

The Visualisation of Utopia in Recent Science Fiction Film

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Utopia can be conceived as a possibility – a space within language, a set of principles, or the product of technological development – but it cannot be separated from questions of place, or more accurately, questions of “no place.”¹ In between the theoretically imaginable utopia and its realisation in a particular time and place, there is a space of critique, which is exploited in anti-Utopian and critical dystopian narratives.² In Science Fiction narratives of this kind, technology is responsible for the transformation of the utopian impulse into a set of principles that are precisely stated and rigidly enforced. The critique focuses on the impossibility, due to the reductive force of instrumental reason, of any systematic realisation of a eutopia where the positive qualities of freedom, individualism and creativity are nurtured. The films *Minority Report*, directed by Steven Spielberg (Dreamworks, 2002), and *Gattaca*, written and directed by Andrew Niccol (Columbia, 1997), both examine utopian claims through speculation on the possible future use of current technologies, the tools of crime investigation and the genome project respectively. However, an examination of the plot cannot attend sufficiently to the particular properties of film and how it, as a medium, constructs utopia as a place. This article aims to address this issue by examining how technologically derived images of utopia are realised in the visual space of film, that is, on the level of the *mise en scène*. These images are often dystopian but the distinction between dystopia and eutopia is not crucial to the argument, because the aim is not to return utopian-

ism to its place at the vanguard of progressive politics, nor to reject utopianism on the basis that it is unrealisable, but rather to examine how technology and utopianism can combine in the visual language of film.³ My concern here is to investigate how utopia is conceived according to the specific features of the medium rather than to present an overarching narrative judgement as to the value of utopian principles. In *Gattaca*, the utopianism of a genetically determined future is reproduced in the *mise en scène* as a set of aesthetic principles, whereas in *Minority Report* the utopian technology itself resembles the apparatus of film. This involves two quite different approaches to the visualisation of utopia:⁴ in *Gattaca*, utopia is embodied in a society in which there can be “no other place,” realised through the subtraction or reduction of visual difference; in *Minority Report*, utopia is an expression of a panoptic regime that can incorporate all visual and cultural difference such that the visible is “every place.”

The film *Gattaca* describes a future delimited by the principles of genetic engineering and organised like Plato's republic, as a genetic hierarchy where aptitude and merit give way to congenital differentiation. The genetic code determines access to employment, education, sport and personal relationships either through the foregrounding of positive qualities, such as IQ, or the assessment of liability where the genetic code substitutes for a general medical examination. The protagonist Vincent Freeman (Ethan Hawke) is prevented from achieving his longstanding ambition of becoming an astronaut due to his genetic deficiencies, in particular his weak heart. However, Vincent fulfils his desire to join Gattaca Aerospace through an elaborate process of genetic deception, where he substitutes the genetic material of a crippled man, Jerome Morrow (Jude Law), for his own. He proves himself capable as an astronaut and in doing so the film serves as an obvious parable for the triumph of human endeavour and, by extension, the American Dream⁵ over a world that has acceded to the principles of determinism. The film's by-line confirms this with the rather glib statement: “There is no gene for the human spirit.” The visionary and expansive (old) technology of space travel is a metonym for the “human spirit” and is contrasted with the restrictive genetic technology which roughly stands in for social constraint.

The opposition between new and old technology is the thematic ground for the critique of genetic utopianism but what is of importance for the purposes of this article is how this utopia is conceived formally and aesthetically. This involves linking the logic of the image to the logic of the narrative. *Gattaca* begins *in media res* with Vincent already a participant in the space program; following a long title sequence he is placed in his rationally structured workplace, Gattaca Aerospace. Significantly, there is little to lo-

cate this scene in a particular time and place – he drives a sixties car but with an electric motor, the road is not tied to any cityscape and the interior of the workplace is stripped of any objects that can link it to a definite past or future – it is outside a recognisable historical progression. Edward Rothstein argues that because a utopia is founded on clear organising principles and is an idealisation of society's desires, it “stands outside of history”⁶ and as a consequence:

[a]ny attempt to really create a utopia is necessarily revolutionary. The manners, morals, and convictions of the past have to be cast aside. The realization of utopia requires destruction.⁷

The *mise en scène* dramatises this historical break because it places viewers in a present that is disconnected from their own. This is reinforced by the absence of music because music has the capacity to situate the narrative within a particular historical period. There is, however, a caption in this opening scene stating that the story is set in the “not too-distant future”, thereby explicitly drawing a connection between the viewer's present and the present onscreen. The film here balances, between text and image, the continuity of history and the ahistorical realisation of utopia. The caption introduces a critical voice, the voice of dystopian fiction, into the utopian present of the image and this is supported, in the remainder of the film, by the nostalgic voice-over linking what was to what will have been.⁸ The voice-over is continually present in the material form of the enunciation, with the ebbs and flows of prosody, but it is also situated through the use of tense in the past and future. Here it differs from the moving image which always articulates a present even when it takes the form of a flashback or flashforward. This coincides with Fredric Jameson's claim that science fiction is not directly concerned with the future, with what is to come, but “[r]ather, its multiple mock futures serve the quite different function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come.”⁹ This transforms the uncertainty of the present into an event understandable in the long duration of historical progression.¹⁰ The voice-over becomes the explanatory framework through which the visual utopia of the present becomes the dystopia of our future. This split between the voice-over and the moving images in part resolves the difficulty, highlighted by Jameson, of representing the long, historical *durée* of utopian development while also attending to the minutiae of the quotidian.¹¹

In *Gattaca* the utopian state does not exist as an already complete system; it is not realised in the present which describes a world where individuals progressively conform to utopian ideals. An abstract but not necessarily complete image of an ideal human subject is projected into the future

and used to guide the genetic choices of individuals. It is not the genes that determine the biological and social future but the social conception of genetics, or “geneticism,” which is most clearly manifest as a faith in the explanatory power of genetics.¹² The continued support for geneticism creates a new society without a period of radical upheaval as the technology provides the means by which utopia is performed incrementally rather than imposed suddenly. The future is determined by the set of limitations each successive generation places upon the genetic code. This determination of the future can be compared to Charles Hartshorne’s explanation of determinism as a form of delimitation rather than the logical unfolding of the internal properties of various events and agents. To explain this, he uses the example of water flowing through a canal. In this environment a single water molecule is relatively free within the bounds of the general flow as it can move laterally and to some extent against the direction of the flow. But, he argues, if the sides of the canal are increasingly narrowed, the path of a water molecule is given greater determination such that it eventually reaches a state where only one molecule can pass at a time, each one following an orderly pattern.¹³ In *Gattaca*, the utopian state is realised incrementally through choice and exclusion. The canal banks are narrowed through the removal of anomalies, such as genetic defects, and undesirable physical features. The technological vision of *Gattaca* follows the utopian logic of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century physics most clearly expressed in the Laplacean vision, which claims “not to speculate on origins or on final ends, but to accept the actual, to tidy up, to reduce all disordered and chaotic life and knowledge to orderly arrangement.”¹⁴ In this method, analytical completeness is the test of perfectibility and the variability of sensual experience is conceived as a lack, a disorder, due to the projection of an imaginary order toward which the imperfect human will asymptotically tend.¹⁵ In this conception, utopia is as much the remainder of all that is not desirable as it is the image of what is desirable and in its finished form becomes *all that is possible*. In other words, there is *no other place*.

The utopian ideal is always a subtraction from the world, there is less in it than there is in the complexity of an actual community. This logic is also enacted in the *mise en scène* by way of a series of events that dramatises the reduction of difference and in the employment of a style marked by geometric consistency and redundancy. On the level of the plot, Vincent must remove all visible traces of his past self if he is to take on the identity of Jerome. His own body’s genetic history must be rendered invisible through the removal of all corporeal excess, any part of his body that can be left behind as an index to his DNA. The genetic sequence is invisible to

the naked eye but it marks a thorough externalisation of the body in that it is present in every cell, a holographic image of the whole, and it makes a finite statement that does not require interpretation – it is a text that does not seek to hide its meaning. The opening sequence shows Vincent in the shower scrubbing his body with a hard brush removing any superfluous flesh that would distinguish Vincent as an “in-valid” – both legally and medically.¹⁶ The body must be scrubbed or toned to such a degree that it only exists as a pellicle barely covering the genetic code, like the outer layer of a virus. In this viral utopianism, the body is effectively transparent in that it can yield only one expression, genetic superiority. The smooth, toned bodies of the genetic elite are indistinguishable in the many scenes in Vincent’s workplace each striving to reach an ideal, that is, a body that effectively conforms to its DNA. Vincent’s deception is not discovered because his co-workers cannot imagine a world, another place outside of the utopian vision, where bodies conceal identity. Jerome tells Vincent that the police will not suspect him of the crime because all they see is his DNA; the invisible substitutes for the visible. Corporeality is prescinded due to a teleological belief in the abstract.

The rational path toward a utopian state, especially when this is conjoined with technological determinism, involves the action of stripping the world of the irrational but also a growing unawareness as to the form the non-rational can take. The performance of utopianism is also a process of ex-nomination where the distinction between the natural and utopian is elided. This is a feature of many of the anti-Utopian science fiction narratives including Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*, written during the early period of communist rule in Russia.¹⁷ In this novel, the protagonist D-503 explains how his belief in the social order is based on the exclusion of all other orders:

Now, think of a square, a living, beautiful square. And imagine that it must tell you about itself, about its life. You understand, a square would scarcely ever think of telling you that all its four angles are equal: this has become so natural, so ordinary to it that it’s simply no longer consciously aware of it. And so with me: I find myself continually in the square’s position.¹⁸

The novel is confronted with the aporia of explaining how the perfection of the state can be both described by and realised in each individual. The first person narrator is both unconsciously aligned with the state – he is a perfect square in the geometry of the state – and sufficiently self-aware as to be able to reflect on the notion of perfection for a yet to be born narratee. There is, as Jameson argues, an aestheticisation of bureaucracy¹⁹ such

that the narrator repeatedly celebrates the triumph of form over the vagaries of individual action. In *Gattaca*, this difficulty is not directly confronted because the unconscious perfection of the state is not avowed by the narrator – who remarkably is largely untouched by the belief system of this genetic utopia – but rather presented in a visual style characterised by a withdrawal of attention from the particular. In this techno-rational utopia, imperfection must be removed and rendered invisible in order to maintain the integrity of the state. It is worth drawing a comparison here with More's *Utopia*, where the city's apparent abundance (there is a cornucopia of food-stuffs) depends on the expulsion of the inedible from the city borders. Similarly, butchery is limited to slaves outside the gaze of upstanding citizens in order to preserve the human sense of "mercy" and prevent disease: "they do not permit to be brought inside the city anything filthy or unclean for fear that the air, tainted by putrefaction, should engender disease."²⁰ The invisibility of perfection depends on the invisibility of imperfection.

The utopian visual style, like the utopian body, is characterised by the precission of residual elements through the overdetermination of the image according to principles of visual composition – the image's genetic code.²¹ In Niccol's script, the utopian environment of *Gattaca* Aerospace Corporation is described as "antiseptic" and the arrangement of objects and the movement of people characterised by regularity and similarity. In Slawomir Idziak's cinematography this is manifest in the preference for long and extreme-long shots of both the corporation's interior and exterior.²² The long shot in this context, with the application of clear geometric rules of abstraction, does not open separate planes of action but actually flattens the image. In one image repeated throughout the film, the various levels of the Corporation are shown from a low angle, and due to the symmetry of the shot and the repetition and proximity of the half circles, this potential narrative space is reduced to a purely geometric space. It is only later in the film, when the utopian vision begins to crumble, that this space is occupied by two key narrative agents, the detectives Anton Freeman (Loren Dean) and Hugo (Alan Arkin). In one extreme long shot, we see Irene and Vincent standing face to face before a perfectly symmetrical rendering of the building's exterior. The neutral surfaces of the brutalist architecture combine with the static film frame to produce a two-dimensional image flattened by its own geometric organisation. The architectural features of *Gattaca*'s utopian world complement the perpendicular lines of the screen with the emphasis on smooth surfaces and simple geometric figures. Mute colours and filters are used because they highlight the structural features of any visual surface in a manner similar to black and white film, where tonal contrast replaces the uncertain variability of a full colour palette. When

Irene and Vincent watch the dawn reflected in a large bank of solar panels, the proximity and similarity of the panels limit the vision to a closed geometric set where the offscreen space has no narrative possibilities apart from the reproduction of the same. This repetition fills the frame, leaving no space for the natural world to intrude and, due to the magnitude of the repetition, transforms the open space of the desert into a technological sublime. Gilles Deleuze argues that images that are overly aestheticised turn inward to form closed sets, the frame itself becomes the overriding structural determinant and, as such, these images only have a weak connection to the “out-of-field” or offscreen space. When they do gesture to the “out-of-field,” the offscreen space conforms to the structural sameness, or “homogeneous continuity,” of geometric space.²³ For Rudolf Arnheim, if the forces are tightly balanced, as they are in these images, then attention is directed toward the abstract whole of the picture plane, and not to the particular qualities of the object.²⁴ We fail to see detail when our attention is diverted by the uniform precision of the perfectly balanced image. It is therefore appropriate that the site of narrative tension is not found in these macroscopic utopian images but in the microscopic details revealed in a number of extreme close-ups – a hair left on a window sill, the showers of flaking skin falling to the floor of the bathroom. These invisible objects continually threaten to intrude on the visual purity of the *mise en scène* and introduce entropy into the unity and balance of the whole. It is a utopia created through repeated acts of abstraction in which the unresolved remainder, the entropic elements, has the capacity to threaten the unity of the image.²⁵

Steven Spielberg’s film *Minority Report* is also a critique of an ideal state founded upon a single technological development. The film is based on a story by Philip K. Dick where a process called “precrime” allows law enforcement bodies to prevent a crime before it is actually committed.²⁶ This involves the precognition of future events brought into the present through the unnatural abilities of three extraordinary humans called “precogs,” an abbreviation for precognitives. The precogs provide information on the crime, including the names of potential perpetrators and victims, and this information is used by a police unit to secure an arrest and prevent a crime.²⁷ The “precogs” are named Agatha, Dashiell and Arthur but despite the reference to the famous fictional detectives there is no direct analysis of current criminal behaviour or the employment of deductive principles in the investigation. The technology is almost mystical in its workings and accordingly is only connected by the thinnest of threads to existing technologies – the book refers to early punch card computing devices whereas the film tentatively invokes the idea of holistic distributed net-

works. *Gattaca* and *Minority Report* are similar in that technology creates a utopian state through the removal of unwanted elements, genetic abnormalities and crime, rather than through the fulfilment of a positive ideal. In *Minority Report*, the utopianism is displaced from the idea of a crimeless society to the visual potential of cinema as a unifying technology. Most serious crime has been eradicated but, unlike in *Gattaca*, the society is not underpinned by an overarching set of principles or a coherent group of laws. There is no indication of how an ordinary citizen perceives or understands the role of the new technology, which would most likely take the form of a heightened panoptic sensibility. *Gattaca* certainly develops a more detailed commentary on the limits and repercussions of institutional observation.²⁸ In both story and film, the central focus of *Minority Report* is not on the formal aspects of social organisation but on the actions of the protagonist, John Anderton (Tom Cruise), who works within the precrime program, and what it means for him to be implicated in a precognised crime. The technology functions as the catalyst for a long chase sequence where Anderton must prove the invalidity of the precrime project, through the analysis of a past crime, in order to exempt himself from a murder charge.²⁹ In the absence of a utopian thesis or a considered critical dystopian argument, the ideality of the future world is imagined solely as a function of the *mise en scène*.

Utopianism cannot be separated from the structural constraints and possibilities of the medium and, in this regard, the film *Minority Report* clearly diverges from the story. In the short story only the name of the proposed victim and perpetrator are given, and in accordance with principles of mechanical cause and effect, the precogs are able to calculate what will happen, in other words, the world is reduced to statistical probability. Unfortunately, the ontological implications of a truly predictable future are not fully explored because again the focus is on plot and its relationship to character agency. In the film the basic premise is retained, that crime is preventable because predictable, but greater attention is paid to the visual whole of the story space. This is due, in part, to the difference between verbal and cinematic description. Seymour Chatman states that a verbal statement is more likely to refer to a particular detail and fact, such that the reader is in no doubt as to what is described, whereas film includes a range of detail in any shot without direct specification of what constitutes the object: “[f]ilm gives us plenitude without specificity.”³⁰ In literature, description is explicit in that it directs attention to particular objects and features whereas film “direct[s] our attention to something else” while still describing objects and setting.³¹ In the adaptation of the story, the film must invoke this “something else”; the utopian place cannot be separated from the ex-

amination and invocation of the utopian precrime technology. Consequently, the precogs do not simply provide the names of perpetrators and victims but also detailed visual information in support of each prediction, which contrasts with the story where there is no visual evidence or visual reasoning – the crime is known but not seen before it happens. This visual information is interpreted by the principal investigator, John Anderton, as determining the location of the upcoming crime. He reassembles a collection of moving images, similar to film rushes, to recreate the visual circumstances of the crime in a manner that parallels the process of filmmaking. He stands before a transparent screen that resembles an editing suite where he fastforwards, rewinds and sequences a number of visual moments or shots. This action is accompanied by an intra-diegetic orchestral soundtrack: Anderton works to music, which draws together the parts into a filmic whole.

In film, and narrative in general, there is a reorganisation of what has happened but in *Minority Report* the precrime cinematic machine is a means of organising what will happen. Like all utopian technologies, it is directed toward the future but also to the creation of a society where everything can be seen and, consequently, where nothing is outside the aegis of the state. The future is foreseen not as an abstract ideal but as a visualisable whole that is structurally identical to the organisation of images from the past. In *Minority Report*, past and future are symmetrical in the form of the cinematic shot or sequence, which is located in the past or future only with the addition of an external temporal marker – it is always added to the image. This contrasts with human memory, which bears the mark of its pastness each time it is invoked, and a human future conceived as expectation or anticipation. The boundary between interiority and exteriority collapses because the precogs are able to exteriorise both memory and desire in the form of these images of the future. There is a multiplication of images, including a visualisation of the future, to the point where there is no active political memory. The future is just another moment in a tenseless process of visualisation, where the individual is nothing more than a node in a network of screens or a moment within the endless procession of images.

In *Minority Report*, the visual technology of precrime is utopian in that it realises the idea of “total cinema.” André Bazin argues that, despite cinema’s dependence on economic forces and technological progress, the myth guiding its development was the teleological belief in the “reconstruction of a perfect illusion of the outside world in sound, color, and relief.”³² Cinema always sought to incorporate anything that would assist in the realisation of this “perfect illusion,” and before the actual development of

sound technology there was the expectation that it would eventually become a part of the cinema.³³ In this theory of perfect cinema, there is also the expectation that cinema will overcome the barriers of touch and smell. This is the future scrutinized in Ernst Jünger's *The Glass Bees*, where cinema becomes the direct expression of utopian dreams and capitalist ideals. The novel's svengali Zapparoni, who resembles Walt Disney, creates a new cinema in which all the characters are played by automatons. Cinema is able to create the ideal future because it is not dependent on the repetitive practices of industrial technology: "[t]he dreams of the old Utopians were coarse-grained in comparison" to this fully automated and active vision of the future and past.³⁴ The cinema can create both fantastic and previously unimaginable worlds as well as incorporate the past through the faithful reproduction of pastoral idylls – the glass bees of the title are one example of the simulation of, and improvement on, nature. In *Minority Report*, it is not the automaton but the screen that combines the future and past and it is the expansion of the cinematic apparatus that makes it possible for Anderton to watch his home movies in three-dimensions and, with the aid of drugs, fully immerse himself in that world. He relives moments with his dead child with the aim of extending the past into an eternal present. This is a future in which home entertainment technology will eventually expand the bounds of the cinema and provide a space where the past will be endlessly recycled and where fiction and fact will coexist equally. In the "perfect illusion," there is the "creation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time."³⁵ In this respect, in *Minority Report*, the utopian claims of cinema are contrasted with the loss of self-determination but, unlike *Gattaca*, there is no ostensible critique of the technology.

The cinematic apparatus creates a utopian world, not through the application of principles of behaviour, but in its capacity to incorporate difference, and this includes all technologies of visualisation, all media. Hollis Frampton develops this argument when he states that film is the "last machine" because it can encompass all other machines.

Since all the 'parts' fit together, the sum of all film, all projectors and all cameras in the world constitutes one machine, which is by far the largest and most ambitious single artifact yet conceived and made by man (with the exception of the human species itself). The machine grows by many millions of feet of raw stock every day.

It is not surprising that something so large could utterly engulf and digest the whole substance of the Age of Machines (machines and all), and finally supplant the entirety with its illusory flesh. Having de-

voured all else, the film machine is the lone survivor.³⁶

Frampton imagines the universe as an enormous cinematic archive, a recording of itself that is never lost.³⁷ The development of such technologies as YouTube and the general rush to digitise film and documentary archives is all part of a drive towards the perfectibility of film. This archival memory becomes so pervasive that nothing can exist outside of the filmic machine, and in *Minority Report's* imagining of the future, nothing can exist outside regimes of visualisation. This process of incorporation allows *Minority Report* to maintain a technophilic sensibility despite the dystopic aims of the narrative. The film revels in the plurality of advertising and technological goods (the Lexus car, the rocket pack, the 3D visual notebook, etc.), and outside the narrative, the commercial demands of product placement. The utopianism is founded on the relationship between cinema and consumption where advertising and technology are both recognised for the capacity to generate new visual surfaces. *Gattaca*, by contrast, works towards the reduction of visual difference.

The film does offer a critique of the technology in the form of a questioning of the limits of determinism, but this critique is largely borrowed from the short story. When adapted to the screen, there remains a residual reference to determinism but this is downplayed by the focus on Lamar Burgess' (Max von Sydow) misuse of the technology and the foregrounding of long chase sequences. The chase itself is a vehicle that transports the viewer through the visual splendour of the imagined future – similar in many respects to the rides at theme parks such as *Movie World* – and, accordingly, we see Anderton hanging onto cars in vertical roadways, using personal flying machines in alleyways, examining prisoners in electronic prisons, living in grungy hotels, visiting country houses or stark glassy buildings and hiding from the panoptic gaze of mechanical spiders. The narrative proffers no explanation of how the various locations are integrated or why technology is so unevenly distributed in a small city area – if this is transposed onto a contemporary Western city, half the population would be listening to valve radios while others watch plasma screens. The logic must be found extra-diegetically on the level of the screen where science fiction narrative presents new possibilities of visibility each of which can be roughly connected through cinematic technology, and where the disconnected scenes function like the separate sets in a film studio, each awaiting their time onscreen. This extra-diegetic logic of cinematic futurity overrides any questions about the technology itself. There is no examination of what it means to live in a world where one's future actions are potentially visible. There is no introjection of the logic of the machine, a panoptic sensibility, by the protagonist and the only issue is how to escape physically from the

various technologies of surveillance. It is capitalism's vision of a future where individuals remain sovereign, still possessed of their right and ability to choose, despite the role of the state in monitoring their behaviour. As such it does not provide the precision of anti-Utopian texts, such as Zamyatin's *We* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, nor does it provide a critique of consumerism, which one would expect in a film that imagines a near capitalist future. There are many shots in which advertising images are projected onto a range of surfaces, including dirty industrial streets and the polished walls of transport terminals, but there is no examination of the interaction between the projected surface (the social space) and the projection (the incorporative logic of capitalism). In *Minority Report*, and in Spielberg's other sf blockbuster *AI*, this critique is nullified through the playing out of aesthetic features of postmodernism including the preference for pastiche and the disconnection of style from the "lived conditions" of a particular place. This is not to say that the film does not offer an outside to the omnipresence of screen technology, but it is so disconnected from the film's futurity that it is largely meaningless. The final image shows the island and rustic house where Agatha has chosen to spend the remainder of her days, which bears no relation to the film's technological and social framework. It is nostalgia masquerading as social critique.

In the principle of incorporation and the telos of "total cinema," the film's eclecticism is held together by the topos of visualisable surfaces and the logic of the frame or window. In the *mise en scène* there is the consistent use of glass surfaces, transparent frames, Perspex memory cards, and clear watery baths. The transparent surfaces represent both the transparency of a society ruled by technological foreseeability, the capacity of every surface to reveal a structure – to see through a wall does not reveal an interior but the relationship between other surfaces – and to present the possible incorporation of a variable future and past. This futurity, in which everything is revealed but nothing is seen, is similar to Tati's satirical examination of modernist architecture in *Playtime* or again to Zamyatin's *We*, where D-503 rediscovers the structural logic of the whole in the transparent architecture:

On the right and left, through the glass walls, I see myself, my room, my clothes, my movements – repeated a thousand times over. This is bracing: you feel yourself a part of a great powerful, single entity. And the precise beauty of it – not a single superfluous gesture, curve, or turn.³⁸

However, in *Minority Report* transparency is not the final expression of a fully realised utopia but its starting point, because these transparent sur-

faces, like the empty screen or blank canvas, function as containers for what is to come, as a means of integrating visual plenitude. The visual structure of the film is in marked contrast to the setting of the short story, where the precogs are attached to a machine with a chaotic mix of wires, punchcards and computer technology. There is no transparency, no superimposition of past, present and future, only the determination of the outcome of particular events. In the film, the fullest expression of the transparent surface is in the Precrime offices, where Anderton manipulates the future images of crime on transparent screens that allow the viewer to see him and the object of his attention in a single shot. Similarly, for Anderton, the future and the present coalesce in the single frame as his transparent screen superimposes images of future crimes onto the office surrounds. Moreover, in the change of scene from transparent interiors to expansive exterior shots, the aesthetic of the screen and its ubiquitous transparency is maintained through the use of blue-green filters – a hue commonly associated with the reflected light of television screens. In the filtered images, the viewer does not see into the storyworld of the future but sees *as if* they were a screen, completing the process of incorporation. Tinted filters are also extensively used in *Gattaca* but they are generally applied to shots where there is little depth, with the colour only supporting the two-dimensionality of the image and the opacity of the geometrically organised plane. There is not so much the sense of looking in but of seeing a finished form, the concrete picture rather than the mobile frame.

In the analysis of utopia in film, it is important to recognise the importance of the medium in shaping the utopian vision. Imagining the future is not only a question of exhausting certain principles of social organisation but of rendering such principles visible. *Gattaca* negotiates the problem of imagining a future in which the principle of social organisation (the genetic code) is largely invisible except in the form of inconsequential physical traits (eye and hair colour, height, etc.) and examples of physical disability. The film does not aim to show genetic perfection, because there is no perfect visual form, but rather illustrates the process of becoming perfect both on the level of the plot and in the *mise en scène*. This is envisioned as a reduction of the body to a smooth external surface (Vincent becoming Jerome) and in the reduction of the visual environment to the regular lines of geometrically organised planes. In *Gattaca*, the “disordered and chaotic” aspects of life are gradually erased through the externalisation of interiority and the separation of the pure and impure. There is the double negation of repetitive abstraction, that is, a world where there is no non-utopian element or “no other place.” The utopian environment is always threatened by the microscopic visual trace that has not yet been removed in the quest for

perfectibility. The object of critique is the rationalisation of the inner world, through an ascetic approach to the body, and its consequent utopian claims. Without the exigencies of visualisation, genetic perfection in the film could have been restricted to an examination of human intelligence. In *Minority Report*, there is certainly a utopian aspect derived from a technological vision of the future but, in contrast to *Gattaca*, this technology is not examined or critiqued in the plot. The technology of precrime is realised as a technology of visualisation and the process by which the viewer is introduced to the prediction of future crime is similar to the making of a film from found footage. Anderton brings together these elements to create a sequence of images with a coherent plot that incorporates all places, in the past, present and future. The future of crime could have been imagined solely in terms of names and dates, as it is in the short story, but in its adaptation, there is a celebration of the possibilities of visualisation, which is a feature of most Hollywood science fiction films. In short, *Minority Report* creates a vision of the future beholden to the expansive utopian dreams of Hollywood whereas *Gattaca* remains tied to the anti-Utopian critiques that extend back to the pre-Cold War period.

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NOTES

¹ Negation is a feature of the word's etymology and utopia's inaccessibility is central to Thomas More's foundational text *Utopia* (London: Yale University Press, 1964).

² The two films examined in this article are to some degree "critical dystopias" because they examine the limits of technologically perfectible societies rather than critique a particular political conception of utopia. *Gattaca* provides a cautionary tale about the use of new technologies, and tends toward anti-Utopianism, whereas *Minority Report* wavers between critique and celebration. For further discussion of this distinction, see Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 198-99.

³ Jameson argues that the anti-Utopian critiques should be resisted because they diminish the "Utopian impulse" by restricting it to a particular utopian vision; *Archaeologies*, p. xvi.

⁴ The emphasis in this article on visualisation of utopianism by no means suggests that film is a purely visual medium. The use of sound in the construction of place is certainly central to film criticism but arguing that sound and vision form a consistent aesthetic leads to a number of difficulties. The principles of abstractive reduc-

tion and incorporation cannot be applied to the respective sound environments and soundtracks of each film.

- ⁵ The film is tied to late sixties America and the optimism of the space race. Vincent is conceived in the back of a 1973 Buick Rivera, a car whose curved styling is clearly influenced by rocket technology, and there are many shots of characters gazing towards the heavens. The inclusion of such a car and Vincent's age also imply that *Gattaca* is set at the turn of the century, the same period in which the film was made. It is an alternative present where space technology competes with genetic technology, unlike our own, which is clearly less interested in the exploration of space than in the proliferation of visual technologies.
- ⁶ Edward Rothstein, "Utopia and its Discontents", *Visions of Utopia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 8.
- ⁷ Rothstein, "Discontents", p. 8.
- ⁸ In the voice-over, the past becomes the means through which the future is invoked. It is inevitable as a possibility in that it is the projection onto the future of an ideal drawn from the past and is best expressed in the future perfect tense, "it *will have been possible*". Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, trans. M. L. Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), p. 118.
- ⁹ Jameson, *Archaeologies*, p. 288.
- ¹⁰ Jameson, *Archaeologies*, pp. 288-89.
- ¹¹ In novels, time is most often limited to the life-spans of individuals and accordingly it is difficult to describe the gradual progression of social change. This cannot be easily overcome without recourse to the description of mythological beginnings or through individual recollection. See *Archaeologies*, p. 187.
- ¹² Alan B. Wood, "Genes and Human Potential: Bergsonian Readings of *Gattaca* and the Human Genome", *Theory and Event* 7.1. (2003), p. 52.
- ¹³ Charles Hartshorne, *Wisdom as Moderation: A Philosophy of the Middle Way* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 18-19.
- ¹⁴ Herbert Wildon Carr, *The Scientific Approach to Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1924), p. 25.
- ¹⁵ Henri Bergson argues that the belief in the opposition between order and disorder is based on the projection of a singular notion of order. There is no disorder, only the absence of an expected order. Bergson, *Creative*, pp. 116-17.
- ¹⁶ The term "in-valid" refers to those with any congenital defects and can be compared with the use of the term to describe people with corporeal defects.
- ¹⁷ Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*, trans. Mirra Ginsburg (New York: The Viking Press, 1972).
- ¹⁸ Zamyatin, *We*, p. 20.
- ¹⁹ Jameson, *Archaeologies*, p. 202.
- ²⁰ More, *Utopia*, pp. 77-78.
- ²¹ The images explicitly embody the gestalt principles of visual organisation which serve to reduce the visual diversity of the image through the foregrounding of sim-

ple shapes, the creation of fixed lines and the repetition of form.

- ²² When medium shots are used, the depth of field is often so great that the character in the foreground is juxtaposed against the long shot of an interior in the background. For example, when either Irene or Vincent is working at their terminal they are juxtaposed against numerous other people working in a similar capacity.
- ²³ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 16-17.
- ²⁴ Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), pp. 26-27.
- ²⁵ *Gattaca* is a utopia of "privation" (see Jameson, *Archaeologies*, p. 185) because there is a removal of freedoms in the name of the state but this system of privation is not evenly distributed across the population due to the maintenance of a genetic hierarchy.
- ²⁶ Philip K. Dick, "Minority Report", in *Minority Report* (London: Gollancz, 2002).
- ²⁷ They are able to prevent murder because it has a much stronger resonance in the present but in the story, there is a discussion of how the program could be expanded.
- ²⁸ It is notable that Niccol also wrote the script for *The Truman Show* before writing and directing *Gattaca*.
- ²⁹ The three precogs do not always agree on the exact details of a future crime and the judgement is reached through a majority decision. The minority, or dissenting report, is suppressed in these cases.
- ³⁰ Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 39.
- ³¹ Chatman, *Coming to Terms*, p. 38.
- ³² André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 20.
- ³³ Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, p. 21.
- ³⁴ Ernst Jünger, *The Glass Bees*, trans. Louise Bogan and Elizabeth Mayer (New York: New Review Books, 2000), p. 38.
- ³⁵ Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, p. 21.
- ³⁶ Hollis Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace Notes and Hypotheses", *Circles of Confusion: Film Photography Video: Texts 1968-1980* (Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983), pp. 112-15.
- ³⁷ Frampton, *Circles of Confusion*, p.115.
- ³⁸ Zamyatin, *We*, pp. 30-31.