Literature Verses Film: *Minority report*

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March 8, 2007
“The Minority Report”, by author Phillip Dick, is a short story of the Science fiction genre. The tale was adapted to film by director Steven Spielberg, and exhibits numerous changes to Dick’s basic narrative. Spielberg’s film leans more towards a radical translation because it maintains the fundamental integrity of Phillip Dick’s short story, yet reveals numerous changes to the central narrative.

Both literature and film versions of the work depict protagonist John Anderton as department head of Precrime, a law enforcement organization that uses deformed “precogs” to observe the occurrence of crimes before they happen. Suspecting conspiracy, Anderton finds himself facing murder charges at the hand of his own organization, and attempts escape.

Director Spielberg remained truthful to basic themes promoted in “The Minority Report”. In Literature into film, Linda Costanzo Cahir wrote that a film translation of literature must convey “…integral value and meaning of the literary text, as the filmmakers interpret it” (p. 99). Thus, the film rendition of Dick’s story fulfills the first requirement of the aesthetic rubric. Some themes that the author explored in “The Minority Report” are societal repercussions of modern technology, corruption, and free will versus fate. As Minority report is viewed, these themes are clearly apparent to the film audience. Phillip Dick investigated significant social and political topics, and Steven Spielberg successfully utilized these ideas in his film.

Minority report displays a multitude of filmmaking techniques that help to communicate a well-defined Science fiction atmosphere. For example, the movie uses a photographic technique called “desaturation” to help echo the threatening, bleak, noir
setting found in *Minority report*. In *Literature into film*, Cahir described desaturation as “…a process by which the film’s color is muted (chemically desaturated rather than enriched)…” (p. 20). Instead of using warm, rich colors, *Minority report* employs an unearthly-looking use of blue shades which help to suggest a modernistic police state. Throughout the movie, odd camera angles imply tension, disparity, and dread. A police raid scene, where mechanical spiders are used to track Anderton, is shot at a high angle, making him appear increasingly vulnerable as the camera bears down. Finally, fast-paced editing techniques help to enhance the ultramodern tone and futuristic setting of the film.

In *Minority report*, Steven Spielberg achieved a work that stands alone, but is still related to, its parent text. Viewers have the ability to identify social and political themes that Dick considered in his short story. However, the film version stands apart from its literary complement. Spielberg changes major plot points, adds an action-adventure component, and a visually pleasing Hollywood star to his film. It is for these reasons that *Minority report* remains independent from Phillip Dick’s short story, and thus satisfies the third component of Cahir’s aesthetic rubric.

Spielberg incorporated an assortment of diverse components to Dick’s basic story format. For example, the characters of Howard and Sarah Marks, a couple in the midst of marital strife, are not found in the literature version of the story. The short story does not include the kidnapping of Anderton’s young son, Sean, yet this feature figures prominently into the movie’s plot. Furthermore, the murder of Ann Lively (precog Agatha’s mother) represents yet another difference between the literature and film translations. Steven Spielberg even inserts humor into the film version of “The Minority
Report”. This is noted when Anderton, on the run from his own organization, literally “drops in” to an advanced yoga session via the roof. These elements further broaden the original story, providing additional interest for the viewing audience, and help to enhance the film’s marketability. They represent just a few of the differences found between *Minority report* and its companion text.

Though the literature account of *Minority report* contains its share of exciting activity, the action-adventure component evidenced in the film is far superior. And, the presence of a futuristic element helps to make this true. For example, Anderton wards off his Precrime attackers in several scenes, one of which shows jet propelled police officers flying through the air as they fight. Throughout the film, Steven Spielberg employs flashy special effects to provide a visual excitement for his work that most literature is frequently unable to offer. Phillip Dick, on the other hand, rendered his action scenes in a manner that is more sedate:

Protesting and astonished, he was hustled outside the house to a waiting limousine. Instantly, three heavily armed men closed in behind him. The door slammed and the car shot off down the highway, away from the city. Impassive and remote, the faces around him jogged with the motion of the speeding vehicle as open fields, dark and somber, swept past. (pp. 126-127)

By using Tom Cruise as the leading character in his film, Steven Spielberg made a vast departure from the John Anderton persona found in the movie’s literature version. Cruise is noted as much for his physical attractiveness as his ability to portray larger-than-life characters in action-adventure movies. Yet, Phillip Dick described his protagonist quite differently: “The first thought Anderton had when he saw the young
man was: *I'm getting bald. Bald and fat and old* (p. 119). The literature version of the story takes Anderton’s insecurities a step further by referencing his aging physical appearance. In Hollywood, however, the use of an attractive, well-known star like Tom Cruise, assures a more successful box office draw than the use of someone such as Jason Alexander, for example.

*Minority report* satisfies the fourth component of the aesthetic rubric because there is a definite connection between the film and its related literature. As stated by Linda Costanzo Cahir, “The film cannot be so self-governing as to be completely independent or antithetical to the source material” (p. 263). The film translation displays a clear-cut connection to “The Minority Report”, and uses the concept of Precrime as a building block for the story. The names of Anderton and Witwer are identical to those found in the literature account, and some of the other characters bear names that are similar, yet not exact, to those found in the short story. While not completely opposite to the literature, the film adaptation takes the basic framework of Phillip Dick’s tale, embellishes upon it, and produces a film suitable for a major box office draw. There is unquestionable balance between both the literature and its film adaptation.

In summary, the film edition of “The Minority Report” effectively meets prerequisites put forth in Cahir’s aesthetic rubric. The movie effortlessly conveys major themes found in the writing of Phillip Dick, such as society’s use of technology, and free will versus fate. Director Steven Spielberg incorporated extensive visual interest by the use of abundant filmmaking techniques, crafting a movie that is independent, yet still related to the original text. *Minority report* exhibits certain marked differences, such as major plot changes and the use of a physically attractive protagonist. The addition of a showy
action-adventure ingredient is unmistakable. However, there is still satisfactory
equilibrium between both film and literature. Though changes found in the movie are
quite transparent, these alterations seem to work within the context of the film without
destroying the basic premise of Phillip Dick’s narrative.
References

