

The Construction and Deconstruction of Su-Field Models (1). "The Minority Report" – Philip K.Dick's short story (1956) vs. Steven Spielberg's film (2002)

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Abstract. OTSM and TRIZ instruments, originally developed for the engineering field, can be transferred to the study of literature. The goal of an analysis involving the construction and deconstruction of Su-Fields is to demonstrate that such functional models can play the same constructive, beneficent, or destructive, harmful role in literature as in technology. Incomplete models compromise the story and the relationships between the characters. This is demonstrated by comparing Philip K.Dick's short story "The Minority Report" with Steven Spielberg's homonymous film.

The goal of an analysis involving the construction and deconstruction of Su-Fields is to demonstrate that such functional models can play the same constructive, beneficent, or destructive, harmful role in literature as in technology. They can connect people and reveal the emotions involved in personal relationships, just as they connect substances and fields. If they are incomplete, the complexity of the story is left wanting and relationships are disharmonious. If they are complete, a richness of relationships and meanings delights the reader.

In case of "The Minority Report," the conciseness of the short story, while imposing a quick pace on the thrilling succession of events, leaves little space for character and relationship development thus meeting the everlasting disgrace science fiction has suffered from. On the other hand, the film version built on the screenplay by Joe Cohen and Scott Frank seems to fill in precisely the dimensions that were missing and therefore creates a richer construct with more satisfying relationships, connecting full-bodied characters who reveal their inner life of contentment or chimera chasing along the background of an electrifying thriller. Both plots, of the short story and of the film, are sometimes too intricate to follow and the use of the Su-Field analysis throws a lot of light on the main characters' relations to each other and on the plot lines, and the concepts they involve.

The short-story and the film start from the same premise: in New York, respectively Washington, in the year 2054, the traditional role of the police has become superfluous. This specific instantiating of the novel's historical moment opens the door to social criticism and the introduction of thematic elements which "deviate from the author's and implied readers norm of reality" being both "historical and

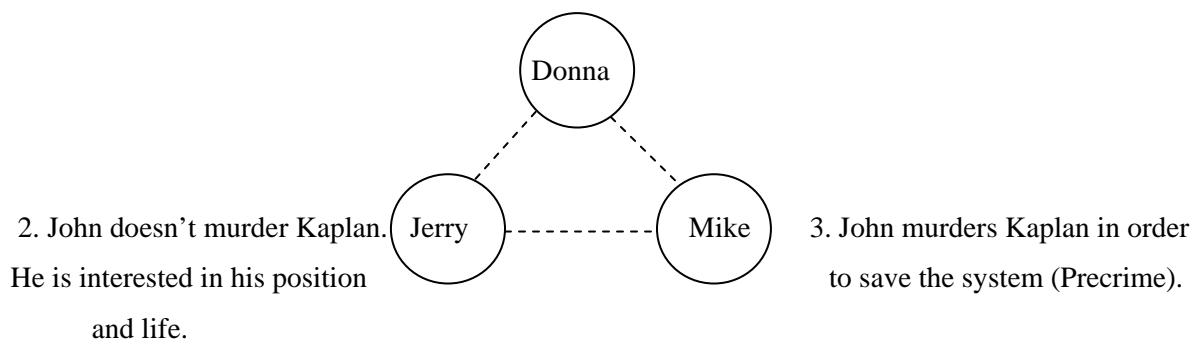
estranged" and allowing Dick to "reflect" the contradictory tendencies of his historical conjuncture as much as to "reflect on them" [Suvin qtd. in Durham, 1992: 194]. A system called "precrime" requires policemen endowed with high technology weapons to race through a completely automated city to protect the would-be victims. They get their information from a reliable source: "the prophecies" of the "deformed and retarded" "three precog idiots" [Ch.I]. Criminality is thus reduced with 99.8% since the would-be criminals know they will be run down anyway, before committing the act.

From now on the novel and the film highlight different moments and connections between the characters, starting with the status of the main character, John Anderton. In the short-story he is the founder and director of Precrime, the result of thirty years of hard work. "In our society," Anderton explains to Witwer, "we have no major crimes but we do have a detention camp full of would-be criminals." There is no way either to cheat the system or to accept bribes since a duplicate file of each card is received at the Army GHQ where general Leopold Kaplan, the leader in charge, is preparing to retire. The drawback to the methodology is that they are "taking in individuals who have broken no law." In the film, a much younger Anderton (Tom Cruise), runs the system whose director is Lamar Burgess (Max von Sydow). With masterly logic, a dancer's movements, and a virtual reality interface, Anderton analyses and selects the information contained in the precogs' prismatic visions of the future, he freezes the image or runs back and forth in time changing points of view until he gets the precise place, time and author of a would-be-crime, hours or even weeks before it would actually happen. There is no reason whatsoever to doubt the performance of the system, in the short-story or the film, until ... the precogs predict a crime that Anderton is going to commit against a person he does not know, Kaplan, respectively Leo Crow.

Seven Su-F models are incomplete or present destructive relationships in the short-story. Their completion in the film is discussed below. Two observations have been taken into account when constructing the Su-Fields. One belongs to Semyon Savranski: "The presence of a field always assumes presence of a substance, as it is a source of the field" [2000: 190]. The other belongs to James Kowalick: " a field comes from an object. There is an object behind every field. And it is often the case that two or more "fields" - as Altshuller defines the word - are associated with a particular function." [xxx (10), 1997]. I therefore use "object" here in its largest meaning, real or imaginary, animate or inanimate.

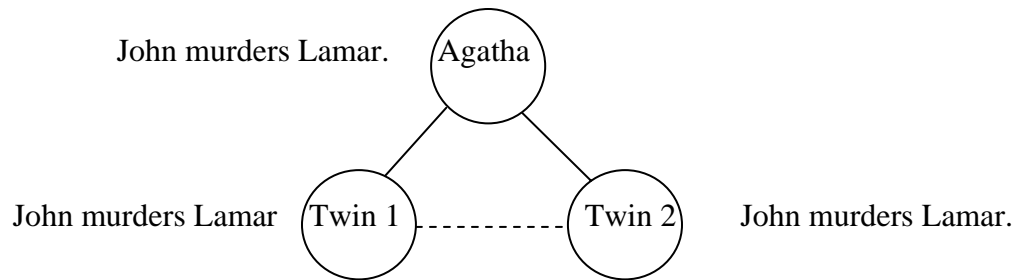
In the short story the three precogs, besides fulfilling their only role, that of precognition, appear as totally undifferentiated characters, the field between them being weak. The reader finds out that their "talent absorbs everything." Apart from that, they lead vegetable-like lives, they are strapped to chairs and wired to recording equipment, their physical needs being taken care of automatically, while their "dull, confused" minds are "lost in shadows" [Ch.1], so obviously they have no spiritual needs. They are useful only together and their accomplishment is comparable to the majority reports obtained in the case of computers. Their three different predictions actually represent three different temporal lines, each influencing the previous, while the interrupted lines are the sign of an insufficient field and of a model that cannot sustain itself.

1. John murders Kaplan.



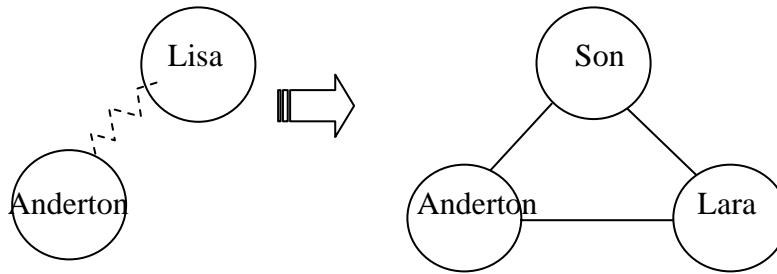
In the above analogy between the three precogs and the three computers, the idea that the third computer, after analysing the data obtained by the other two, has overriding power of decision over them is not made clear. On the contrary, in the film, Agatha acquires those interaction properties – major interests, strong feelings – that allow for the model to be fulfilled with her acting as a field. Just like the twins, Agatha is the monster baby of a drug addict mother, born with severe brain damage. Anderton has no special interest in either of the precogs other than their precognitive performance, and explains to Witwer that they are "just recognition filters" that convey images with the help of optical tomography: "We see what they see" [Ch.1]. What the film does is to humanize Agatha in order to construct a credible relationship, based on mutual trust, between her and Anderton. When Anderton drags her to Rufus Riley's VR entertainment centre to "download" the minority report from her, Agatha, during some nicely machinated scenes in the film, delays the period before his being caught by his former colleagues for as long as she can. She saves his life while Anderton, in return, punishes the murder of her mother, Anne Lively, a character that does not exist in the short-story, but is the key character who triggers the action in the film. Therefore the film changes the previous non-functional

model into the functional model represented below in which Agatha acts as a field but, as different from the short-story, there is no minority report:

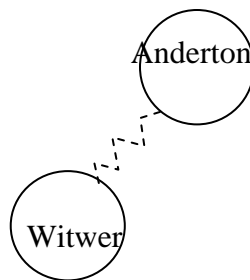


In Robinson's opinion paranormal abilities, like the ones manifest in Dick's three precogs, are not science fiction's strongest element since they are not relevant to the society that generated the text. They have little metaphorical power "no doubt because of their origin in an older genre, the supernatural or Gothic. They do little to represent human existence in a technological society" [2005: 31]. Obviously Dick's concern in this short story is not reflected in his preoccupations with the kind of existence a technological society would imply but in much more urgent matters: How would a change in the police's prerogatives affect the whole social system? and, If such a change involves the power to inflict existential changes on human beings, how does it affect ethics and to what extent should human consciousness be involved? To what extent would the exercise of free will affect a deterministic system?

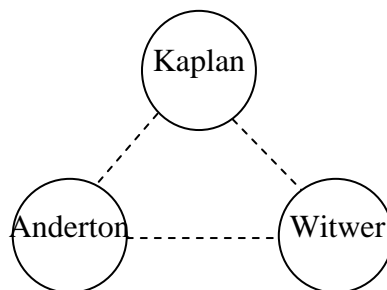
The short story offers an incomplete model and an unsubstantiated interaction between Anderton and his wife, Lisa. She is the first whom Anderton suspects of plotting against him while later, in a scene which is much too short and abrupt in the short-story, the reader is offered his changed perspective, his wife is innocent, but how this dawned on the character is not really clear. This very weak, and mostly unexplained relationship becomes much stronger in the film with the addition of one character, the couple's son, and a supplementary plot line, in which Anderton feels responsible for his disappearance, and after six years, he still cannot come to terms with it, especially since it led to a divorce caused not by the loss of love but by painful memories. The son, even though not an actual presence in the film, is a container of strong feelings of affection on behalf of both the mother, Lara (Kathryn Morris) in the film, and the father and acts as a field uniting the two. And that's exactly what was in the minds of Frank and Cohen, the creators of the screenplay, when they considered that by introducing a dead son, they can play on the affective string much more convincingly. The transformation of the model is shown below:



Another incomplete model in the book, which is also bidirectional and harmful, is the relationship between Anderton and Witwer, the representative of the Attorney General sent to act as Anderton's assistant until his retirement. He misinterprets Anderton's increasing nervousness and observes: "You really dislike me." It was true: Anderton "couldn't believe he disliked the young man that much. It didn't seem possible" [Ch.I], but still he could have dissimulated that. What actually happened was that Anderton had just discovered the prevision accusing him of murder and the shock this caused was harder to conceal.



One could imagine the completion of the model if Kaplan were included. Kaplan, in the short-story, plays the part of Lamar with the difference that he wants the system destroyed. This is the only reason why he needs Anderton, whom he hasn't personally met, while his only interaction with Witwer is confined to keeping the former out of his hands.

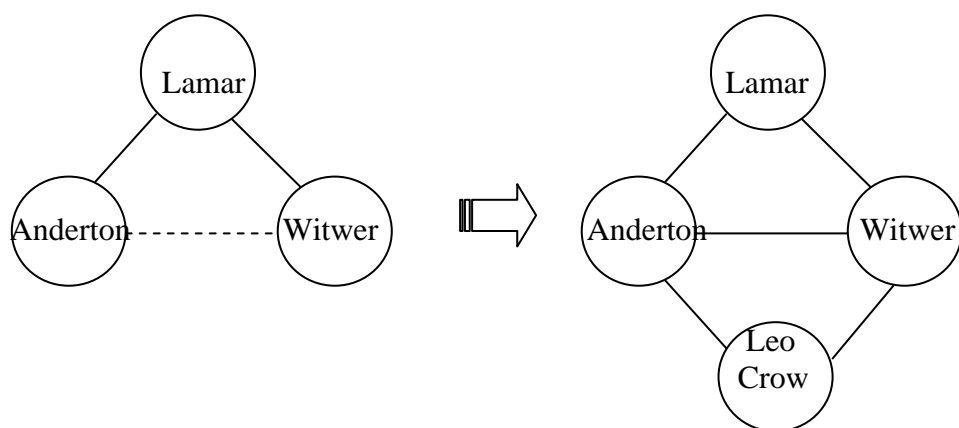


Even now the triangle is very loose. At the moment when the prediction is processed by the army, Witwer has already taken control and wants to turn Anderton over to the police to prevent him from committing the crime, while Kaplan pretends he wants the same thing for "his own protection" [Ch.III]. Actually, what Kaplan wants is to prove that the report is wrong and thus discredit the police and

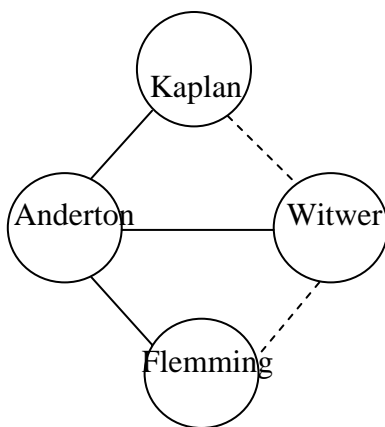
attract more financing for the military. He strongly resents his retirement after the Anglo-Chinese War and the division of authority between the army and the police forces.

In the film, Lamar acts as a much better field than Kaplan. He is the Director of Precrime, he holds control and strongly relates to both Anderton and Witwer. During the course of events, he is shown to change his mind: he doesn't want to retire anymore, on the contrary, he wants to promote the system nationwide with himself at the head of it. But Anderton, who considers him a friend, gets too close to a dirty secret which Lamar has been trying to hide: he had to murder somebody and to cleverly and deliberately cheat on the system itself in order to implement it. The stratagem including Leo Crow was a necessity from Lamar's point of view, since it offered him the possibility of controlling the situation: aware of Anderton's only weak point and foreseeing his reaction, he offers him a fake killer of his son. Anderton will be taken to the detention camp and the secret of Ann Lively's drowning will not be revealed. The film, by introducing one more character, Leo Crow, fulfilling the role of another field, allows for the transition to a dual system. In conformity with Standard Solution 2.1.2. "If it is necessary to improve the efficiency of SFM, and replacement of SFM element is not allowed the problem can be solved by the synthesis of a dual SFM through introducing a second SFM which is easy to control" [Salamatov, 1999: 53]. It is not Crow's individuality that is important, in fact he has no more individuality than the precogs themselves, but what he succeeds to arouse in Anderton by pretending he is the child molester that kidnapped and killed his son. Interestingly enough Anderton's reason for murder is his being hunted and pre-accused of committing it. Thus, in his case, in a vicious circle, the prediction draws the act which would fulfil the prophecy.

Witwer, whose only role in the film is that of finding imperfections in a seemingly perfect system, also becomes involved because, in order to prevent the system from falling apart, he has to catch Anderton before committing the crime. Consequently, the relationship between Anderton and his assistant becomes much stronger. They strongly dislike each other especially when Witwer discovers that the former hotshot policeman has become a "clarity" (drug) addict after the death of his son. But in front of so much evidence planted against him, even Witwer has to admit something is wrong. His interaction with Lamar is quite loose until, totally unexpectedly and with no obvious reasons, the latter kills him. Witwer committed the same mistake as Anderton: in all good faith he revealed his uncertainties to Lamar, who thus commits a second murder for the system. The initially simple model is changed into a dual one:



By analogy, the very loose Kaplan – Anderton – Witwer model in the short story, can also be turned into a dual model with the addition of Flemming who interacts strongly with Kaplan by being his protected subordinate, with Anderton by directly influencing his judgement as to the plot against him and keeping him out of the hands of the police, and standing in almost no relationship with Witwer.



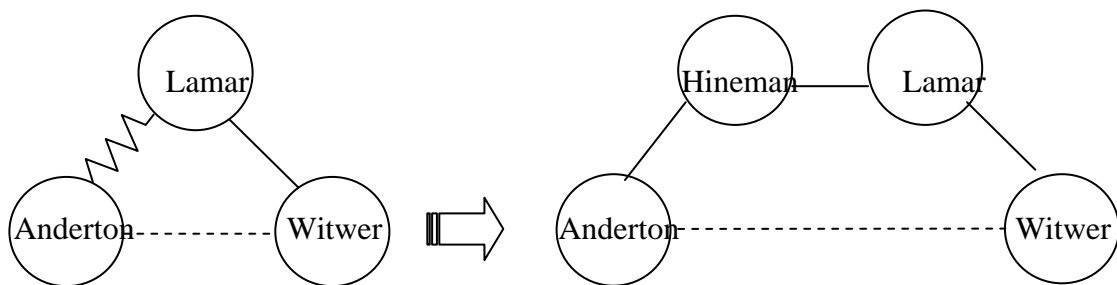
The model is much weaker than the one produced in the film because of the lesser involvement of Witwer. Just as in the former dual model and, therefore, in the story just as in the film, Witwer is a straightforward supporter of Precrime. However, he does not establish strong, radical relationships with either of the characters. Even at the end of the short-story when he becomes the next Police Commissioner, Anderton's successor, the success yet appears to be Anderton's and not his.

There is another triangle which is of a binary importance in the film. Anne Lively is already dead when the events unfold but between mother, victim of a murder, and the precog daughter there is a strong bond, an unresolved wish of the now cured mother to get back her damaged child, a relationship strong enough to unleash the action which will overthrow the order existing at the beginning of the film. This triangle is also important because the endeavour to complete the Su-Field is transparent here: Agatha, the "idiot," is purposefully luring John Anderton into disclosing who the person responsible for her

mother's death is. This relationship becomes thus strengthened from the emotional point of view, just as the one involving Lamar, as murderer of Ann Lively.

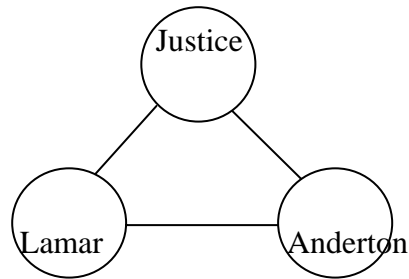


Alongside the same lines of bringing more humanity and feeling into the film, one more character is introduced, which does not exist in the short-story. In the latter, Anderton listens to the news on the radio and this reminds him of the possibility of a minority report. In the film, the role of the radio is taken over by Dr.Hineman, the genetic researcher, who had been trying to return to a useful life the brain damaged children of drug addicts. From her point of view, her attempts ended in failure. However, she made the remarkable discovery that some of these children had a gift: they had horrible dreams about crimes all of which would be performed a short time later. She is the one who developed the precogs, designed the system, and pioneered the interface. When, as the film unfolds, the Lamar – Anderton relationship becomes a harmful one, Dr.Hineman takes over part of the harmful effect and neutralizes it by serving Anderton with the information he needs: Agatha is the cleverest of the precogs and she stores the original minority report. Without her, Willy the caretaker says in the film, the other two are useless and "hive-minded," and this is true since, Lamar can confidently shoot Witwer while the fugitive Anderton is keeping Agatha with himself. In the film the model is developed:



One last model should be mentioned: the complete Su-Field formed of the concept of Justice in relation to Anderton and Lamar, which makes up the backbone of the film. If any of them were missing, the equilibrium would be overthrown. If Anderton would restrict the model by his absence, Lamar would be the only one in charge and could infringe the law as he desired. If the latter were absent, Anderton would be the perfect law-obeying policeman and nothing more. If the concept itself were missing, the

connection between Lamar and Anderton would be one of dependence between superior and subject. All three points of the triangle need to be there for the model to work.



The conclusion of the short story seems to be that the precogs are never wrong, the system proves correct, but by knowing your future you can interfere with it. But Anderton's allegation at the end of the story " My case was unique, since I had access to the data. It *could* happen again – but only to the next Police Commissioner," that is to Witwer, is wrong since, in all probability, the Army will still get duplicates of the files.

In the film the system was proved wrong, the precogs may make mistakes: Anderton, knowing his future, had a choice and didn't shoot Leo Crow. Therefore Precrime is abolished, says Anderton in a voiceover at the end of the film and everybody leaves the jail since the possibility exists that, under the influence of free will, some of those people would change their minds and not commit the crime. While the precogs are moved to an undisclosed place where they can be taken care of and can live in tranquillity without the burden of their talents, John and Lara expect their next baby boy. Therefore the film's conclusion is different from the ending of the short story: the precogs could be wrong because humans can exercise their free will and change the future. As a result the whole system collapses.

As shown above, Spielberg's film dwells more on the emotional side of the story. And this is one of the facts that has guaranteed its success. Whether we speak about the same thing when associating the short-story and the film is debatable. Not much of the original story is left in the film except for the main idea whose outcome develops in totally opposite directions. The message Spielberg sends out to the Americans and the world is that the system in place is good enough and it doesn't need to be changed. Life goes on, the new baby is going to be born, the conclusion is thoroughly soothing. Gary Goldman, producer and co-writer of *Minority Report* says:

The basic sentiment of the film is that the U.S. constitution and our current ideas of civil rights are more important than having absolute truth. These are good lessons but not what Philip K. Dick was writing. In his story, he is willing to contemplate that the system

actually works, and if it does work, then we have to get used to new ideas about justice. Anderton's exercise of free will is accurately foreseen. He chooses to fulfil the prophecy – in part merely to prove that the system is infallible. But that's hard to wrap your mind around [qtd.in Koornick, 2002].

Thus the film becomes appealing to a general audience by taking it as a given that there has to be free will "that the system was bad because it violated the constitution." Its nomination for several awards proves its generic qualities. But the film "doesn't go to the roots of Phil Dick's story" who did not take anything for granted and was willing to question everything" [Goldman qtd.in Koornick, 2002].

What Philip K.Dick was interested in were not so much the technological developments *per se* but their consequences reflected in human society. More than other writers in the domain, he was aware that good science fiction should always be dissecting some social problems and dwell on social concerns since technology is just a reflection of social dynamism. The serious problems reflected in many of his works are as actual nowadays as ever and not much room is left for comforting humanity.

To do Spielberg justice in this respect, one cannot but remark that, besides the harmonious closure and in spite of a preoccupation with amazing technical solutions and the creation of some fabulous scenes, such as, to give just one example, the one in which Tom Cruise leaps among the speeding cars on vertical highways and narrowly escapes being killed on the assembly-line of a car factory, he, in his turn, seems concerned with something much more substantial. In his characteristic way, he wants to offer the audience something to think about after the film is over. To those who are willing to.

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