has an embedded and immanently destructive paradox. A prediction, namely the guaranteed assertion that a crime will take place, is precisely the reason why

it does not take place. Neither the film's youthful hero nor his fatherlike adversary actually carry out the murders they are predicted to carry out. We have no reason to assume *a priori* that this could not also have been true for some of the people now preventively imprisoned forever. But this brings us to a discussion of the key issue in this article.

(3)

Does *Minority Report* manage to legitimise or delegitimise a normative order?[10] What does it mean at all to speak about legitimisation in the context of movies? Several positive answers are available if we look at the normative order itself. What exactly is it which is being legitimised or delegitimised? I should like to answer this by addressing five different points.

(a) *Minority Report* seems to have an obvious delegitimising impact as far as a perfect totalitarian system of surveillance is concerned. In accordance with the science fiction genre, the film, like the book by Philip K. Dick that it is based on, runs with and exaggerates tendencies already existent in the present day. The film was released in 2002; Dick's short story was published back in 1956, the same year that J. Edgar Hoover (Director of the FBI for nearly 50 years without interruption, from 1924-1972) institutionalised a covert programme in the USA for pursuing communists. It was the age of the Cold War and McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee. Spielberg's film, in contrast, was released post-9/11. The numbers stand for the largest and most effective terrorist attack on a country within the cultural and political Western hemisphere to date. Today political terrorism is also held high as the official justification, or rather the alibi, for transforming a civilian state which looks after public safety into a prevention state, in which all citizens are potential suspects. It would appear[11] that the Department of Homeland Security, founded in the USA following the attacks on 11 September 2001, has been working in secret on a type of Precrime programme for years. One would like to assume that the Department does not rely on the extrasensory powers of precogs (although a deadly serious comedy such as *The Men Who Stare at Goats* [Grant Heslov, 2009] reminds us that the US military never shies away from testing even the most abstruse theory if it is for a good, i.e. their own, cause). As far as we can gather, the scientists and technicians in the Department go about their work far more soberly. A screening technology, combined with video and sound material,

is supposed to recognise suspicious individuals by evaluating criteria such as ethnicity, sex, age, but also respiratory and heart rates. First tests have apparently already been conducted in airports and at major events (such as sports tournaments and concerts).

This development overlaps fatally with our consumer and communication-oriented society and all the new technological possibilities bundled in social networks. As most of us know, Facebook introduced a face recognition service in the summer of 2011.[12] Those who choose to upload photos need to know that the files now run through a biometric scanner and are tagged with names. This function can be limited to so-called ‘friends’, and it can be de-installed, albeit with some effort – yet it remains a component of the Facebook database. The next step comes in the shape of ‘gigatagging’. Individuals appearing in group photos can be matched to their Facebook profiles. It will come as no surprise that for this the photos are fed through an automatic face recognition software,[13] and that it is only a question of time until individuals appearing in photos from mass gatherings will be identifiable. We can read that the US investment in biometric identification software amounts to one-thousand million Euros. A similar procedure is tested at airports. Human checks can only be selective, and ultimately the control will be handed over entirely to machines. Industry and marketing experts are, naturally, also keen to use this technology; digital profiles are valuable as customer profiles. Market researchers, for example, are very interested in a programme developed with the aid of cognitive science which can draw conclusions about personal mood from facial expressions – in other words conclusions about the internal from the external. In any case we can be fairly sure that future consumers will find themselves in the same situation as John Anderton when he is on the run and hurrying through a shopping mall – greeted personally by hoardings outside the various shops which invite him to come in and browse. If you have your eyes swapped, scanning will lead to you being greeted by a new name.

(b) *Minority Report* is a science fiction story delivering a focussed delegitimisation of a societal surveillance system with its origins in the present day. The film potentially also delivers a delegitimisation of the legitimisation of this system. One of the paradoxes it shows – in other words one of the statements contradicting popular opinion or one of the self-contradicting fundamental truths – is that the instrument chosen to fight against evil, the instrument of good, is actually itself founded on evil. ‘One paradox the film presents is that the system designed to prevent murder is itself founded on

murder.’[14] In common parlance we might say the fox has been put in charge of the henhouse.

In the postmodern age, Lyotard and Derrida have pedantically dissected the paradox of the original or founding political act by analysing the constitutions of modern states such as France and the USA. In its core this paradox consists in founding right on the basis of wrong, allowing legality to originate from caprice, while at the same time mythicising it. Hegel also recognised this genealogical context but drew different conclusions about validity, and in so doing changed the paradoxical relationship into a dialectical one. In his analysis of the hero as initiator of laws and states he openly describes the founding act of the hero as an act of violence, caprice, and iniquity. But this iniquity, like all wrong for Hegel, is a necessary stage in the development of right, a development which, like every development for Hegel, follows the principle of determinate negation. Right thus develops from its original, being-in-itself validity imposed only by the act of the hero to a genuine validity which materialises in the course of a historical process. Real is what remains as affirmed following the negation process.[15]

Minority Report is quite clearly not operating at this general level.[16] It presents no more, but also no less, than an individual case which can be seen but which does not have to be seen as representative of a generality. Its validity status – the manner of its justification and legitimation – is therefore of the kind which Kant in his *Critique of Judgement* calls ‘exemplary’.[17] Using argumentation theory, the exemplary can then be justified inasmuch as successful argumentation is not (exclusively) a derivation of the particular from the general. Vice versa, its ‘reflecting’ side actually consists in finding for a given particularity the relevant general assumption, in this case the paradoxical founding act of right. A film like *Minority Report* provides a potential common experience to which participants in a discourse can refer, either by using this experience as an example or by generating an idea or a hypothesis only possible because of and through this experience. But, in the words of John Dewey, having an experience means finding a form, a ‘definiteness and interest’ in the flow of life, which permits us to recall an episode and say, ‘That *was* an experience!’ This experience may be something of tremendous importance or something slight, an averted catastrophe or a meal in a Paris restaurant.[18] In the case of films, we should add, the form of the experience is one dominated by narrative.

(c) *Minority Report* also makes a fairly obvious contribution to the now widespread cultural scientific assumption of Western, and in particular Modern, ocular centrism. Accordingly, in the year 2054 identity is deduced through identification via the iris of the individual. Cameras in all public places, on all public transport, and in all shopping malls, scan and identify passers-by in seconds. As the English language so beautifully allows, one is 'eye-dented'. 'I' and 'eye' merge to become not only a phonetic unit but also a technological unit of identification for observational purposes. 'I am seen, therefore I am.'

Of course, the role played by film in this context is ambivalent. Criticism of the primacy of seeing occurs here within a technological medium which is primarily geared towards the visual. These days, film theory and philosophy of film pay due attention to both the auditory and the physical as additional manners of perception, but there can be no doubt at all that in the cinematic context primacy is attributed to seeing. Physicality is constitutive for all perception – while not being able to hear for physiological reasons does not mean being unable to comprehend what a film is, but being unable to see does mean being unable to comprehend what a film is. Here we should note that the more a film activates physical perception the more the narrative element (the chronologically and causally-ordering element) recedes. 'What happens when and why?' is a question which then fades into the background in favour of the affective momentum of the present action. This is especially true of the 'body genres': melodrama, horror, and pornography.[19] A crying, bleeding, twitching, or writhing body which emits unarticulated sounds is aimed at affect, not at the narrative reconstructive logic of its audience. There is no affective reaction on the side of the viewer if there is no sound with the images. *Minority Report* also employs this model, albeit not pivotally, and this is clearest in the scene where Anderton – after a cynical surgeon, aided by his made-up assistant, has implanted new eyes in his head – stumbles through their dirty hole of an apartment with bandaged eyes looking for something to eat and drink. He finds something in the fridge, but instead of a fresh sandwich takes a green and mouldy one, bites hungrily into it and then immediately, in order to get rid of the taste, grabs a milk bottle. In his panic he has taken one whose contents are no less green, and in order to get rid of this disgusting taste he grabs a canister. Instead of the desired water this canister contains an acidic liquid, so that our thwarted hero, repeatedly spitting and gagging, is floored three times.

Present-day philosophy of film is by no means fixated on a simple critique of ocular centrism. For Deleuze, for example, cinema as a modern, secular-Catholic version of the resurrection of the flesh is a resurrection not only of affect-entangled perception but also of seeing in the sense of visionary perception. Also for Nietzsche, a philosopher usually readily quoted as a firm supporter of the anti-ocular centrists, seeing means first and foremost trusting in the healing powers of (a) vision. Nietzsche will not help us to circumvent the logocentrism bequeathed to us by the latest French critique of reason, not least as a tribute to Nietzsche himself, with an *ocular centrism*. But if it cannot be a case of finding an *alternative* to visual cognitive orientation, for example by focussing on auditory or affective-physical perception, then it can only be a case of distinguishing different *forms* of visually-oriented cognition and of localising them historically. One would then have distinguishable 'regimes' of seeing. The Modern regime would consist in establishing a pluralism of seeing. Expressed in Nietzschean metaphor, this path leads from the regime of the cyclops via the regime of the divine to the regime of the cyborg. Instead of seeing with just one eye, i.e. the eye of science or metaphysical theology, human beings in the Modern age must learn to use many eyes with sometimes better, sometimes worse, inherent eyesight; or, as is the case in *Minority Report*, a protective, secret, subversive function. Having new eyes implanted means seeing the world in a fresh way, through fresh eyes; it means becoming a new, a different human being; it means not being able to be identified by surveillance devices (at least for a while). Perspectivism means an immanent critique of seeing through its multiplication.[20] *Minority Report* can also be interpreted in this way.

(d) There is another paradox at work in *Minority Report*, this one stricter than the last: the paradox of good being founded on evil. It is the paradox that a crime, a murder, does *not* take place for the precise reason that it is predicted with absolute certainty; it is the paradox of free will *through* determinism. In the case of John Anderton, there is no so-called *minority report*, no discrepancy in the predictions of the three mutants. Anderton's behaviour thus seems determined, and yet it deviates from the prediction. Agatha calls out to him repeatedly, 'You still have a choice. You can choose.' The safe assertion that the murder will take place is precisely the reason why it does not take place. The prediction itself is the reason for its negation. To this extent one can say that 'the precogs *mis*-perceive the future, because they perceived a murder taking place, yet it does not take

place precisely because they perceive it'. In other words it is possible 'to change the future once it is known in advance'. 'Once you know your future, you can change it by creating an alternative.'[21]

In this regard one cannot dignify the film with being an analytically-sharp contribution to philosophy. But differentiations are helpful here. First of all, the possibility of *minority reports* makes it clear that the predicting bodies, the precogs, deliver their predictions not with absolute certainty, but merely, in the language of jurisprudence, beyond all reasonable doubt. Then the film leaves open three different possible explanations for the predictive status it portrays: a psychological, a philosophical, and a tragedy-theoretical explanation. Interpreted psychologically, the precogs foresee that suppressed desire residing in the depths of the human subconscious which from a metaphysical, as well as a romantic, perspective is declared as actual desire. They do not see a *culturally*-determined action defined by social rules, as in the case of the hero Anderton, and possibly also in the case of other protagonists if they had not been arrested (one second earlier). Interpreted philosophically, especially with Harry Frankfurt, the precogs only foresee first-order desires which effectively lead to action, not second-order desires and volitions – but the latter are crucial for the granting of free will. Accordingly, a person is free in his/her volition if first-order desires effectively lead to actions which the person wants in his/her second-order desires to effectively lead to action.[22]

In addition to these psychological and philosophical interpretations we also have a tragedy-theoretical explanation. From this perspective Anderton is similar to the tragic Ancient hero Oedipus because he, just like his adversary Burgess, has an advantage over all other perpetrators: he knows in advance that he will commit a particular act or be accused of it. In this respect he knows his future and can develop doubts about it, contemplate the possibility of an escape, an alternative. Like the Ancient heroes, he has the option of asking the oracle, but unlike them he uses it. One of the reasons the classical tragedies take their course is because the protagonists do not exploit the semantic scope of the prophesy in its full ambiguity. They do not make specific enquiries or at least sound out its equivocations. If Croesus, King of Asia Minor in the 6th century B.C., and famous for his legendary wealth, had checked with the oracle when it prophesied that he would destroy a huge empire the moment he crossed the border to Persia he could have asked which empire was meant, and he would not have started the war (because it actually was his own empire which was meant).[23]

Finally, one more differentiation is insightful. The visions of the mutants are not reliable in the sense that certain pictures are missing – the police inspectors arrange them on the screen with intermittent gaps. Their hermeneutic reconstruction does not result in a whole. Only the film itself can provide whole results. It fills in the missing images which the viewers and protagonists do not yet have at their disposal at the beginning of the film; the man who is marked as the victim seizes the weapon Anderton has pointed at him and shoots himself. A similar thing happens at the end of the film when the system-manipulating bad guy points the pistol at Anderton, as foreseen, but ultimately, and unforeseen, kills himself with it. The visualisation medium of cinema proves to be the preferred medium for images. It tells the truth, in other words it delivers those details which give a story, a narratively reconstructed circumstance, a specific sense. Once again cinema celebrates itself. It is not the master medium of philosophy, but it is the master medium of imaginology, the study of seeing pictures, and it has a structural affinity to surveillance. A film that tells a story has to tell us the whole story or the whole truth – even if this includes that there is no whole (rounded out) story or no truth. A movie in the end may leave us unsatisfied because it does not give us a clear solution. But this, as well, is a solution: that there is no clear solution.

(e) I would like to end by pointing out something which leads me once again to my analogies at the outset. A popular work of art like *Minority Report* reminds us that a *work of art* – if it follows the aesthetic ideal of perfection and totality in German Idealism, according to which all parts must be interconnected as necessarily as the organs of a body – generally follows the same *totalitarian* model as its statist counterpart. Accordingly, it can only become a *countermodel* if it renounces, first, any claim to absolute truth; second, any unreflected fixation on visuality; and, third, any idealisation of perfection which has plagued not only metaphysicists and philosophers of beauty from the Ancients to the 18th century but also the perfectionists of the surveillance state.

Concerning the first of these aspects, we usually make allowances for cinema because it is made to be consumed. Cinema is not usually concerned with pontificated truth but rather with entertainment. But as long as cinema remains within the paradigm of classical narration (as *Minority Report* does) it maintains a naive claim to ‘the whole’ truth. Concerning the second aspect, *Minority Report* proves itself to be sufficiently self-reflective in all things related to ocular centrism. And, concerning the last aspect, this

film proves to be – though maybe against its own wishes – sufficiently imperfect in its theory narrative. It remains ambivalent, delegitimising surveillance on various levels but legitimising it on the central level of imaginology.

In general terms, a work of art must remain imperfect in this context, a fragment which does not elevate this fragmentary status, not even through dialectic or early Romantic refinements. Adorno (who himself tends towards dialectic refinements) said ‘art is the ever broken promise of happiness’.[24] The promise of happiness is broken by factual societal circumstances, but also by art itself as long as it pursues the ideal of perfection. Art can only be the model of utopia, the allurements of a successful life – for this is what ‘promise’ means in the context of art – when its visionary prediction always remains performatively uncertain. Otherwise there is no essential difference between it and an ocular-centric dystopia, as *Minority Report* takes great pleasure in bringing before our eyes.

Translated into English by Sarah L. Kirkby

Author

Josef Früchtel (<http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/j.fruchtel>) is Chair in Philosophy of Art and Culture – Critical Cultural Theory at the University of Amsterdam. He was head of the department from 2007 to 2012. His research interests include aesthetics, ethics, Critical Theory, theory of modernity, and philosophy of film. Published monographs include: *Mimesis – Konstellation eines Zentralbegriffs bei Adorno* (Würzburg, 1986); *Ästhetische Erfahrung und moralisches Urteil* (Frankfurt/M., 1996); *Das unverschämte Ich. Eine Heldengeschichte der Moderne* (Frankfurt/M., 2004), published in English as *The Impertinent Self: A Heroic History of Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 2009); *Vertrauen in die Welt. Eine Philosophie des Films* (München, 2013; forthcoming in English with Routledge in 2017).

References

- Adorno, T.W. *Aesthetic theory*. Translated and edited by R. Hullot-Kentor. London-New York: Continuum 1997.
- Balke, F. *Gilles Deleuze*. Frankfurt-New York: Campus, 1998.
- Buckland, W. *Directed by Steven Spielberg: Poetics of the contemporary Hollywood blockbuster*. New York-London: Continuum 2006.
- Dewey, J. *Art as experience*. New York: Perigee 1980.
- Elsaesser, T. and Hagener, M. *Filmtheorie zur Einführung*. Hamburg: Junius, 2008.
- Frankfurt, H. 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 68, No. 1, 1971: 5-20.
- Früchtl, J. 'Regime des Sehens. Nietzsches Perspektivismus aus einer Perspektive der Moderne' in *Perspektive – Die Spaltung der Standpunkte. Zur Perspektive in Philosophie, Kunst und Recht*, edited by G. Koch. München: Fink, 2010.
- Hegel, G. *Werke, Vol. 13: Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, edited by E. Moldenhauer and K. Markus Michel. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970.
- Huemer, M. 'Free will and determinism in the world of minority report' in *Science fiction and philosophy: From time travel to superintelligence*, edited by S. Schneider. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009: 104-115.
- Knox, T. *Hegel's aesthetics: Lectures on fine art, Vol. I*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
- Mullarkey, J. *Philosophy and the moving image: Refractions of reality*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Rilke, R. *Ahead of all parting: The selected poetry and prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*, edited and translated by S. Mitchell. New York: Modern Library, 1995.
- Rowlands, M. *The philosopher at the end of the universe: Philosophy explained through science fiction films*. London: Ebury Press, 2005.
- Sloterdijk, P. *Du musst dein Leben ändern. Über Anthropotechnik*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2011.
- Thiel, T. 'Die tausend Augen der Biometrie', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 July 2011.
- Thomä, D (ed.). 'Die späten Texte über Sprache, Dichtung und Kunst. Im 'Haus des Seins': eine Ortsbesichtigung' in *Heidegger Handbuch. Leben-Werk-Wirkung*. Stuttgart-Weimar: Metzler, 2003.
- Williams, L. 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess', *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 1991: 2-13.
- Žižek, S. *The parallax view*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006.

Notes

- [1] Rilke 1995.
- [2] Cf. Thomä 2003, p. 319.
- [3] It is not, as Rilke purports, merely the thing which has something to say, cf. in the same sense Sloterdijk 2011, p. 38.
- [4] Hegel 1970, p. 203; cf. Knox 1988, p. 153: 'Hegel's quotations are nearly always inexact.'
- [5] Cf. Balke 1998, p. 55; when it is specifically about film, Deleuze, of course, could add that it is the aim of classical cinema to present a whole whereas the post-classical cinema is interested in the permanent reopening of the whole. Following Deleuze, it is the positive meaning of an image that it is a process, i.e. a process of exchange between actual and virtual components.
- [6] Cf. Elsaesser & Hagener 2008, pp. 130, 133.
- [7] Cf. Buckland 2006, p. 195, with reference to Jerry Palmer (1979) and Tzvetan Todorov (1977).

- [8] According to scriptwriter Scott Frank in: TV Movie, Nr. 3, 2008, p. 55; Arno Meteling drew my attention to the fact that the two other precogs are also named after crime writers: Arthur (Conan Doyle) and Dashiell (Hammett).
- [9] Buckland 2006, p. 198.
- [10] Narration und Rechtfertigung was the title of a lecture course conducted by Martin Seel and Jochen Schuff at the University of Frankfurt am Main in the Winter semester 2011-2012, when I first spoke about *Minority Report*.
- [11] Cf. SpiegelOnline, 11 October 2011, <http://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/web/0,1518,791110,00.html>
- [12] Cf. Thiel 2011.
- [13] For the time being, in Europe, due to data protection law, Facebook could release its facial recognition-powered photo app in 2016 only without actually including any facial recognition technology (<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/may/11/facebook-moments-facial-recognition-app-europe>).
- [14] Buckland 2006, p. 195.
- [15] Cf. Hegel 1970, pp. 238, 244, 248; *ibid.* Moldenhauer & Michel 1970, pp. 172, 180, 507.
- [16] This includes that it does not work at the general level of (syllogistic) argumentation either moving from a major premise (there is a world where crime can be predicted) and a minor premise (it is predicted that one of the interpreting predictors will commit a crime) to a conclusion (interpreting prediction has too many inherent paradoxes to make sense). See Mullarkey 2009, pp. 18-19.
- [17] Cf. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §§ 18 (B 62f.), 32 (B 139).
- [18] Cf. Dewey 1980, p. 36. Following the horrific terrorist attacks on Paris restaurants in November 2015, it is almost impossible at the moment to resist a traumatic and even cynical overtone from Dewey's sentence.
- [19] Williams 1991, esp. p. 4.
- [20] Cf. Früchtel 2010, pp. 49-64.
- [21] Buckland 2006, pp. 200, 194. Another example, this time taken from our everyday experience: once a medical test tells a person that she is a candidate for a certain serious sickness, she can do something about it and thus change the future predicted to her (within the usual scientific restrictions).
- [22] See Frankfurt 1971. Frankfurt stands in the tradition of Kant, who conceptualises freedom not as the simple opposite of deterministic causal necessity but as a specific *mode* of causality, namely the agent's *self-determination*: I am free when I am able (on the second level) to determine which causes (on the first level) will determine me. Žižek, as well, refers to that tradition but adds Henri Bergson's idea that we can change the past – not the actual past, i.e. an actualisation of past possibilities, but one of these possibilities. This is what Anderton does in *Minority Report* (see Žižek 2006, pp. 202-203; besides this Žižek refers more to Philip K. Dick's story to demonstrate the inconsistency in the 'big Other' represented by the three precogs, see pp. 207-208). The philosophical discussion about determinism and free will is applied to *Minority Report* as well by Mark Rowlands and Michael Huemer, one arguing for determinism the other for free will. See Rowlands 2005, p. 121; Huemer 2009, pp. 104-115.
- [23] I would like to thank Eva Schürmann and Christoph Menke for pointing this out.
- [24] Adorno 1997, p. 185.