

8-1-2021

## Rotten with Prediction

Serena Raquel Hicks

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ROTTEN WITH PREDICTION

By

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Bachelor of Arts - Communication Studies  
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2018

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts - Communication Studies

Department of Communication Studies  
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University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
August 2021



## **Thesis Approval**

The Graduate College  
The University of Nevada, Las Vegas

June 28, 2021

This thesis prepared by

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entitled

Rotten with Prediction

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts - Communication Studies  
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## Abstract

This project focuses on the relationship between religion and technology as it is portrayed in Science Fiction (SF). This thesis explores the SF genre rhetorically by examining the 2002 movie *Minority Report* (*MR*), which signaled the importance of surveillance and the need to predict future crimes following 9/11. The events of 9/11 played a significant role in post 9/11 SF films, which reflect and critique our communal and cultural values. 9/11 created a new relationship between the U.S justice system, predictive technologies (PTs), and data gathering. Through the Bush Doctrine of “preemptive action,” the U.S government attempted to use Dataism, the assumption that “data is a transparent and reliable lens that allows us to filter out emotionalism and ideology; that data will help us do remarkable things - like foretell the future” (Brooks, 2013, para. 1). Dataism uses predictive technologies to regulate future behaviors by interpreting past behaviors (Siegal, 2013). My project highlights how SF critiques the new “worship” of Dataism by demonstrating that all PTs are fallible. I use *MR* as the rhetorical artifact because of the historical timing of its release and corresponding U.S policies. The project’s theoretical foundation draws on two of Kenneth Burke’s texts: *Rhetoric of Religion* and *Grammar of Motives*. These texts introduce Burke’s concept of the guilt-redemption cycle. Burke views guilt as a motivating factor driving human drama, resulting in the need to purge such guilt via the guilt-redemption cycle. *MR* also enacts Burke’s concept of “technological psychosis,” as the character’s guilt relates to their belief in technological perfection. The thesis analyzes *MR* to better understand how technological changes manifest as a desire for perfection and a need for Order. *MR* illustrates how humans are “rotten with perfection” in terms of technology and surveillance while also showing the unintended consequences of both (Burke,

1963, p. 507). The thesis shows how SF critiques predictive technological devices as falling short of creating a pure and perfect social order.

*Keywords:* Dataism; surveillance; religion; guilt-redemption cycle; post 9/11; science fiction; predictive technology

## Dedication

*This one's for you, mom.*

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were an event that will always be remembered, dramatically altering the lives of American citizens. Almost twenty years later, citizens still remember that day, where they were during the attacks, and the emotions they felt (Bonilla, 2020). Many young people that were not alive during 9/11 learn about the largest terrorist attack on American soil in schools and through their families' lived experiences (Schuman & Corning, 2012). The attacks changed our social landscape and cultural assumptions regarding our safety (Huddy & Feldman, 2011), surveillance (Gandy, 2003), war (Dubnick et al., 2009), religion (Morgan, 2009a), and politics (Woolsey, 2009). While then-Vice President Dick Cheney suggested that 9/11 "changed everything" (Cheney, 2003, para. 7), scholars have since argued that the United States was already making shifts in many of the areas noted above (Dunmire, 2009; Leffler, 2011; Lyon, 2003a; Shkolnik, 2008). In particular, while surveillance certainly increased post-9/11, it was strengthened dramatically and was a focal point of U.S governance after the attacks (Ball & Webster, 2003; Bloss, 2007; Gandy, 2003; Lyon, 2003a). Changes to U.S surveillance practices became a flashpoint for cultural representation, critique, and discussion in the years following 9/11.

Following 9/11, the government argued for stricter surveillance legislation, saying that the attacks "made clear to all of us that civil liberties are endangered if the Government does not have the capacity to protect its people" (*Implementation of the USA PATRIOT ACT*, 2005, para. 5). To achieve state surveillance, the events of 9/11 made way for new public policies, such as the USA PATRIOT Act (2001), Bush's Doctrine of Preemption (2002), as well as a new federal executive department known as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (2002). The USA PATRIOT Act (2001) is a backronym, which stands for "the Uniting and Strengthening America

by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act” (Department of Justice, n.d.b, para. 1). This act gives “sweeping search and surveillance to domestic law enforcement and foreign intelligence agencies and eliminates checks and balances that previously gave courts the opportunity to ensure that those powers were not abused” (Kearns, 2014, p. 62). The second policy resulting from 9/11 was the Bush Doctrine of Preemption (2002), which

holds that it is politically, legally and morally defensible for the United States to use force against a perceived foreign foe in order to prevent future harm against itself, even though that perceived foe has not yet attacked the United States (Weber, 2007, p. 482).

The difference between both of these policies is that the USA PATRIOT Act (2001) focused on the tools and means of surveilling domestic and international people/groups as well as increasing the penalties for terrorist crimes and activities, while the Bush Doctrine of Preemption (2002) allowed for the Bush Administration to engage in a preemptive war with Iraq (Huiskamp, 2004). The discourse around these policies provides a “premise that increased surveillance actually *enhances* civil liberties,” when in reality, we have seen this premise used as a justification to increase control and power against foreign enemies (Simone, 2009, p. 11, emphasis in original).

The newly implemented public policies and the DHS gave the government extensive power and allowed surveillance to be conducted through both government and personal technologies (Gandy, 2003; Shamsi & Abdo, 2011). The policies informed the public about how the government can obtain data through technologies whose practices threaten civil liberties rather than protect American’s freedoms (Simone, 2009). To prevent another attack, the government supported the new process of accessing citizen’s personal records held by third parties (e.g., bookstores, libraries, universities, doctors, and any Internet service providers) (ACLU, n.d.; Huddy & Feldman, 2011). The government could also enforce a content-oriented

wiretap to the Internet by tracking the web pages and content one looks at (ACLU, n.d.; Shamsi & Abdo, 2011). The USA PATRIOT Act violated other civil freedoms, such as the First and Fourth Amendments. For instance, the government can conduct a search of someone's property without a warrant, violating the Fourth Amendment, and the FBI can start an investigation against an American citizen for exercising their freedom of speech, breaching their First Amendment (ACLU, n.d.). The government justified the practices of surveillance for several reasons, such as collective wellbeing and safety (Glaser, 2000; Huddy et al., 2002; Manderson, 1999; Sackett, 1993), while highlighting the benefits of individual citizens' safety (Higgs, 2001; Lyon, 1994). Governments also instilled fear in civilians by noting the dangers of crime (Haggerty & Ericson, 1999a; Leman-Langlois, 2003) and how the U.S was under threat, thus legitimizing why the government employed enhanced surveillance tactics. The USA PATRIOT Act also stressed the importance of data and information sharing, which is evident in this passage:

The PATRIOT Act facilitates information sharing and cooperation among government agencies so that they can better 'connect the dots.' In the past, different agencies and departments were collecting data but not sharing it with each other. Now we are able to share that data to prevent future attacks (Department of Justice, n.d.b, para. 8).

This statement emphasizes how the government understood the value of data and how technological mechanisms reinforced a form of social control. The USA PATRIOT Act gave power to the creation of DHS and allowed for the Bush Administration to generate warrantless surveillance policies, such as the Bush Doctrine of Preemption (2002).

9/11 inspired changes in surveillance practices, and there were several cultural responses to those changes. The impact of 9/11 and its aftermath gathered steam from U.S citizens, supporting the policies put forth by the Bush Administration (e.g., deployment of troops in Afghanistan, military action against other countries who harbor terrorists, and the possible

initiation of a national identity card system) (Huddy & Feldman, 2011). Americans supported surrendering their civil liberties, such as allowing the government to monitor phones and emails to fight terrorism and feel safe (Huddy et al., 2002). Public opinion polls conducted after 9/11 found that increased surveillance, including identity checks in public buildings and at work, was supported by more than 75 percent of those surveyed (Huddy et al., 2002). Americans who advocated for a national identity system, random identity checks, as well as giving up their civil liberties had a positive response rate ranging from 55-79 percent, depending on the survey (Huddy et al., 2002). The 9/11 attacks also increased air passenger safety, where Bush instituted a new Transportation Security Administration (TSA), which mandated several important changes in U.S commercial airports (Blalock et al., 2007). TSA was another surveillance measure where passengers and their pieces of luggage were screened by security to prevent another attack and restore confidence and safety for passengers (Blalock et al., 2007). Since 9/11, it was reported in 2016 that the country has nearly spent \$100 billion on airport security and technological surveillance measures (Peterson, 2016). The impact of 9/11 extended beyond politics and policies for U.S citizens, as we saw a shift in our media, art, and entertainment during this time as well (Morgan, 2009b).

Because surveillance practices are tied to technological capabilities, one genre that grappled with these changes was Science Fiction (SF). SF engages with specific cultural and political themes that reflect how the world operates, revealing authors and filmmakers present fixations as well as future probabilities (Doherty, 1989). Some of the fixations present in SF are psychological warfare, interplanetary warfare, nuclear warfare, time travel, technology, and extraterrestrial lifeforms (Schmeink, 2016). In the wake of 9/11, the discourses of surveillance and security gained popularity in the genre of SF (Mallan, 2014). The genre reflects surveillance

through technologies, reflecting the anxieties people experience knowing that they are constantly being watched (Connors, 2017; Mallan, 2014). Presenting technologies in films visually reflects how governments and companies can track, profile, and accumulate data on citizens' everyday actions. For the genre of SF and its surveillance trope, technology can be used as a weapon, specifically by watching everything one does (Stewart, 2012). For SF and the surveillance plot it brings, "vision is a weapon," which is evident in several SF surveillance films (Stewart, 2012, p. 7) (e.g., *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1984), *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Total Recall* (2012), and *V for Vendetta* (2005)). These films are cultural responses to our anxieties and fears regarding surveillance and government (Frank, 2011; Katovich & Kinkade, 1993).

One such cultural response to this change was *Minority Report* (hereafter, *MR*). *MR* (2002) was a film that was released not long after 9/11, based on a novella written by Philip K. Dick in 1956. Even though *MR* was created before the 9/11 attacks, the film still allows us to explore the surveillance practices that came about from post-9/11 policies. This project also focuses on the relationship between religion and technology as it is portrayed in SF. More specifically, the main argument facilitated by my thesis is that we find ourselves in moments of technological fallenness due to the "worship" and faith of Dataism, and the genre of dystopian SF offers audiences a way to imaginatively face this tension, the guilt that materializes, and how people can redeem themselves. In this project, I will analyze *MR* as a gateway to understanding how SF critiques Big Data "worship" in the 21st century, critiques human's desire for perfection, and critiques predictive technologies (PTs) and their fallibility, which falls short of creating a perfect social order.

This chapter includes four sections: the first section discusses the genre of SF and its importance to this project. We can understand technology and surveillance culture through the

cultural phenomenon of SF, which reflects back on society and its practices. The second section explores the practice of Dataism, or an ideology that stresses a “widespread *belief* in the objective quantification and potential tracking of all kinds of human behavior and sociality through online media technologies” (van Dijck, 2014, p. 198, emphasis in original). I discuss further how data is becoming more valuable than humans and how this is society’s new ideology, or as Harari (2015) states, it is a data religion. The third section briefly highlights the critical approach for my rhetorical analysis, which is influenced by Kenneth Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle and writings on technology. The final section provides an overview of the thesis with details on each chapter.

### **The Genre of Science Fiction**

The genre of SF is a forward-looking fiction that provides its audience with what we could experience in the world socially (Parrinder, 2013). Scholars who study SF and authors of SF have offered many definitions for this genre. However, a broad, traditional definition for SF reads as “Imaginative fiction based on postulated scientific discoveries or spectacular environmental changes, frequently set in the future or on other planets and involving space or time travel” (Roberts, 2000, p. 2). Rod Serling (1962), the creator of *The Twilight Zone*, also put forth a simple definition about SF stating, “Fantasy is the impossible made probable. Science Fiction is the improbable made possible” (as cited in Mahanti, 2012, p. 43). SF literature and films can also include many other premises that the broad definition might not incorporate, such as robots, computers, alternative histories, and the like (Maylor, 2000; Milner, 2004; Roberts, 2000).

There is often a “point of difference” within SF that helps us realize what makes something SF or not (Suvin, 1979). Specifically, a “point of difference” tends to make a clear distinction between a world depicted in SF from the world in which the audience experiences

and recognizes today (Milner, 2004; Suvin, 1979). The difference between the reality presented within the SF text and that of the readers needs to be evident, including elements like superior technological devices, space or time travel, extreme environmental changes, non-human life (e.g., extra-terrestrial creatures), and scientific discoveries or experiments (Catană, 2016). A way to help label and identify these elements was established by the SF scholar, Darko Suvin, creating a term known as “novum,” which is Latin for “new thing,” and helps to refer to this “point of difference” (Suvin, 1979, p. 63). A “novum” is used to describe plausible scientific innovations and technological devices (Suvin, 1979). In fact, “The ‘novum’ can exist only by ‘cognitive logic’ or rational explanations that involve scientific processes or discoveries” (Catană, 2016, p. 169). If a narrative does not include these characteristics, it is not deemed SF (Suvin, 1979). Furthermore, some SF stories can have one novum, such as a time machine as presented in H.G Wells’ book *The Time Machine* (1895), or atomic power in his other book, *The World Set Free* (1915). While other SF stories include “nova,” which is the plural form of “novum,” meaning there are several interrelated scientific innovations and devices (Roberts, 2000). For instance, the starship known as *Enterprise* on *Star Trek* has various interrelated nova, including numerous futuristic technologies found onboard. Audiences witness technologies such as communicators (e.g., cell phones), faster-than-light travel, tricorders (e.g., device that gathers medical information), and matter-transportation machines (Cueno, 2011). SF plays a significant role in shaping societal understandings and attitudes about technology and the role communication technologies play within our culture (Furini et al., 2016). We end up with real-world technologies resulting from SF (Ahlin, 2018), which inspires technology enthusiasts to go about and turn our imaginations into reality (Kirby, 2010).

One of the most influential and culturally significant SF texts that allowed for so many technological possibilities was *Star Trek: The Original Series (TOS)* (1966-1969). *Star Trek's* illustrations inspired technologies that we use daily, such as computers, laptops, and cell phones (Cueno, 2011). The show also prophesied the evolution and creation of other technological devices. For instance, when Captain Kirk communicated with other people on their ships, he did so on a screen with video, establishing visual communication similar to video conferencing we practice today (e.g., Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, GoToMeeting) (Cuneo, 2011). Another example points to Spock downloading data onto a tiny storage device, resembling small floppy disks measuring around 3 inches (Cueno, 2011; Gresh et al., 2001). Soon after, the floppy disk depiction became a reality in 1970, developed by IBM, and measuring at eight inches (Swedin, 2005). *Star Trek* has had a massive impact on technologies, so much so that NASA contacted and teamed up with the original actors from *Star Trek* to help recruit young astronauts and discuss technology (Allgaier, 2018). Technologists have openly admitted to *Star Trek* inspiring them to create technologies, such as the engineer from Motorola, Martin Cooper, accredited with the first mobile phone in 1973 (Bryant et al., 2012). Cooper recalls watching *Star Trek*, saying, “And suddenly, there’s Captain Kirk talking on his communicator. Talking! With no dialing. That was not a fantasy to us... that was an objective” (as cited in Bryant et al., 2012, p. 313). This statement proves why we, as a society, now have particular technological devices, thus linking SF with real-world technology (Bryant et al., 2012; Cuneo, 2011; Kirby, 2010; Wakkary et al., 2015).

SF is broad and complex in the sense that it can be combined with other subgenres. These subgenres include parallel worlds, space opera, cyberpunk, dystopian/utopian fiction, and feminist SF (Booker & Thomas, 2009). This inclusivity of subgenres embraces popular culture,



allowing much freedom for authors, filmmakers, as well as scholarly critics to write and critique the storylines and conflicts in SF texts. The genre poses important questions about the morality of humanity through science, technology, nuclear warfare, political issues, and religious issues (Sanders, 2008). Throughout many SF storylines, “science fiction promotes understanding of human differences and ethical thinking” (Jones, 2020, para. 2). This genre deals with real human dilemmas and asks the audience to imagine moral issues rather than accept or believe these moral issues as true (Walton & Tanner, 1994). SF is a way for audiences to grapple with economic, social, and political dilemmas that are opportune and pertinent, “but in settings or times that offer critical distance” (Jones, 2020). Thankfully, SF texts allow viewers and readers to use their imagination to consider ways of handling social and political challenges (Beukes et al., 2017; Jones, 2020). One of the challenges this project focuses on is technology, which will be framed in combination with the subgenre of dystopian fiction.

Writers and filmmakers have created many visions of technological upheaval through SF in conjunction with a dystopian prism. The future in SF is often displayed in a dystopian setting - a way of signaling a specific chain of events culminating in what “could be” (Moylan, 2000). To have something be labeled as dystopian, the story must include particular components from the author’s or filmmaker’s contemporary society as a foundation to imagine a new and worse-off futuristic social order (Millward, 2007). People often think that anti-utopian stories are the same as dystopian stories. Anti-utopian stories include undesirable places and terrible human conditions, similar to that of dystopian fiction. The essential difference between dystopian and anti-utopian is that the latter does not have to be grounded by the author’s contemporary reality or address existing problems the author experiences (Sisk, 1997). However, dystopian fiction must always include problems and anxieties from the writer’s world (Millward, 2007; Sisk,

1997). Sisk (1997) extends the dystopian fiction definition, saying, “Dystopian fiction is fundamentally concerned with the writer’s present society and builds its horrific power on extrapolating current trends to what the writer considers their logically fearsome conclusions” (p. 7). This is why we can resonate with this genre because these stories can culturally mirror our experiences and world.

In a dystopia, the future is often dark, frightening, and troubling (Thompson, 2018) or offers “a more wretched kind of life” (Williams, 1980, p. 196). Dystopian SF stories tend to focus on the protagonist and their perspective of the dystopian world (Moylan, 2000), who tend to have troubles with their existing social structures (Millward, 2007). The audience bears witness to the character’s journey of finding a way to cope or overcome dilemmas in their dystopian society. By the end of the film, there is typically some form of “a utopian horizon, or at the very least a scrap of hope” for either the characters or the social structures within the film (Moylan, 2000, p. 2).

Dystopian SF tends to have technology as a theme, represented with technological excess or a technologized culture and world (O’Riordan, 2005). Other common dystopian tropes that are present in combination with technology are control (e.g., government and surveillance), environmental catastrophes, alien invasions, and loss of humanity (Buchen, 1984; Klus, 2012; Moylan, 2000; Roberts, 2000). Dystopian SF texts possess and offer an element of social warning(s), whose warnings offer insight into whatever common dystopian theme(s) the author or filmmaker used (Millward, 2007). We see dystopian books and films offer several different kinds of warnings, such as *Children of Men* (2006) and *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2017), both show warnings of women incapable of reproducing (e.g., loss of humanity) who are under strict government regimes. We also see technological forewarnings and their social implications in

*Black Mirror* (2011) and *The Giver* (2014), showing how technology can manipulate societies and their emotions while under surveillance. These cautions can prepare the audience for the future by reflecting on current social conditions to prevent specific outcomes that are dystopically portrayed (Browning, 1966; Moylan, 2000; Walsh, 1962). Margaret Atwood, the author of *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), provides insight into the cautions seen in dystopian works. She states that these cautions should make the reader or audience ask themselves “What if?” questions, such as “What if we continue down the road we’re already on?” or “How slippery is the slope?” (Atwood, 2003, para. 7). For Atwood and many authors, this is the intended goal of dystopian SF, which allows the audience to imagine (Atwood, 2004).

Philip K. Dick (1928-1982), a famous SF American novelist, whose work is considered in this study, will help us to better understand dystopian SF. Dick has helped shape the dystopian SF landscape, confronting questions of what it means to be human and collapsing technology, surveillance, and governments as some of his main themes (Mirenayat & Soofastaei, 2015). Another layer he adds to his narratives is his characters’ quest for redemption, representing religious allegorical tales and religious symbolism (Hale, 1997; Mirenayat & Soofastaei, 2015). A lot of his work became films, such as *Blade Runner* (1982, 2017), *Total Recall* (1990, 2012), *The Truman Show* (1998), *Vanilla Sky* (2001), *A Scanner Darkly* (2006), and *The Adjustment Bureau* (2011), and television shows, including *The Man in the High Castle* (2015) and *Electric Dreams* (2018). Dick’s SF novels and short stories have obviously made an impact on popular SF cinema (Alessio, 2006), only deepening his dystopian ethos over time. The SF text that I will be analyzing from Dick’s work is *MR*, a 2002 Spielberg film about a society where crime can be predicted and stopped before it happens. It only seems fitting to study one of the “most important figures in the 20th century U.S Science Fiction” genre and his prescient story, *MR* (Clute &

Nicholls, 1999, p. 328). As we continue, the next section will introduce a new emerging ideology known as Dataism.

### **Dataism as Religion**

Predictive technologies (PTs), or predictive analytics, are algorithmically driven computational systems that seek to regulate future behaviors based on interpretations of past behaviors (Larose, 2015). Siegel (2013) describes predictive analytics as “technology that learns from experience (data) to predict the future behavior of individuals in order to drive better decisions” (p. 11). The more behavioral data these systems can accumulate, the better their predictions. PTs are the vehicle that allows for Dataism to operate. The term Dataism first appeared in 2013 when David Brooks, an op-ed columnist for the New York Times, stated, “If you asked me to describe the rising philosophy of the day, I’d say it is data-ism” (para. 1). This article, titled “Philosophy of Data,” examined how data was used over the past ten years by government agencies and Big Tech (e.g., Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, and Microsoft). This ability to gather and track society’s personal data and find out specific information from that data,

seems to carry with it certain cultural assumptions - that everything that can be measured should be measured; that data is a transparent and reliable lens that allows us to filter out emotionalism and ideology; that data will help us do remarkable things - like foretell the future (Brooks, 2013, para. 1).

This mentality, and “reverence” for data, parallels nicely with the Bush administration’s public policies of the USA PATRIOT Act (2001) and the Bush Doctrine of Preemption (2002). Both Dataism and Bush’s policies aim to trace behaviors through our online activity, translated into data, to predict future actions; in this way, these earlier policies demonstrate that shift in societal thinking that has led to a surge in Dataism today.

The practice and understanding of Dataism can be looked at in two ways: a scientific paradigm and a religion. There is one thing that remains true between both outlooks, and that is Dataism is successful due to proliferating PTs, social network sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube), and communication platforms (e.g., Skype, WhatsApp, and free email services) where users are willing to give up personal information to participate in the new aspects of social life (van Dijck, 2014). van Dijck (2014) and other scholars (Kosinski et al., 2013; Mayer-Schoenberger & Cukier, 2013) look at Dataism as a new paradigm in science and society where social behaviors and actions are transformed “into online quantified data, thus allowing for real-time tracking and predictive analysis” (van Dijck, 2014, p. 198). These scholars believe that the scientific paradigm of Dataism is a secular ideology (Lyon, 2017), where users trust the government and Big Tech organizations with their data (Lyon, 2017; van Dijck, 2013). This ideology reads as a “widespread *belief* in the objective quantification and potential tracking of all kinds of human behavior and sociality through online media technologies” (van Dijck, 2014, p. 198, emphasis in original). As a new scientific paradigm, the goal is to look at data sets, interpret the information to predict individual behavior, and figure out sensitive personal attributes from users (Kosinski et al., 2013). The goal of collecting this information is to “optimize personal platform services and offer social psychologists a wealth of data they could never have gained otherwise” (van Dijck, 2014, p. 200). The most important thing for Dataists is collecting data to manipulate, measure, and monetize online human behavior (Moulaison, 2020; van Dijck, 2014; Zuboff, 2019). However, scholars argue that data does not accurately reflect *true* human behavior because it is manipulated by algorithms, thus creating a false sense of truth and knowledge (boyd & Crawford, 2012; van Dijck, 2014). The Big Data we see in Dataism “is

seen as a troubling manifestation of Big Brother,” and adding to the power of our surveillance state by decreasing citizens’ privacy and increasing control (boyd & Crawford, 2012, p. 664).

The term reemerged in a new way when historian and social scientist Yuval Noah Harari wrote *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (2015). Harari (2015) claimed that Dataism sees the universe as a system consisting of data flows. The only way to be valuable to the system, whether objects or human beings, is determined solely by the ability to process such data. Harari (2015) believes that human cannot process the immense amount of data present today due to the proliferation of technology.

Prior to the vast amount of data being available from technology, Harari (2015) insists that “humans were supposed to distill data into information, information into knowledge, and knowledge into wisdom” (p. 373). Instead, he suggests that data processing should always be assigned and entrusted to algorithms (Harari, 2015). Dataists put their trust in machines and Big Data, similar to the scientific paradigm, but as sources for knowledge rather than humans, replacing humans slowly but surely (Harari, 2015). The scientific paradigm depends on humans and their activity, so they can continue to establish new methods of knowing information and ways of monitoring society at large (boyd & Crawford, 2012). Furthermore, Harari (2015) states that Big Data algorithms will soon know and understand people better than they know themselves, helping to predict what they will do next. We are already experiencing this as a society simply by using Amazon. Amazon’s algorithms and the data it collects relate to our purchasing habits when we need to buy a specific product (e.g., dog treats every six weeks) and continuously gathers data about users to tailor products and services back to them. Because of Dataisms all-knowing capabilities, Harari (2015, 2017) claims that Dataism is a new God and a new form of religion, whether we realize it or not.

Harari believes in the scientific paradigm of Dataism, but he took it further by reimagining Dataism to reflect it in a more religious light. Due to this extension of Dataism and the coinage of Dataism as a “new religion,” I refer to Harari as the founder and Father of Dataism. He explains this “religion” as being faith-based around algorithms, whose algorithms collect people and objects (e.g., cars and refrigerators) data (Harari, 2015, 2016a). This data knows much information about us, and Harari believes that people will “worship” and trust Big Data because of its unprecedented self-insight into its users (Harari, 2015, 2017). Having humans connect to an all-knowing system allows the system to create meaning for users and their lives (Harari, 2015). Humanism believed “that our experiences occur inside us, and that we ought to find within ourselves the meaning of all that happens” (Harari, 2016a, para. 40). Dataists believe that people must share their data and experiences to make meaning of their lives. Therefore, giving power to data helps data to know the very inner workings of users’ behavior and their souls (Harari, 2015, 2016a). The system knows the users’ preferences, which allows and helps algorithms with meaning-making (Harari, 2016a).

Traditional religions signaled that God is all-knowing and is the divine entity who watches over you and knows everything about you (Harari, 2015, 2017). “Data religion” suggests that the algorithms are now watching you, collecting data to optimize your life experiences because they now care for you (Harari, 2015, 2017). Harari (2017) claims that instead of praying to God and symbolically looking above toward the sky for people’s answers, people now look down to their technological devices and depend on the Google cloud as their new source of authority (Harari, 2017). Nowadays, whenever individuals experience an issue, they do not always ask God for help. Instead, users of technological devices ask Google or Facebook because of the vast amount of data points they have per user, helping them to make

“better decisions” than what they would have done on their own (Harari, 2017). Harari (2015) believes that Dataism is a way for humans to reach their full potential because data and algorithms suggest the “better” option when making decisions in their lives; it is the inner workings of perfection by code (Hyde, 2010). Overall, I argue that Dataism functions as an ideology that guides human behavior.

The way “data religion” is described could also align with surveillance and the genre of SF. Surveillance can be seen in a metaphysical sense, and it helps us understand modern surveillance tactics by relating them to an omniscient God (Saltzman, 2019). As the Dataists and algorithms “know everything *about us*, whereas their operations are designed to be unknowable *to us*,” it helps give this “data religion” power to continue gathering data and predicting human behavior (Zuboff, 2019, p. 28, emphasis in original). This point could be related to the idea of God, where Saltzman (2019) claims, “God knew all human secrets, yet God’s secrets remained fundamentally unknowable to human beings” (para. 3). Saltzman (2019) claims that the enigmatic omniscience of our surveillance in the new digital age parallels “the medieval belief in an all-knowing God” (para. 1). There is a reason why in surveillance studies, scholars use the term “God’s eye” to explain and envision surveillance (Lyon, 2018), and it is also a theme depicted in SF cinema.

Orwell’s *1984* and the notion of “Big Brother” and surveillance trends are a direct model for many SF dystopian pictures (Atwood, 2004; Marks, 2005). Surveillance in SF dystopian texts and literature often has religious symbolism (Alessio, 2006; McGrath, 2011), where many surveillance plots use ocular thematics where vision is used as a weapon (Stewart, 2012). As Lyon (2018) further describes, “this implies fearful if not actually violent undertones, suggesting a God whose primary task is of a moral overseer who invisibly scrutinizes humanity for failure



and transgression” (p. 546). If God views and judges humans’ morality, so does “data religion,” but at the expense of users’ privacy. The fear of constantly being watched can influence the way people act and think, as depicted in SF dystopian films (Richards, 2013). There are other religious undertones, allegories, and symbolism within the genre of dystopian SF.

The connection between religion and SF is prominent, whose stories signify humanity, morality (e.g., good versus evil), and the notion of existence and meaning (Alessio, 2006; McGrath, 2011; Simkins, 2016; Woodman, 1979). It is essential to situate religion with SF by articulating it as “belief systems that adhere to an externally generated, relatively concrete set of tenets that guide behavior; that present certain ideas about the universe; and that represent a particular element, or figure, as divine” (Simkins, 2016, p. 14). This definition allows for dystopian SF authors and filmmakers the freedom to apply religion to their stories in a way that works for them, whether this is through climate change, the government, surveillance, or aliens. I argue that there are a lot of religious undertones in dystopian SF movies that integrate technology. Specifically, technology and Dataism can trigger dystopian and utopian rhetoric (boyd, & Crawford, 2012) because we have tools that can give us insight and knowledge (e.g., utopian) while also allowing invasions of privacy and decreasing civil liberties (e.g., dystopian). It is significant to note that dystopian societies were originally utopian societies due to technology, establishing technological utopias (Mirenayat & Soofastaei, 2015). Technology helps create a perfect world order and living conditions, but things go wrong, and these societies degenerate into dystopian societies (Marks, 2005; Mirenayat & Soofastaei, 2015). In these dystopian SF worlds and their relationship to technology, dystopian SF texts often use religious allegories to highlight morality, control, and what it means to be human, where the characters follow the Christian narrative of Jesus Christ by sacrificing their own life (Plotinsky, 2009;

Roberts, 2016). Because these SF stories parallel religious narratives, dystopian SF also focuses on savior figures (Polatis, 2014). We see this combination of technology, morality, savior figures, and sacrifice in SF films like *Star Wars* (1977), *The Terminator* (1984), *Total Recall* (1990), and *The Matrix* (1999). SF draws on symbolism and is comparable with Western theology, allowing viewers to reflect on specific questions about humanity (McGrath, 2011). These questions SF offers include whether free will exists or not, the ethical issues of whether evil is a personal trait or mainly systemic, and if it is morally justifiable to enforce “violence in combating evil and/or seeking freedom” (McGrath, 2011, p. 6). Some of these questions are addressed, in relation to Dataism, in the dystopian SF text that I will be analyzing: *MR*. The following section turns to an influential rhetorician, Kenneth Burke, who studied technology and religion during his lifetime. This section briefly introduces the relevant theoretical concepts and the Burkean framework this thesis will employ.

### **Kenneth Burke’s Work as Method**

As Kenneth Burke (1973b) observed, “Stories are equipment for living” (p. 294). Burke believes that stories respond to a given social situation and represent our social structures (Burke, 1973b). The genre of SF also believes that stories are responses to specific cultural trends and situations that reflect the author’s social order (Sisk, 1997). Stories presented as films are a way to imagine the world, understand relationships between people, and understand attitudes as well as cultural values. Fisher (1985) believes that stories help us make meaning of our lives, and so does film, which helps us shape our attitudes and beliefs (Lemke, 2006). Specifically, Burke dabbled in reading SF as a source of entertainment. Burke commented on SF and depicted SF texts as social documents, focusing on what they have to say about modern society at large (Burke, 2003). Burke (1967) also agrees with Fisher’s sentiment when he looks at literary forms and describes them as providing answers to situations that helps the audience cope and

understand those given conditions. Burke (1967) believed that writing can serve as the author's solution to a situation, which can elicit identification for the readers. Knowing this, I believe we can extend Burke's ideas of literary form to include SF films to communicate answers to its audiences by way of identification surrounding moral and technological issues.

Thus, this project's theoretical and methodological perspectives draw from Kenneth Burke. Burke has already theorized about social order and technology. He viewed technology as destructive yet commented on people's obsession around technology, representing a cult toward technological progress (Burke, 1972). This thesis considers Burke's philosophy of technology and the guilt-redemption cycle as they relate to Dataism and PTs. The choice to combine Dataism with Burke's concepts can help us make sense of Burke's methods when looking at dystopian SF texts and how these concepts relate to religion. The subsequent section provides an overview of the project.

## **Conclusion**

As discussed throughout this chapter, this project focuses on the relationship between religion (e.g., faith in data) and technology as it is portrayed in dystopian SF. This project aims to conduct a rhetorical analysis that examines the popular 2002 film *MR* and identify the importance of surveillance and Dataism through PTs, how these devices gather data while humans "worship" as well as rely on Big Data, and the significance of predicting future behaviors. In order to analyze *MR* as a gateway to understanding the links between religion, technology, and the genre of SF, I would like to provide a brief overview of the project with details on each chapter.

Chapter Two provides a comprehensive explanation of a critical perspective, theoretical constructs, and the method that will guide my rhetorical analysis. The beginning of this chapter establishes Kenneth Burke's attitude toward technology. The second half unpacks the

epistemological underpinnings of Kenneth Burke's guilt-redemption cycle. The cycle will aid in identifying *The Established Order*, *The Negative*, *Victimage*, and *Redemption* among SF texts. I also delve into the pairing of Dataism with each phase of Burke's guilt-redemption cycle to analyze SF artifacts. Chapter Three utilizes a Burkean framework, presented in Chapter Two, to investigate the 2002 film *MR*, directed by Steven Spielberg. As the analysis shows, SF critiques the "worship" and faith of Dataism in the 21st century and proves that predictive technological devices fall short of creating a perfect social order. Finally, Chapter Four will stress three contributions made to the discipline of rhetoric: 1) the importance of SF for future scholarship and how it helps us to understand the world, 2) the implications about PTs and Dataism as an extension of Burke's philosophy of technology and guilt-redemption cycle, and 3) the project's relevance surrounding 9/11 scholarship and how this study is a contribution to surveillance studies.

## Chapter Two: Burke's Guilt-Redemption Cycle

Burke's guilt-redemption cycle is a useful tool for evaluating Dataism, predictive technologies (PTs), technological anxiety, and religion patterned in the genre of Science Fiction (SF). SF can be understood as a lens to view Dataism, PTs, and religion because SF captures and reworks reality to show how these topics materialize and how to handle these topics (Milner, 2004). Generally, the dystopian SF genre uses contemporary society as a mere basis for their imagined dystopias, lending an element of social warning(s) about technological innovation in SF texts (Thompson, 2018). Therefore, dystopian SF is an important genre to study because it can 1) replace conventional religion with the belief in another SF prop (e.g., technology or environmentalism) (Roberts, 2000), and 2) offers re-conceptualizations of technologies and how these devices affect the human agent (Bukatman, 1993). Thus, SF dystopian cinema can function rhetorically to help illuminate Burke's idea that symbols and language warrant humanity's independence from nature, demonstrating how man is "separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making" (Burke, 1970, p. 40). Specifically, I am extending Burke's definition in this project to say that technology is one of the things we filter our reality through, so we can never be one with nature.

The combination of SF, technology, and religion taps into the notion of perfection (Hyde, 2010). SF texts underscore the relationship between humans and PTs, revealing the potentialities and consequences of this rotten form of perfection (Newman, 2010). In SF, we witness promises of social perfection (Order) through PTs, resulting in catastrophic outcomes (the fall). Audiences witness how characters in SF cinema rhetorically figure out and sort through questions of guilt, blame, and how to redeem themselves in a fallen social order. Burke (1970) provides theoretical guidance on the guilt-redemption cycle, illuminating how dystopian SF addresses social anxieties

surrounding surveillance and PTs, specifically how guilt and blame are assigned for these troubles (e.g., *1984* (1984), *V for Vendetta* (2005), *The Circle* (2017)). Additionally, dystopian SF imagines the prospects of redemption through specific narrative devices and patterns, such as employing religious allegories to represent redemptive acts (Alessio; 2006; Roberts, 2000). Dystopian SF texts feature the “dark side” of digital culture (Meadows, 2012), in which the evils of technological manipulation and mastery are made clear, thus needing to purge their technological guilt. As discussed in further detail below, this project will deploy Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle to examine how SF configures and attempts to solve our fallen state rhetorically.

The chapter proceeds in three parts. The first section discusses Kenneth Burke’s conceptions of technology to highlight the meanings and ramifications of technological behavior. This section demonstrates the value of Burkean dramatic analysis for the broader project (Burke, 1969a). Establishing Burke’s attitude toward “Big Technology” in a broad sense helps to situate the guilt-redemption cycle concerning big (institutional technologies) and small (personal wearable technologies) PTs envisioned within SF. In the second section, I will be identifying the spirit of perfection with digital PTs, which constitutes a sense of order, and helps connect to other technological attitudes and behaviors, such as technological psychosis. Thus, this technological psychosis identifies the character’s guilt as related to the belief in technological perfection. Lastly, the third section introduces, describes, and elaborates upon Burkean concepts that constitute this project’s critical approach for analyzing my SF artifact, including *The Established Order*, *The Negative*, *Victimage*, and *Redemption*. As we will see, Burke’s guilt-redemption framework is ideal for evaluating how popular SF texts rhetorically manage the

sacralization of Dataism and PTs. Before explaining the relevant concepts, however, I first need to introduce Burke's relationship with technology and its roots within rhetorical concepts.

### **Burke's Philosophy of Technology**

Kenneth Burke is widely known for being an American literary critic, but he also published poems, fiction, and review essays of all kinds (Rountree et al., 1987). His prominent titles, classified as literary criticism and other collections, help with the project's grounding and critical handling by providing a framework for critiquing the genre of SF and how these texts are examples of the guilt-redemption cycle. In discussing Burke, Muir (1990) wrote of him that he was a "preeminent scholar of our symbol capacity, providing insight into human nature and offering a fundamental description of how and why humans act" (p. 1). Burke's rhetorical theories and concepts offer scholars a way to study the relationship between human symbolic capacity and digital technology and provides critical approaches surrounding the relationship between the human agent and technology (Muir, 1990). During Burke's lifetime, he was ridden with technological anxiety, and this attitude against technology only strengthened over time (Hill, 2009). Burke lived and experienced different technological innovations as well as tragedies:

WWI saw a dramatic increase in killing proficiency; agriculture transformed the Midwest into the Dust Bowl; industrial machinery enslaved factory workers as managers turned to automation; capitalism wasted more and more resources through planned obsolescence and consumerism; and automobiles transformed the American landscape (Hill, 2009, p. 3).

His technophobia was magnified due to realized technological calamities, which led him constantly devoting his time to grappling and writing about technology, technological behavior's and their meanings, as well as technological consequences (Hill, 2009). More expressive, perhaps, of Burke's technological attitude was his anti-technological lifestyle (Nicotra, 2017). His way of life supported a term he coined in *Grammar of Motives*, "technologism," which was

constituted by an anti-technological attitude (Burke, 1969a, p. 54). This lifestyle consisted of Burke living far away from a metropolitan area and living in and amongst nature on a farm with no electricity or running water (Rickert, 2017). He was insistent not to be around technology and did so until the 1960s (Rickert, 2017). Even though Burke tried not to partake in technological practices, he still recognized the interconnectedness of all spheres of human activity with technology, how it constituted a world order (Burke, 1984a), and the possibility of technology's destructive capacity (Hill, 2009). Because technology was a part of every field of human activity, Burke featured it as one of his key themes throughout his writings known as "Big Technology" (Burke, 1976, p. 177). "Big Technology" for Burke was the mechanization seen in factories, vehicles, and, most notably during his life, nuclear warfare, such as the atomic bomb (Pfister, 2017). These were three crucial technologies that ascended during his life, inspiring him to write about the atomic bomb (Burke, 1966a). Burke was not against all forms of technology, but he was against the kinds of technology birthed for the sole purpose of extraction, growth, and overproduction in the competitive marketplace (Burke, 1968). Specifically, Burke had a deep distrust of technology that led to problems linked with the prominent technologies of his life: industrial pollution, advanced weaponry, and genetic experimentation (Hill, 2009). Throughout his work, Burke mentions and emphasizes technology's destructive capacity.

It is worth noting for comparison to discuss the technologies Burke did accept during his lifetime. His poem, *Eye-Crossing - From Brooklyn to Manhattan* (1973a), is a very personal piece regarding his dying wife, Libbie. As her primary caretaker, her illness caused him to go out in the city to run errands. He realized he was in a city, whose high technology and power helped build it (Burke, 1973a). Burke acknowledges that the human brain, found in nature, generates science and technological inventions that separate us from nature (Rueckert & Bonadonna,



2003a). This epiphany made him realize that some positive forms of technology developed by the human mind exist. Burke changed his attitude toward technology, arguing in his poem that these technological inventions signify perfection (Burke, 1973a), which Reuckert and Bonadonna (2003a) note as the “perfection of reason” (p. 4). Some of the great technological inventions that Burke (1973a) sees as the “perfection of reason” are cities and their infrastructure, as well as modern medicine and life-saving medical procedures (Burke, 2003, p. 4). Burke (1973a) believes that some of these technological inventions are humankind’s greatest achievements. However, at the nexus of this poem, he suggests that Manhattan “represents as a catastrophe - that is, as a product of technological genius” (Reuckert & Bonadonna, 2003b, p. 306). Even though Burke views the city as a form of technological innovation and genius, he still views technology as having a destructive capacity (Burke, 1973a). He continually characterizes the city as a “catastrophe” (Burke, 1973a, XVI). However, Burke frames this line of thinking with a quote from Remy de Gourmont, stating, “intelligence is an accident, genius is a catastrophe” (as cited in Reuckert & Bonadonna, 2003b, p. 306). Burke accepts some forms of technology, but he will always acknowledge the negative effects technology offers.

Burke held this attitude surrounding technology, noting that it was a fanatical belief system, one of compulsion and perfection, similar to Western theology, and was symbolically curated as such. He wrote of this perfectionist function:

of man’s technological genius, as compulsively implemented by the vast compulsions of our vast technologic grid, makes for a self-perpetuating cycle quite beyond our ability to adopt any major reforms in our ways of doing things. We are happiest when we can plunge on and on (Burke, 1971, p. 19).

The locus of this compulsion is between humans and the “vast technological grid,” signaling how this cycle will never stop because humans are always driving toward perfection (Burke, 1971, p. 19). Burke expressed his feelings about technological progress, and he felt that the

attitudes around this progress represented a cult (Burke, 1972). Frankly, he felt it was a cultural absurdity (Burke, 1972), but as time went on, technology and its destructive capabilities became more alarming and real for him (Hill, 2009). Due to technology's alarming effects, this only deepened Burke's anxiety and distrust toward technology and technological behaviors. Humans' drive toward perfection with the progress of technology can result in unintended negative consequences (Burke, 1976; Keller, 1996). This prior sentiment is expressed by Rickert (2017), stating, "the punning shift in progress's meaning is telling: progress's promise of something more and better shifts progressively into the worse and worsening" (p. 70). In other words, despite the promises of perfection through better technology, it could result in a multitude of unforeseeable outcomes for humanity (e.g., atomic bomb, social media). Perfection is contradictory and can both be a benefit as well as a burden (Hyde, 2010). Indeed, technological advancement and the manic social attitudes surrounding technology were so crucial to his writings that he incorporated "rotten with perfection" as one of humankind's five defining characteristics (Burke, 1966b, p. 16). Furthermore, Burke (1966b) describes the five clauses of "Definition of Man" in *Language as Symbolic Action* as:

The symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal  
Inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative)  
Separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making  
Goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order)  
And rotten with perfection (p. 16).

He observed that people goad each other through language and symbols to fulfill their goals to the utmost perfection; however, language can never fully capture reality and, as a result, will always fall short of perfection. This rottenness, he argued, is a direct result of the perfectionist compulsion in the symbol-using and tool-making aspect of the human-animal (Burke, 1966b). Burke described this proclivity to seek symbolic perfection as "entelechy" (Burke, 1972, p. 39).

The term entelechy, coined by Aristotle, describes processes within nature or the process of development (e.g., a seed developing into a mature plant) (Lindsay, 1999). In essence, entelechy for Burke is the principle of perfection; it is what humans aspire to be. He amplified Aristotelian's entelechy from "individual anima to species survival while he also generalized the term, applying it to subjects beyond 'the soul'" (Hill, 2009, p. 7). In other words, Aristotle afforded Burke a rhetorical term that allowed him to define human *and* technological goals and how these goals revolve around this idea of perfection. According to Burke, perfect motivation results in perfect behaviors (Burke, 1966b).

Burke discusses entelechy as "tracking down the implications of a position, going to the end of the line" (Burke, 1974, p. 314). When Burke mentions "going to the end of the line" (Burke, 1974, p. 314), he is trying to speak about the notion of consummation (Burke, 1968). The evidence shows that Burke refers to a specific human drive, motivation, which gives humans purpose to determine specific implications of an issue or topic (Isaksen, 2017). The notion of "going to the end of the line" parallels the idea of perfection because, for Burke, he has the need to keep going and going to figure out technology and other topics (Burke, 1974, p. 314). Burke's collection of written texts and thoughts often mirrored this pursuit of perfection, specifically by observing and writing about the relentless entelechial demand for technological progress during the 20th century (Hill, 2009). The goal is to always bring everything to its utmost completion, with rhetoric and technological progress. For the purposes of this paper, I am implying that Burke is saying that we will push technology as far as we are capable of, even at costs we cannot imagine. We can also see this entelechial drive play out through Dataism, which carries the same attitude of "everything that can be measured should be measured; that data is a transparent and reliable lens" when trying to find out specific information (Brooks, 2013, para. 1). Burke's

discussion of the pursuit of perfection pushes anything to its ultimate end, even if that end is undesirable; Dataism is all about the way we push technology. Adding to Burke's argument about perfection, I would point out that despite Dataism's goal of perfection and its all-knowing capabilities, there will *always* be unintended consequences (Harari, 2015; Wright, 2008). Thus, we may fruitfully apply Burkean entelechy on Dataism and PTs as the perfection of certitude (Order) within the dystopian SF genre.

For Burke, "technology's attitude is transcendent in precisely this sense: a going to the end of the line on the back of faith in progress that drives it along" (Rickert, 2017, p. 70). Burke is signaling how humans need to plunge on to attain perfection, which is most evident with technology. When technological problems confront technological advocates, the solution becomes *better* technology (Rickert, 2017; Sadowski, 2020). Burke agrees with this outlook, mentioning that:

Even the correcting of the problems produced by technology must be accomplished by technological means; they cannot be solved by abandoning the technological way of life, since our modes of livelihood are already so dependent upon its resourcefulness (Burke, 1981, p. 182).

For instance, if we see pollution emanating from cars, the answer becomes *electric* cars; we see a declining bee population due to pesticides, so the solution is *robot* bees to pollinate plants (Wyss Institute at Harvard University, n.d.); we see climate change as an issue, so the solution becomes *smart* technology. My project highlights how SF, this imaginative medium, critiques the idea that if there is a problem, then the way to symbolically correct these problems is through the "divine" power of technology. Drawing from Burke's perspective, SF can illustrate the principle of entelechy (perfection) through Dataism and predictive technological devices. Additionally, SF assesses the entelechy of Dataism, offers religious allegories, provides a way of seeing the significance of technology (Clark, 2005), and its critique of "worshipping" Dataism. However,

when there is a deep “reverence” for Dataism, people experience the contradictory nature of this perfection, thus experiencing unintended consequences (Hyde, 2010). With the combination of unintended consequences, the relentless entelechial demand for technological progress and “pure” rhetoric gives way to the possibility of what Burke calls “technical psychosis” or “technological psychosis” (Burke, 1984b, p. 36).

### **Technological Psychosis**

These perfection motivations within rhetoric and technology can result in “occupational psychosis” (Burke, 1984b, p. 40). Burke appropriated Thorstein Veblen’s notion of “trained incapacity,” which meant “the state of affairs whereby one’s very abilities can function as blindness” (Burke, 1984b, p. 7) into “occupational psychosis” (Burke, 1984b, p. 58). Burke (1984b) elaborates upon this psychosis, mentioning how people “equip themselves for their kinds of work, [and] people develop emphases, discriminations, attitudes, etc. Special preferences, dislikes, fears, hopes, apprehensions, idealizations are brought to the fore” (p. 40). In effect, occupational psychosis indicates that a person’s occupation can create biases and affect our perceptions, thus limiting our capacities to perceive ideas. People experience occupational psychosis due to their particular experiences in the world - one’s position shapes the individual’s orientation.

Occupational psychosis is a “way of seeing” while simultaneously also “a way of not seeing” (Coupe, 2001, p. 419). Some people’s occupational psychosis and their entelechial pursuit for technological progress (e.g., engineers, technocrats, capitalists, computer programmers) can come at the expense of culture and humanity. Burke takes this discussion of occupational psychosis a step further in his discussion of “technological psychosis” (Burke, 1984b, p. 49). Burke refers to this as a “master psychosis” (Burke, 1984b, p. 49), which can allow people to tap into different perspectives and feelings while also shutting down others

(Rickert, 2017). The fact that humanity has now relied on this exploitation of technology -- automation, war machines, and industrial expansion -- through the 20th century put the “technical psychosis” forward as the most menacing occupational psychosis (Burke, 1984b).

Burke’s assertion highlights the issues of this emerging psychosis:

In and about all these [occupational psychoses], above them, beneath them, mainly responsible for their perplexities, is the technological psychosis. It is the one psychosis which is, perhaps, in its basic patterns, contributing a new principle to the world. It is at the center of our glories and our distress (Burke, 1984b, p. 44).

Because all occupations take their terminologies to their utmost perfection, people occupied by technology experience their own technological psychosis (Burke, 1974). While Burke never uses the term “technological psychosis” to convey his concern for the overreliance on human PTs and Dataism we see today, I maintain that we could use this term to refer to this phenomenon because it is rooted in contradiction. For instance, social media has credited notions of convenience for its users, allowing them to connect with friends and loved ones. While, on the other hand, by using these “free” platforms, we sacrifice our privacy, personal data, and free will to Big Tech companies. Burke’s use of technological psychosis should be used because it explains the problem(s) and compulsion humans experience from technology (Burke, 2003). We see occupational psychosis paired with this entelechial pursuit as a theme in the SF genre in movies over time, such as *The Terminator* (1984), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008), *Interstellar* (2014), and *Arrival* (2016). Similar to these films and how specific characters’ occupational psychosis materialized, my project highlights how SF critiques the new occupational psychosis, through technological psychosis, by demonstrating how reliant we are on PTs and the unintended consequences that result from this dependence.

As stated earlier, technology motivates technological solutions, even when dealing with predictive technological issues, because technology fulfills itself (Rickert, 2017). Combining

Burke's master psychosis and his principle of entelechy, as a part of my method, will aid the rhetorical analysis of the SF genre and will highlight how humans are "rotten with perfection" in terms of technology and surveillance (Burke, 1966b, p. 16). As Rickert (2017) notes, it is evident that "technology's motivation both blinds us to the other possibilities and aims to perfect itself - that is, to maximize the capabilities to the very end" (p. 78), despite the possible consequences that could result from this entelechial pursuit. So far, this chapter has offered Burke's perspective on the issues of technology, technologism as an anti-technological attitude, and how his technological outlook was rooted in the appropriation of rhetorical principles: entelechy and technological psychosis. What remains is an explanation of Burke's guilt-redemption cycle and how this method is strategic in analyzing predictive technological exigences within SF techno-dystopian texts.

### **Burke's Guilt-Redemption Cycle**

In light of his broader attitude towards technology, Kenneth Burke's guilt-redemption cycle offers the most fitting and productive lens through which to analyze modern SF. Burke offers conceptual tools to unpack the ways techno-dystopian SF texts attempt to manage our technological fallenness. Burke views guilt as a motivating factor driving human drama, resulting in the need to purge guilt via the guilt-redemption cycle. Thus, we can productively analyze SF through this Burkean lens. This method can help the main argument facilitated by my thesis, which is that we find ourselves in moments of technological fallenness due to the worship of Dataism, and the genre of dystopian SF offers audiences a way to imaginatively face this tension, the guilt that materializes, and how people can redeem themselves.

"Dramatism" examines how society, in being "moved by a sense of order," is simultaneously "moralized by the negative" (Burke, 1966b, p. 16). In other words, in seeking the reassurance of one's place in a given "hierarchy," humans need some rationale for when that

order is degraded. This explanation can be tracked through Burke's guilt-redemption cycle, which he sees as the underlying plot of much social drama. This journey of Burke's redemption drama is a secular version of the Christian story in which humans seek salvation through the atoning sacrifice of Christ (Burke, 1970). In *Rhetoric of Religion*, Burke (1970) explains this cycle, stating:

Here are the steps  
In the Iron Law of History  
That welds Order and Sacrifice:

Order leads to Guilt  
(for who can keep commandments!)  
Guilt needs Redemption  
(for who would not be cleansed!)  
Redemption needs Redeemer  
(which is to say, a Victim!)

Order  
Through Guilt  
To Victimhood  
(hence: Cult of the Kill) (p. 4-5).

According to Burke, as symbol-using animals belonging to a collective tribe, all human beings experience guilt, which is a kind of "hierarchical embarrassment" akin to "the theological doctrine of original sin" (Burke, 1984b, p. xiii). As such, the guilt-redemption cycle is a process of purging individual or collective guilt through symbolic assignations of blame and corresponding acts of sacrifice. Guilt encompasses a whole range of unpleasant or negative feelings experienced by the individual (Littlejohn et al., 2016). Foss et al. (2014) explain

Burkean guilt as follows:

Guilt is a permanent part of the human condition in that it is intrinsic in the negative and the hierarchy produced by language. Some methods of catharsis, purgation, purification, or cleansing are needed to rid individuals of this guilt so that they can receive redemption. Just as a language system creates guilt, it is the means through which guilt is purged (p. 208).



As described above, symbolic guilt emerges when a given social order fails to be maintained. Once guilt is established, it prompts the purification-redemption process required for its assuagement (Foss et al., 2014).

Using the guilt-redemption cycle to analyze SF can help reveal the characters' rottenness (perfection) and fallenness (guilt/technological psychosis) in relation to technological practices. The purpose of this critical approach, as expressed by Foss et al. (2014), "is the drama of the self in quest, the human effort to discover and maintain identities so that they can move toward the perfection they seek" (p. 210). To put this differently, the guilt-redemption cycle is a lifelong journey of growth, a way to understand guilt and absolve those feelings through redemption. It is a way to find our true selves within our hierarchy. In Burke's view, Order can never be upheld, so the human actors must reckon with the degradations of Order. Ultimately, this process illuminates how humans, in dystopian SF films, constantly find themselves in a position of fallenness and the urge to alleviate such (dis)Order. Once this happens, the characters end up in a new sense of Order, a false sense of Order, thus requiring a rebirth cycle to begin anew (Carlson & Hocking, 1988). This sequence is never finished.

Burke provides the theoretical notions of the guilt-redemption cycle. As stated previously, one of the primary purposes of rhetorical symbolism is to purge guilt, which results from a violation of societal norms. This violation includes a specific pattern of interrelated rhetorical concepts: *The Established Order*, *The Negative*, *Victimage*, and *Redemption*. Next, I describe this cycle by devoting sections of Burke's theoretical notions to guide the reader about this mode of method and its importance within the context of SF.

### ***The Established Order***

Through the medium of near-future dystopian SF films, we see clear examples of the guilt-redemption cycle's first concept at play: the established order. Burke compares order to a

social “covenant,” a term he later substitutes for the Dramatistic term “Order” (Burke, 1970, p. 180). This process begins with an understanding of “Order,” which is a “socio-political” hierarchy that compels the actions of individuals (Burke, 1970, p. 41). Burke is saying that order is the miracle by which we all get along by ranking and categorizing people. However, there is never a full way to understand each other because we are always stratified by our jobs, values, and lifestyles (Burke, 1969b). In Burke’s “Definition of Man,” the fourth clause includes the notion of hierarchy, declaring that humans are “goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order)” (Burke, 1966b, p. 16). It is essential to acknowledge that “Order” and “hierarchy” imply one another, and scholars use these terms interchangeably because hierarchic structures inherently create order (Burke, 1966b; Brummett, 1981; Carlson & Hocking, 1988; Sheard, 1993). Further, Burke views society as a dramatistic phenomenon in which hierarchy forms structure and creates a sense of Order through rhetoric and power relationships (Klumpp, 1999). Hierarchies construct their own set of guilt feelings resulting in individuals experiencing this guilt, regardless of where one is within the social hierarchy. Thus, the hierarchy constrains the actions of individuals.

Brummett (1981) defined Burke’s concept of “hierarchy” as “a social order that binds people together in a system of rights and obligations” (p. 254). Furthermore, a social hierarchy is constructed through a set of morals and values, which helps to assign where people fall within the social order (top-down approach). Burke believes that the social order always orders people, creating different parts of this hierarchy, whether in terms of people’s prestige, status, jobs, whether they are superior or subordinate (Overington, 1977b). Burke argues that human beings are drawn to a sense of Order and status because it gives them a sense of direction, meaning, and purpose. Order “orients us with respect to a system of moral values” (Carter, 1997, p. 363). In

this way, the hierarchy contributes to the notion of perfection, which can be both a benefit and a burden within the SF genre (Hyde, 2010). A social order is a benefit because it can motivate people to climb the social order and be better. It can also be a burden because it can marginalize people and inherently possesses a quality of otherness (Hyde, 2010).

The SF genre exemplifies hierarchically stratified societies and has appeared with notable consistency compared to other genres (e.g., *Divergent* (2014), *Gattaca* (1997), *The Hunger Games* (2012) (Livingston, 1971; Mallan, 2014; Simkins, 2016). For instance, stratified societies within SF are controlled by “elite managers [who] use modern techniques of psychosocial manipulation to induce mass conformity to the prevailing belief system” to maintain order (Livingston, 1971, p. 256). Technology may also help create balance and social order, whether this technology is a repressive mechanism or this technology is allowed to work at full capacity for its society (Livingston, 1971). Societies that are allowed to use technology are not presented as utopian (Reynolds, 1970); rather, SF warns its viewers that “materialistic perfection may also be a kind of tyranny, for man” (Livingston, 1971, p. 256). To put it differently, hierarchical structures within the SF genre can either promote or suppress individual agency. SF is representative of stratified social orders and provides commentary on our communal and cultural values.

“Order” functions rhetorically as the dream of perfection, which in this project takes the form of Dataism and PTs. Modern SF is a “crucial and popular mode, even *the* mainstream mode, of thinking about life in a modern, technoscientific world,” and its films show the power PTs hold (Rogers & Stevens, 2015, pp. 6-7, emphasis in original). As films and their imagination of PTs play out, I argue that they embody the systems that assign, maintain, and advance social order through Dataism. These symbolic systems are framed as providing clarity and sorting out

the good from evil, similar to God (Harari, 2015). I contend that PTs are all-knowing due to the data given to these devices (Harari, 2015), representing a form of perfection because data creates “perfect” knowledge. Thus, PTs are the instruments that allow for Dataism to operate.

Specifically, PTs require data to function, but it also exists to extract that very data from users.

Anyone familiar with PTs should agree that these devices are mediums of circularity, where they exist for and because of data, at once.

Burke’s concept of the established order has the potential to be applied to SF representations of mass surveillance because we see mass surveillance as creating a perfect social order and having this promise of creating a more utopic world. However, as we will see in the next section, where we discuss Burke’s concept of the negative, there is always fallibility in predictive technological systems. To summarize, I explained Burke’s characterization of “Order,” highlighted its utility for this thesis and its function. In the section to follow, Burke’s rhetorical concept of the negative will be defined, and I will demonstrate how it works discursively.

### ***The Negative***

The second clause to Burke’s “Definition of Man” reads that man is the “inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative)” (Burke, 1966b, p. 16). Burke’s principle of “the negative” is defined as the “ability to distinguish between the yes and no of ‘right and wrong’ in the sense not just of avoidance (such as any animal can be conditioned to) but of a thou-shalt-not” (Burke 1952a, p. 258). The language used around the negative is representative of commandments, showing our moral values. Burke insisted that morality was a particularly human notion and is created by the idea of the negative. Humans are the inventors of the negative, of laws, sanctions, judgments, and distinctions between orders of good and bad. Burke also explains how the negative is rooted in paradox. The principle of the negative is very simply

what something “is not” (Burke, 1970, p. 18), an idea that is only possible because of the creation of language. For instance, if a social commandment stated, “Thou shalt not kill,” this represents a negative idea because this notion proposes the positive image of killing someone (Mackey-Kallis & Hahn, 1991). Burke explains this previous sentiment further by noting, “Since determined things are ‘positive,’ we might point up the paradox as harshly as possible by translating it ‘Every positive is negative’” (Burke, 1969a, p. 25). The negative gives humans “the power to be moral” and “by the same token gives them the power to be immoral” (Burke, 1970, p. 291). Overall, the negative requires morality, a path for what is right and what is wrong. Burke (1952b) believes that all morality is controlling because it determines how a person will act, whether good or evil, within the social hierarchy.

Burke’s concept of the negative works together with the established order. In *Permanence and Change*, Burke mentions “*both* the positive and negative are commands that authority requires us to follow” (1984b, p. xxxvi, emphasis in original). In other words, the authorities within a hierarchy, which show the distinction between the ruler and the ruled, depend on the negative because the negative is based on social commandments of what someone should *not* do. Hence, hierarchies lead to this entelechial pursuit to reach perfection. Technology is an essential addition to SF narratives, and it is “the metaphorical effectiveness of technology in SF that focuses [on] the SF encounter with alterity” (Roberts, 2000, p. 147). The notion of alterity focuses on otherness, and technology can exploit this otherness to maintain control and order (Roberts, 2000). I argue that SF makes a clear distinction between the ruler and ruled due to what type of technologies some characters obtain, whether this is a spaceship, a time machine, a matter-transporter, or the esper (e.g., *Blade Runner* (1982)), which is a super computer used by the police. In order for the rulers to have *true* authority in the SF genre, I maintain that they

employ the use of Dataism through the vehicle of PTs (e.g., *Black Mirror* (2019), *Westworld* (2020), *Devs* (2020)).

Not only do Dataism and PTs assign, maintain, and advance social order, but I argue that they help with the assigning of blame and feelings of guilt, which is rooted in the negative. Guilt only exists when we do things we should “not” do or “not” do the things we should do (Burke, 1966b, p. 9). Guilt is important, which is why Burke stresses that a human is seen as a moral agent, and it is one’s actions that reveal one’s character. He expresses this outlook stating:

Action involves character, which involves choice - and the *form* of choice attains its perfection in the distinction between Yes and No (shall and shall-not, will and will-not). Though the concept of sheer motion is non-ethical, *action* implies the ethical, the human personality (Burke, 1966b, p. 11).

In other words, we are moralized by the negative because people want to become and attain their fullest potential within their social hierarchy. This assertion gives way to Burke’s notion that humans are “rotten with perfection” (Burke, 1966b, p. 16). However, we know this perfection cannot be attained because hierarchies are not always moral, nor are the systems that assign where people are in the hierarchy because they are fallible.

Burke’s concepts are linked to religion and especially the concept of original sin, as explained above. This parallels SF’s common theme of religion (Roberts, 2000) because we see that the negative questions our moral sense and values, similar to religion. SF’s religious undertones show the importance of Western theology, which continually conveys a conception of perfection and is the birthplace of all things perfect (Hyde, 2010). When we come to terms with perfection, it calls on our ability to know the difference between what we hold to be right, good, and true versus what is wrong, bad, and false. Most importantly, SF can show its audience that humans’ moral sense is fallible despite its veneer of perfection. Having thus established

Burke's concept of the negative, we need to discuss how guilt is laundered through specific rhetorical strategies of victimage: mortification and scapegoating.

### ***Victimage***

Victimage is the way human beings try to redeem their sense of guilt to restore order. Burke (1970) claims that there are three pathways of victimage: *mortification*, *scapegoating*, and *transcendence*. However, for the purposes of this project, I am only focusing on *mortification* and *scapegoating*. I do not include *transcendence* as a part of my analysis because it does not require literal or figurative sacrifice like scapegoating and mortification (Bloomfield, 2019).

First, *mortification* is defined as:

a kind of governance, an extreme form of 'self-control,' the deliberate, disciplinary 'slaying' of any motive that... one thinks of as unruly... Mortification is the exercising of oneself in 'virtue'; it is a systematic way of saying no to disorder, or obediently saying yes to order (Burke, 1989, p. 289).

To put it simply, mortification is the way we morally turn guilt *unto ourselves*. Mortification is when someone apologizes or blames themselves when there is wrongdoing or sacrificing oneself literally (e.g., suicide) or figuratively to be purified and achieve redemption (Burke, 1989).

Furthermore, mortification works through a self-inflicted form of punishment or suffering that attempts to balance the scales of sin and redemption so that one can receive forgiveness (Moore, 2006). As French and Brown (2011) describe mortification and victimage, they state, "If there is no bad guy, there must be a fall guy" (p. 3). There needs to be a 'fall guy' because it is a way to relieve someone's guilt, and it provides a representation of what the guilty have done themselves (Brummett, 1981).

The second way to absolve one's guilt is through Burke's notion of *scapegoating*. Burke describes scapegoating as a need to blame another person or group for someone's troubles (Burke, 1970) and "by 'passing the buck,' by seeking a sacrificial vessel upon which we can

vent” (Burke, 1989, p. 289). Scapegoating is when someone directs their guilt *outward*, to some external vessel, a punishment of others, by blaming or sacrificing an external source literally (e.g., homicide) or figuratively to attain redemption (Burke, 1989).

Burke (1984a) suggests there are two different types of scapegoating: *universal* and *factional*. First, for universal scapegoating, Burke says, “the stylistically dignified [universal] scapegoat represents everyman. In his offence he takes upon himself the guilt of all - and *his* punishment is *mankind’s* chastening” (Burke, 1984a, p. 188, emphasis in original). Essentially, the victim blames *everyone* in the social hierarchy for the problem. That is, audiences associate, identify, and even feel sorry for the victim because it includes themselves, which is a part of the whole (e.g., everyone) (Moore, 2006). However, even though audiences identify with the victim, they do not identify with the victim’s punishment because the penalty creates terror for them (Moore, 2006).

The second form of scapegoating is what Burke calls factional scapegoating. Burke expresses that factional scapegoating “attributes the evil, not to all men, but to some (the other faction)” (Burke, 1984a, p. 189). To put it simply, the speaker blames a *specific group* or a *particular person* for their problems, “for it blames some, not all,” unlike universal scapegoating (Moore, 2006, p. 312). Factional scapegoating shifts the blame and guilt onto someone, making them the “new” villain while the original party or person now functions as the victim. Factional scapegoating creates a division and dissociation within the audience because audiences might not identify with the individual or group being blamed within the text (Moore, 2006).

Both forms of scapegoating create a dichotomy of good versus evil. Whoever is vilified in either *universal* or *factional* scapegoating is viewed as morally violating the ideals and rules of the social order (Blain, 2005). Whoever is brave enough to take action against the wrongdoer is



now looked at as the hero within the storyline because they were able to confront evil (Blain, 2005).

Many scholars study victimage rhetoric and employ Burke's redemptive paths, such as scapegoating, mortification, and transcendence, onto rhetorical artifacts (e.g., Bloomfield, 2019; Brummett, 1981; Carmack, 2014; Klumpp & Hollihan, 1989; Moore, 2006). Some scholars emphasize one redemptive path over the other. However, I argue that using only one redemptive path of victimage as an approach to cleansing guilt can fail to encompass other people or groups' guilt that could be happening simultaneously. Combining multiple victimage practices can elevate and offer new ways of understanding guilt in human dramas. Bloomfield (2019) recently combined scapegoating and transcendence as complementary paths of redemption to describe the assigning of guilt in the #MeToo Movement. Bloomfield (2019) discovered that transcendence provided an opportunity for a social order to come together and heal because it combined individual experiences of sexual assault, found the patterns and commonalities between them, and understood how sexual violence is a ubiquitous problem. Additionally, scapegoating considers individual experiences, which are unique because everyone's experiences are different. Because of the victim's unique incident, it necessitates a tailored response to absolve guilt (Bloomfield, 2019).

Similarly, I adopt the combination of redemptive paths for my thesis, calling upon the dual approach of mortification and scapegoating. From this perspective, Moore (2006) argues for the combination of mortification and the two different forms of scapegoating to restore order. The grouping of these redemptive acts is rare because we see both mortification and scapegoating as *one* redemptive path, rather than *two* redemptive paths, which is how scholars write and explain these redemptive processes (e.g., Carlson & Hocking, 1988).

Moore (2006) asserts that “if an act of mortification accompanies scapegoating, the scapegoating would typically be universal in nature” (p. 312). He provides an example of this combination, which is the story about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, where he died on the cross to take away the sins from *everyone* (Moore, 2006). This illustration of Jesus Christ dying on the cross represents a unification of both mortification and *universal* scapegoating. It combines self-sacrifice (mortification) with a sacrifice for all (*universal* scapegoating). Moore (2006) mentions how examples of victimage that combine both mortification with *universal* scapegoating tend to be sparse, but these redemptive acts do exist specifically within the SF genre (e.g., *The Terminator* (1984) and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (2008)). This critical distinction about victimage is unique to this project because it aids the religious themes and the religious narrative of redemption within the genre of SF, specifically with the combination of mortification and *universal* scapegoating. If we look at mortification and *factional* scapegoating, cases of such victimage tend to be even rarer in SF. While these redemptive processes may not typically occur together, the combination of mortification and scapegoating is evident within the context of SF, and therefore shows the significance of why this genre should be investigated.

The third part of the guilt-redemption cycle, victimage, advances the conceptual relationship between the established order and the negative. Within SF, there are various world order models (Livingston, 1971; Milner, 2004). Specifically, within dystopian SF, these texts often situate hierarchies and social orders at the pinnacle of their narratives because it is a way to make sense of specific tensions in the storyline (Musgrave, 2015). We see social orders in dystopian SF depicted in various ways, such as genetic screening, creating “a rigidly hierarchical society based on genetic discrimination” in the film *Gattaca* (1997) (Marks, 2005, p. 229). Additionally, the social structures in *The Handmaid’s Tale* (2017) are depicted in the Republic of

Gilead, where every person has a role within the hierarchy, specifically focusing on women who are able to bear children. To maintain this social hierarchy, people wear specific clothes as representing their position (Živić, 2014,) and their discourse, as a result of their training, defines for each group what they are allowed to say or not say depending on their positionality in the hierarchy (Namjoo, 2019). Language, in this text, is a way to maintain and control the social hierarchy. Another way of establishing social order and controlling it is through technology, which is the nexus of power, the source of rule-making, and is a surveillance tool (Connors, 2017; Diglin, 2014). Therefore, I propose that Dataism and PTs have the utmost authority because they construct the social hierarchy by assigning who is a good or bad citizen, resulting in guilt. The negative emerges from PTs because the negative's rhetoric functions as a binary system and determines whether something is right or wrong, good or evil, true or false (Burke, 1952b). Characters experience this feeling of guilt because they rebelled against or violated the socio-political hierarchy (Brummett, 1981), which rebellion is a common theme in dystopian SF because people want to crash down the system of power (Namjoo, 2019). Guilt must be expelled for the person or a group to achieve forgiveness of their wrongdoing, which creates a secure hierarchy or reinstates an old hierarchy (Carlson & Hocking, 1988).

The characters in SF illustrations employ both pathways of victimage to absolve their guilt, whether this guilt is turned inward or outward unto someone else (Burke, 1989). For instance, in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), HAL, a super-computer, is “killed” and destroyed by an astronaut known as Dave. HAL is the sacrifice in the film, whose death has an element of mortification. Dave is aware that if he “murders” HAL, then he cuts himself off from communicating with others and all help. Dave isolates himself from the people on earth and

rejects any aid the computer provides. Therefore, Dave sacrifices himself to terminate HAL successfully (Williams, 1984).

Humans and their quest for perfection are evident in the technological tools we create, which have served us well (Bernstein, 1968). However, SF narratives critique how these tools contain a potential for manipulation and destruction (Williams, 1984). Data gathering and algorithms within PTs have the power to manipulate both forms of victimage. In SF texts, these technologies are regarded as the *real* authority because they deem to have ‘pure’ knowledge (boyd & Crawford, 2012) and control (van Dijck, 2014). Humans trust and give power to these devices because these technologies have ultimate control. However, SF texts and their societies maintain widespread digital surveillance through PTs that collect a massive amount of information about each person within the social hierarchy (Diglin, 2014). I argue that these devices (PTs) have the power to manipulate and construct a false narrative, a false identity, a false social order, alternative facts, and fake news. As in many SF stories, these falsehoods are distinct, shifting the powers between humans and technology (e.g., *1984* (1984), *Matrix* (1999), *V for Vendetta* (2005), *Total Recall* (2012)). Thus, this manipulated information has the power and *potential* for people to experience mortification or could possibly be framed as a scapegoat. The unintended consequences and effects that stem from PTs illuminate technology’s paradoxical nature, ultimately affecting people’s path of purgation and redemption. Aside from the resolution of guilt through mortification and scapegoating, the final part of my methodological approach involves a consideration of redemption via victimage.

### ***Redemption***

The final part of the guilt-redemption cycle is Burke’s notion of redemption. Burke believed that an individual could not achieve redemption unless they experience some form of punishment. In *Rhetoric of Religion*, Burke explains the idea of redemption by saying, “To ‘pay’

for one's wrongdoing by suffering punishment is to 'redeem' oneself, to cancel one's debt, to ransom or 'buy back'" (Burke, 1970, p. 176). Burke (1970) believed we must pay for our sins to seek redemption and be restored. Burke's strategies of victimage, via mortification and scapegoating, allow people to resolve their guilt in order to experience the stage of redemption. Redemption is only achieved when people's purification acts within the hierarchy are identified and accepted by others (Burke, 1984b). Once our guilt is purged, we can return to a new social order or hierarchy. This stage of the cycle is the shortest. Once redemption can be accomplished, it is only a temporary state at the end of the guilt-redemption cycle before it repeats itself (Burke, 1970). The reason for this brief redeemed state is that Burke argues there is *always* something wrong around us, therefore forming a new sense of guilt and repeating the cycle (Carlson & Hocking, 1988).

By utilizing the term redemption in my textual analysis, I highlight Burke's definition of redemption to refer to *both* its religious and secular meanings. The guilt-redemption cycle, as identified earlier, is a secular version of the Christian story in which sinful humans seek salvation through the atoning sacrifice of Christ (Burke, 1970). The combination of religious and secular redemptive paths is similar to what was previously mentioned with the combination of scapegoating and mortification. The coupling of religious and secular redemptive paths is valuable for this thesis because human beings are complex; they have a physical and spiritual nature. Therefore, I view these two forms of redemption as two sides of the same coin. Because Burke's concepts are linked to religion, this parallels SF's common theme of religion (Dinello, 2005) and how people have faith in Dataism. In a spiritual, theological understanding, the word "redeem" means "deliverance from some evil by payment of a price" (Zavada, 2019, para. 3) to save one's soul from the consequences of sin. Western theology's use of redemption relates to

what Christ did for humanity (Zavada, 2019). In a secular sense, the term “redeem” means “the act of redeeming or atoning for a fault or mistake” (Wellman, 2014, para. 1) or “the act of freeing someone from a charge or claim” (Bobbitt, 1992, p. 66). The project’s analysis demonstrates both understandings of Burke’s redemption. This final phase of the cycle provides a new state of purity, and cleanliness is secured.

The concept of redemption is the last interlocked term that completes the relationship with the previous Burkean concepts within the guilt-redemption cycle. The goal of this never-ending cycle is to achieve redemption and be cleansed of guilt each time. Redemption is essential to the way the social order operates. As McCullough (2008) puts it, “There has to be a way to restore people to good standing so that they’ll be motivated to return to cooperation with all of the other cooperators in the population” (p. 109). If human beings did not have the chance to redeem themselves, our failures would result in guilt, and this guilt would continue, resulting in a dreadful life (Smith, 1971). Arendt (1958) adds to this conversation, stating that if we did not have redemption, “we would remain the victim of its consequences forever,” meaning we would be indebted to our wrongful deeds for the rest of our lives (p. 213). Redemption offers a way for us to learn from our mistakes, establishing balance within the social order and our moral code. However, we cannot reach redemption without acknowledging the other parts of the cycle and how they rhetorically operate with one another. Rhetorical messages are a means by which one can participate effectively within a social hierarchy. The spirit of the hierarchy determines how one experiences guilt solely on where they fall *within* the social hierarchy. Since the notion of social hierarchy is a prominent dystopian feature, the way these characters symbolically and individually experience guilt is unique to their conditions. When violating the social order and going against one’s social position, guilt is the result, which reduces the social cohesion within

the hierarchy (Brock, 1985). This violation causes humans to feel less than due to feelings of guilt. Because of these emotions, people strive to seek redemption as a moralizing and socializing force to eliminate such guilt.

Nevertheless, before we can attain this redemption, we must experience the negative and redemptive acts via victimage. Humans do not want to be othered from the hierarchy, but guilt inherently creates this otherness, forcing individuals to morally reflect on their choices. The negative generates and structures the societal commandments of what individuals should *not* do (Burke, 1952a). Since the negative is couched in dual logic and requires morality, it provides a path for what is right and wrong, who is accepted and rejected and reveals the presence or absence of someone within the hierarchical structure. Thankfully, dystopian SF offers representations of how people are othered from their social structures and ways of overcoming this othering (Živić, 2014). Dataism and PTs construct and threaten the social order and the people within it. Since humans are “goaded by the spirit of hierarchy,” they want to counter Dataism and its control by absolving their guilt through victimage (Burke, 1966, p. 16). One must redeem guilt through mortification, “the victimization of the self” (Burke, 1989, p. 147), or scapegoating, where “one character can impute guilt to another by sinning in his stead” (Burke, 1970, p. 176). Depending on what path of victimage one takes, it must be done properly in the eyes of the social hierarchy to obtain purification (Burke, 1970). At this point, one reaches the end of the cycle by experiencing redemption, where guilt is eliminated, and they find themselves restored within their social hierarchy. Oftentimes, SF texts take their audience in the direction of religion and represent it through religious allegories, themes, imagery, and language (McGrath, 2011). Since SF texts often reflect the redemptive arc for their characters, it seems that Burke’s concepts and methods are fitting for this genre because characters can experience a journey of

sin. SF narratives move toward redemption (Alessio, 2006), “in which every event refers allegorically to this scheme” (Roberts, 2000, p. 185). SF texts offer many valuable life lessons where characters’ moral codes are constantly being challenged. Burke’s concept of redemption can be applied to dystopian SF representations that reflect religious themes and undertones because we see religion as a moral compass, which provides a possibility for those living in darkness to see the light and attain redemption.

As the preceding section demonstrated, using a Burkean framework for my analysis can be a complex method due to the multitude of interrelated concepts that stem from Burke’s work. By defining the guilt-redemption cycle method and offering how this method is notable within the context of the dystopian SF genre, this allowed for the definitions and utility of concepts, such as *The Established Order*, *The Negative*, *Victimage*, and *Redemption*, to be understood and seen in a new light. This chapter put forth how Dataism and PTs are prevalent in dystopian SF texts and that Dataism can be applied as a part of the guilt-redemption cycle. Dataism is an extension of each component that makes up Burke’s cycle, allowing for the analysis to understand how guilt generates in a dystopian society and how the “worship” of Dataism can lend to one’s fallen state. Given the conceptualization of the guilt-relieving motives and redemption-oriented drives, this chapter will present its concluding thoughts.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provided a comprehensive explanation of a critical perspective, theoretical constructs, and a Burkean method that will guide my rhetorical analysis. Burke, Dataism, and dystopian SF genre have several overlapping similarities, such as religion, social hierarchies and order, morality, and the loss of free will, to name a few. Burke believes that technology creates unintended consequences, and we see these unintended technological consequences in dystopian SF films. Dystopian SF cinema portrays these unintended consequences by focusing on



dystopian themes, such as the operation of social hierarchies, technology, control and oppression, and what it means to be human (Mirenayat & Soofastaei, 2015; Živić, 2014). They also portray PTs and Dataism, whose technology is oppressive and minimizes free will (Harari, 2016b) through the use of surveillance to control the subjects in the far-distant future. The “worship” of Dataism and the reliance on technology provide insight into “data religion” in dystopian SF films, which is symbolically and allegorically represented by traditional Western religion. The most fitting method to rhetorically analyze this genre is Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle, representing a religious sequence illustrating a sense of guilt and then achieving redemption.

The main argument facilitated by my thesis is that we find ourselves in moments of technological fallenness due to the “worship” of Dataism, and the genre of dystopian SF offers audiences a way to imaginatively face this tension, the guilt that materializes, and how people can redeem themselves. The thesis analyzes the SF genre to better understand how technological changes manifest as a desire for perfection and a need for Order. Also, this project shows how SF critiques predictive technological devices as falling short of creating a pure and perfect social order due to their fallibility. Therefore, through the construction and application of Burke’s philosophy of technology, technological psychosis, and his guilt-redemption cycle, this thesis allows for the capacity to rhetorically venture out through film and create a space for such answers.

### **Chapter Three: Critical Analysis: Minority Report**

*The fact that you prevented it from happening doesn't change the fact that it was going to happen*  
- Chief John Anderton

Chapter Two featured various functions of Kenneth Burke's rhetorical work, such as his perspective and attitudes about technology, how his technological outlook was rooted through the notion of perfection and technological psychosis, and the guilt-redemption cycle. The previous chapter proposed that the guilt-redemption process is valuable for evaluating Dataism, predictive technologies (PTs), and religion in the genre of science fiction (SF). SF dystopian texts critique how technology can help create balance and social order. Given that many scholars highlight technologies as creating various conditions in SF texts (e.g., hierarchies, interaction with larger groups, a formation of subgroups, a way of communicating), I argue that we need to extend our analyses of such technologies to include PTs and Dataism within the genre of SF (Livingston, 1971; Buchen, 1984; Dautenhahn, 1998; Moylan, 2000). Specifically, this thesis addresses how PTs and Dataism help construct and establish a social order by collecting data from its citizens in SF. The knowledge data provides helps with the goal of surveillance and preemption, therefore helping to predict, maintain, and advance social order. This ordering, fed by data from PTs, determines where one is within society's structure and operation (Moylan, 2000).

SF dystopian narratives tend to concentrate on one of the subjects within the social system, and the storyline's protagonist "begins to recognize the situation for what it really is and thus trace[s] the relationship between individual experience and the operation of the entire system" (Moylan, 2000, p. 2). I maintain that SF dystopian texts represent a rhetoric of fallenness because they exemplify hierarchically stratified societies that give power to one group while other groups are powerless (Livingston, 1971). Dystopian SF stresses how advanced

technology helps control a social order through manipulation and mass conformity while also hoodwinking its citizens to believe that these devices are all-knowing and they can perform miracles (Heinlein, 1953; Livingston, 1971). Technology controls the minds of its citizens, and they view technology as their new religion (Harari, 2015; Livingston, 1971). Thus, the audience bears witness to the character's technological fallenness due to the "worship" of Dataism and offers redemptive paths to redeem their guilt via the guilt-redemption cycle.

The present chapter utilizes a Burkean conceptual framework to analyze the 2002 film adaptation of *Minority Report* (hereafter, *MR*), directed by Steven Spielberg, from a SF short story written by Philip K. Dick in 1956. *MR* is a futuristic tale set in 2054 that critically examines an American "domestically applied system of preemptive justice" through the Department of PreCrime (Weber, 2007, p. 483). Set in the District of Columbia, the infallible system of PreCrime allows police officers to arrest would-be murderers before they commit the actual crime. This total surveillance system is only possible due to the Pre-Cogs known as Agatha, Dashiell, and Arthur, who are three psychic individuals who help predict future crimes. Dr. Iris Hineman and Director Lamar Burgess (hereafter, Burgess) designed the PreCrime system. The system has been so successful under Burgess that it has virtually eradicated crime in the D.C area. Because of the PreCrime system's success, they are under investigation by an agent (Colin Farrell) from the Department of Justice (DOJ). Once the investigation is over, and the DOJ deems the system infallible, it will be extended nationally.

The story's protagonist is Chief Inspector John Anderton (hereafter, Anderton), portrayed by Tom Cruise, who works for the Police Department's Division of PreCrime. While the DOJ is investigating the system, Anderton is working on a new prevision from the Pre-Cogs to determine a future murder. Suddenly, the Pre-Cogs vision plays out and identifies Anderton as

being guilty of a future crime. Because of the Pre-Cogs predicted vision, Anderton flees and runs from the PreCrime cops and his boss, Burgess, to figure out how he is now guilty of a future crime. His goal throughout the film is to fight against the surveillance state and prove his innocence. Through it all, Anderton is successful with his justice-seeking voyage and reveals the truth of the PreCrime system while also clearing his name. He proves that the PreCrime system is fallible, which stops the national rollout, and eradicates the system from D.C. Capturing this journey through a murder mystery, *MR* serves as an illustration of a SF dystopian future where citizens use PTs and rely on Dataism for the “*betterment*” of society.

Outside of *MR*, PTs and Dataism are fallible. They have had several problems, such as issues over statistical discrimination over groups of people (e.g., women, gay men and women, African Americans, Jews, and Muslims). This discrimination was due to faulty data and information, resulting in people not attaining certain jobs, getting approval of a home loan, and obtaining specific credit cards (e.g., Apple credit card) (Harari, 2015; Noble, 2018; Vincent, 2019). PTs and Dataism can manipulate data to win elections (e.g., Cambridge Analytica Scandal) (Parton, 2018). Dataism also helps create a stratified system of “social credit” correlating to one’s behavior and data resulting in a score that the data provides (e.g., China’s social credit) (Harari, 2017). These examples further my argument that Dataism and PTs are fallible. Before rhetorically analyzing *MR*, the subsequent section features the contextual factors that help situate the film's creation and production historically.

## **Context**

September 11th, 2001, marks the largest terrorist attack on American soil. Following the attack, government-led surveillance increased significantly in the name of American safety, giving way to profound changes in public policy (Bloss, 2007). On June 1st, 2002, the 43rd President of the United States, George W. Bush, formalized his administration's chief

justification for what was known as the Second Gulf War, or the War on Terror, through a broad-based policy effort titled the Bush Doctrine of Preemption. During Bush's enunciation of the doctrine, President Bush contended that "our security would require all Americans to be forward-looking and resolute, to be ready for *preemptive action* when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives" (Bush, 2002, para. 20, emphasis added). The U.S government achieved preemptive action by employing the use of Dataism to help identify suspicious activity, potential threats, or terrorists (Gandy, 2003). The government's predictive tool kit offered social benefits of safety, while at the same time, its underlying ideology endangered our privacy (Kerr & Earle, 2013). I argue that this moment helps trace the emergence of particular practices relating to the spread of digital surveillance, which eventually threaded its way through our culture and future.

Not long after President Bush's proclamation, *MR* was released nationwide by Steven Spielberg. Not only was war (Gross & Aoláin, 2014) and crisis rhetoric (Drew, 2004) expressed during that time by the Bush administration, but this preemptive justice was realized fictionally and in actuality, which was quite fitting for viewers that summer. During the film's release, safety was the predominant concern of post-9/11 American life (Huddy & Feldman, 2011). Surveillance was only possible through the use of technology (Shamsi & Abdo, 2011), and we as citizens agreed to this to guarantee the safety of America (Huddy et al., 2002). The multifaceted relationship between security, justice, and technology was also represented in *MR*, mainly as it functions to better society. *MR* exemplifies what Levin (2002) terms as "*rhetorics of surveillance*," which focuses on specific rhetorical functions of surveillance in recent cinema (p. 581, emphasis in original). *MR*'s narration presents viewers with the rhetoric of surveillance and shows what a possible post-9/11 future dystopian world would look like (Levin, 2002). It is evident that citizens did not experience the surveillance and safety measures depicted in *MR*

during its release; however, it fosters the tensions between a politics of fear, intensified security, and the loss of privacy (Ball et al., 2012). Through the rhetoric of preemptive action in the film, audiences find commonality between themselves and the notion of safety, thus establishing a linked connection between the audience, safety, and the government. This SF dystopian film was accidentally prescient (Rountree, 2004) and presaged a wave of anxiety about governmental overreach that materialized and became the new normal in the following decade (Shamsi & Abdo, 2011; Hiranandani, 2011; Hu, 2017).

When *MR* was released, it was one of the most popular films of 2002, earning a 7.6 on IMDb (IMDb, n.d.), an 80% audience score, and a 90% critic score on Rotten Tomatoes (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.). The film earned a little over \$358 million on a \$102 million budget (Box Office Mojo, 2002) and was later nominated for several academy awards. Most of the film's success is due to Steven Spielberg and how he prepared for this film. Spielberg consulted several scientists, philosophers, journalists, urbanists, biomedicine experts, and artists to illustrate a more reasonable and plausible future world than other SF dystopian films (Bonnington et al., 2012; Mikulec, n.d.). During pre-production in 1999, the "think tank" experts and the production designer created an 80-page document known as the "2054 bible" (Rothkerch, 2002, para. 9). The "2054 bible" laid out everything the production team would build for their future world, including all things political, architectural, socio-economic, and technological (Rothkerch, 2002). Spielberg and his team had creatively constructed this world and rhetorically chose to name this document the "2054 bible," demonstrating the power and interrelationship between science fiction, technology, and religion. Spielberg and his team were able to make a series of brilliant forecasts and predictions (Cherry, 2019). I maintain that the 2054 bible supports why there are religious undertones in the film.

Spielberg wanted the film to hold a certain level of scientific validity with the technology, so much so that he mentioned in an interview that he hoped all these technological inventions might come true one day (Mikulec, n.d.). Spielberg and his team felt that these futuristic technological devices would bring up many concerns, such as how invasive they were throughout the city, people's homes, and their bodies (e.g., iris scanners). They knew that the future of technology would reduce civil liberties, specifically with privacy (Mikulec, n.d.; Rothkerch, 2002). Belker, a consultant that participated in the think tank, had mentioned in an interview that the future's new motto for the world of *MR* would be "you don't have 15 minutes of fame, you have 15 minutes of privacy" (as cited in Rothkerch, 2002, para. 22). These technological concerns may have been hypothetical during production, and the audience felt that these technology designs would appear in the *far-distant* future (Mikulec, n.d.). However, in the years since the film's release, Spielberg's bleak technological vision has, in large part, come to fruition (e.g., iris recognition, gesture-based computing, personalized ads, autonomous vehicles, 3D video, and loss of privacy) (Arthur, 2010). In hindsight, the 2002 adaptation was a cautionary tale that prefigured the onset of Dataism through surveillance, data gathering, and new predictive technological devices that bring forth data.

The film's intersecting themes of gender, surveillance, and technology have prompted scholarly analyses and popular articles over the last twenty years. I add to these critiques of *MR* by examining its guilt-redemption tactics and how this film uses religious archetypes to communicate the problems surrounding surveillance, PTs, and Dataism. Specifically, *Order*, *The Negative*, and *Redemption via Victimhood* are operationalized to show how particular Burkean concepts are unique to this text. In Chapter Two, I organized and analyzed victimhood and redemption as separate, but, in order to achieve redemption, one has to experience victimhood. In

the analysis, these two parts are explored together because they are so intricately linked. In what follows, I explore key scenes along with vital themes. In this text, the themes and scenes attend to the pervasive practices of Dataism and see 1) Dataism as fallible, 2) Dataism as oppressive, and 3) Dataism as minimizing privacy. Throughout my analysis, I identify six themes: *technological psychosis, religion, parenthood, morality, free will, and vision*. By combining themes with critical scenes, the audience will see how these rhetorical features urge us to re-evaluate the relationship between PTs, Dataism, our government in conjunction with surveillance, and ourselves.

In demonstrating *MR*'s movement from a state of technological fallenness through its path of symbolic redemption, this chapter will proceed in four main parts, thus revealing the film's sequence from guilt to redemption. Part One explores how Order is assigned in the film and how it affects the characters. In Part Two, I examine Anderton's technological fallenness, or psychosis, which leads him to experience the negative, and offers a paradoxical way of combating such fallenness. Then, in Part Three, the film's road to redemption is near, signaling the audience that Anderton's truth will soon be revealed. Lastly, I conclude this chapter by addressing how SF films expand upon the topics of PT's and Dataism, how PT's and Dataism demonstrate a desire for perfection by employing surveillance to create order. The following section investigates *MR*'s portrayal of humanity's technological "fallenness," underscores the assigning of blame and guilt related to PTs, and how these devices establish a sense of Order.

### **Part One: In All Disorder, a Secret Order**

*MR* (2002) delivers a unique and compelling message about preemptive justice that blends the disruptive powers of Dataism, provided by predictive-based technologies, and how this data helps construct a "socio-political" hierarchy for the city of Washington, D.C. through its use of surveillance. As Burke reminds us, one of the main characteristics of humans is creating



and maintaining Order (Burke, 1970). For Burke, Order demands that a person is moral and obeys the social order (Burke 1969b). If one is immoral or disobeys the order, this results in guilt, and the individual or group must be punished (Burke, 1970). Part One explores *MR*'s framing around an exigence linked with an infallible predictive technological device. This device is rooted in blame and helps create and assign the stratification of the social hierarchy.

Throughout *MR*, the audience witnesses the importance of Order and how Order motivates the characters throughout the storyline. The film stresses how the social hierarchy drives moral values in a positive way while also assigning blame to specific individuals for their moral wrongdoings. As we will see, *MR*'s depiction of the "problem" and the "solution" to crime embodies visual and linguistic elements surrounding religion. *MR* takes the audience on a dystopian journey. It illustrates how this ordering must be redefined at every turn, such as assigning who is good and evil, which the analysis will show. Here, I argue that Burke's ideas can be used as a critical tool to better understand how technological changes manifest as a desire for perfection and a need for Order. Therefore, this section will analyze two scenes from *MR* that identify with Burke's concept of *the established order* accompanied with themes of *religion*, *technological psychosis*, *morality*, and *vision*.

### ***Scene One: The PreCrime System***

At the beginning of the film, Anderton (Tom Cruise) mourns his son, Sean's, unsolved disappearance and his subsequent marital collapse. His son's disappearance and the guilt Anderton feels concerning Sean have left him spending the past six years in a drug-addled fog of justice-seeking anguish (e.g., a fictitious drug known as Clarity that is equivalent to heroin). As a result, he dedicated his life to the Police Department's Division of PreCrime and was reassured by this infallible system of predicting future crimes. His guilt motivates him to do his job, and he wants to ensure that no parent would ever have to experience that type of pain nor crime.

Anderton's goal is to deliver justice and Order day in and day out to protect D.C. and its people. The way Anderton can promise safety is through a specific type of governance. The combination of the disciplinary hierarchy – the Department of PreCrime – and the lack of individual civil rights creates this world of total visibility to ensure safety. The surveillance tactics the Department of PreCrime exercises also helps the structuring of the city.

The Department of PreCrime constructs the District of Columbia's social hierarchy, which rhetorically references religion and religious themes. This "utterly infallible" pervasive system assigns the accusation of a crime or guilt, thus creating a sense of Order. The PreCrime system signals an individual's place in the hierarchy from a top-down approach. This technology effectively establishes and amplifies social stratifications (Mazzotti, 2017), thus existing as a powerful rhetorical tool in the film. We see this when the Pre-Cogs get a prevision of a future murder at the beginning of the film. A regular white-collar worker named Howard Marks (Arye Gross) was *going to* kill his unfaithful wife and lover. The PreCrime unit arrests him, and he continues to maintain his innocence, saying, "I wasn't going to do it! I wasn't going to hurt her! I just wanted to scare her!" (Spielberg, 2002, 0:13:56). Despite what he said, PreCrime has the power to determine who is innocent and guilty, resulting in him being haloed indefinitely. A halo is an electrical device that is placed around a citizen's temples and stuns them. Howard Marks went from being a part of the social hierarchy to now being at the bottom. In the eyes of this surveillance society, Marks' positioning is now outside of the social hierarchy because he is not an active participant of social life due to the halo incapacitating him. An arrest is an act of othering while technology exploits otherness to maintain control and order (Roberts, 2000).

This system is omniscient; it is all-knowing due to the data the PreCrime system receives from the PTs embedded throughout the city of D.C. (Harari, 2015). Technologies embedded

everywhere are what Aarts calls “ambient intelligences (AmI)” (Wright, 2008, p. 473). AmI had been understood as an

information Society where... people are surrounded by intelligent, intuitive interfaces that are embedded in all kinds of objects and an environment that is capable of recognising and responding to the presence of different individuals in a seamless, unobtrusive and often invisible way (Ducatel et al., 2001, p. 1).

Surveillance functions through AmI, or PTs, which are present within *MR*. The technologies featured are retinal scanners, voice recognition/activation system, optical tomography, talking billboards, thermal scanning, and electronic spyzers. These devices collect data and also interpret data (Wright, 2008). However, retinal scanners are one of the essential surveillance tactics in the film. Several technologies rely on the optical scanners located throughout the entire city of D.C. to initiate the data collection and interpretation of that data about its citizens. Retinal scanners allow the city to track each citizen and lets them know where they are virtually at all times, even if citizens are in impoverished areas of D.C (e.g., the “Sprawl”). The technologies described above give power and information to the surveillance state. This futuristic world draws on data in multiple ways to keep Order. It is almost impossible to go undetected in the 2054 version of D.C.

Harari (2017) claims that data and the practice of Dataism are the new sources of authority because they can find patterns that humans cannot find. However, the film shows that human Pre-Cogs operationalize the system by finding patterns of human behavior, such as who is good and evil, which then predicts future crime. This total surveillance system is also possible due to three Pre-Cogs - Agatha, Arthur, and Dashiell - who are mutated offspring of drug-addicted parents and gifted with precognition. The three narcotized Pre-Cogs, whose bodies are suspended in a milky, amniotic-like fluid, are enslaved to the Department of PreCrime and are kept in an area known as “The Temple.” The Pre-Cogs are depicted as the holy trinity whose prophecies and “data” help to uphold justice by determining who is guilty (evil). Their data gives

way to the belief and faith in Dataism. The visions that the Pre-Cogs put forth are known as previsions, which is a collective effort. If a Pre-Cog gets a different data stream from the other two Pre-Cogs, this is known as a “minority report.” In other words, if one of the Pre-Cogs sees a variant data stream while the other two see the same data stream, the Pre-Cogs go with the latter. The “minority report” is then filed away.

The Pre-Cog’s visions for PreCrime are disarranged, and it is hard to tell what these images and sequences of events will lead up to - similar to that of a puzzle - it is a part of the whole. The PreCrime "oracles" are events that need to be reconstructed by a kind of narrator: Anderton. Anderton must interpret the Pre-Cogs visions by searching for clues about the crime’s location using the footage of the crime they produce. Anderton has the power to decipher moral wrongdoings through Dataism to restore stability and order, similar to Jesus Christ - a savior of humankind.

In addition to the images and circumstances of the crime, the Pre-Cogs provide police with the victim and perpetrator’s names, the time, and the date of the murder. This information is a form of control attempting to reestablish safety and material perfection for its citizens. The police in the film are referred to as “priests” and “clergy” because they are the hierarchically privileged mouthpieces and interpreters of this prophetic world. Therefore, the Department of PreCrime holds much power because they are essentially the judge, jury, and executioner. In fact, they have judges on a teleconference witnessing Anderton when he depicts the Pre-Cogs previsions who sign off on the predictions, allowing for Anderton to prevent the crimes. Their goal is to assign blame for the moral disorder. Once a future crime is predicted, police venture out to arrest the future offenders. When taken into custody, they put a “halo” around the offenders’ heads to keep them in an active mental state. At the same time, their bodies are

incapacitated and placed in tubes that resemble a coffin, representative of purgatory in the film. This purgatory holding facility represents the “Other” (Murray, 1998), thus creating a “rhetoric of *othering*” (Riggins, 1997, emphasis in original), which results in being outside of the hierarchy. The Department of PreCrime has enough power to constitute members' identities in a social hierarchy, becoming the authority of guilt, whose goals reflect the dominant culture and whose discourse fashions the “Other” (Jasinski, 2001).

Therefore, the “top” of the hierarchy represents two groups: The Pre-Cogs and the governmental agency. The ‘top’ includes the Pre-Cogs because of their god-like psychic powers as well as the governmental agency due to their status and ultimate decision-making authority. The “middle” of the social hierarchy represents a divided society where there is a “counterculture on the one side and the seemingly perfect, but also controlled, population on the other” (Slováčková, 2019, p. 9). The counterculture fights against the PreCrime system and rebels against the laws and customs of the surveillance system (Slováčková, 2019). We see these types of people living in “the Sprawl,” such as the surgeon Anderton obtains for his eye surgery, which will be explained later in this chapter. On the other hand, the seemingly perfect yet controlled citizens are the mainstream population because they obey the PreCrime system. The mainstream citizens are genuinely seen as innocent because of their obedience to the system. However, this obedience could result either from fear of the controlling system or because they faithfully believe the system is right. The tension of fear and genuinely believing in the system is often depicted in dystopian SF texts (Padden, 2015; Slováčková, 2019). Meanwhile, the down, or “bottom,” of this hierarchy are the haloed offenders.

Order is temporarily restored until there is another precognition. Structure and order are vital to the world of *MR* because PreCrime seeks perfection through its utopic notion of

eliminating crime. Burke perceives Order and applies it to two different realms: physical evolution and our socio-political structures (Burke, 1984b). *MR* represents our social and political organizations where actors use and misuse symbols to control and surveil their environment. The guilt-redemption cycle helps contextualize how *MR* places blame on individuals within the hierarchy.

### *Scene Two: The Guilty Party*

In another scene, the ordering of the social hierarchy is redefined. The Pre-Cog, Agatha, witnesses a foreseen murder, but this time, the new set of images reflects Anderton himself committing the impending murder. He “will” murder a man by the name of Leo Crow (Mike Binder) - a man he does not know nor has he ever met - in 36 short hours. At this point, *MR* illuminates a constellation of errors and concerns, particularly as PT impacts social relations within the hierarchy and creates unintended consequences (Noble, 2018), which generates a technological fallenness for Anderton. His technological psychosis and belief in this entelechial piece of machinery blinded him insofar that he thought his actions were moral and that he would never be guilty of a crime. This idea of total visibility, of “seeing,” provided a trained incapacity, a way of “not seeing” (Coupe, 2001, p. 419) for Anderton when it comes to the question of blame and guilt. How could a PreCrime cop be guilty of a future murder when that is the very thing he prevents from happening every day? Anderton hopes that something will eventually recontextualize his actions and that maybe this guilt can be transferred onto another citizen. He believes someone is targeting him for this crime, representing a scapegoat for someone else's evil ways.

This prevision immediately changes Anderton's position within the hierarchy from being innocent and fighting against crime to being a suspect of murder. He is now a guilt-ridden citizen, which has immediately shifted his rank from being at the top of the hierarchy to now

potentially being at the bottom with the other haloed offenders. When someone goes against the social order, the future perpetrator must submit himself to the intended punishment or rebel against the socio-political hierarchy (Burke, 1970). These future actions situate Anderton lower within the governmental hierarchy, which changes the dynamic of being the observer of PreCrime to now being observed. This new ordering from the Pre-Cogs is still striving for perfection. Anderton chooses to rebel against the hierarchy. As he attempts to leave the office, an alarm goes off involving Anderton's recent premeditated murder prediction. Rather than surrendering himself, Anderton escapes by running away and seeks to change this prediction by going against the grain to redeem himself. Similar to the Pre-Cogs and their entelechial workings, Anderton's drive is to carry out the fight against Dataism as a perfect extreme against the system. He is rotten with perfection to discover the truth. In the meantime, he becomes a fugitive from his governmental organization, which views him as a future sinner. The system forces Anderton to view himself in a new light as a "guilty" citizen, which is a kind of "hierarchical embarrassment" for Anderton (Burke, 1984, p. 278). It is an embarrassment because the PreCrime system was something he believed in, and he helped make that Department what it is today, evidenced by his position within the system. Now, he is forced to be on the run to prove he was framed and redeem his guilt.

By analyzing the Burkean concept of Order within *MR*, the themes of religion and technological psychosis accompany two other themes: *morality* and *vision*. Specifically, the theme of religion complements morality (e.g., good and evil), while technological psychosis ties in with the notion of vision (e.g., sight and blindness). The PreCrime system operates through the use of Dataism, whose data is supplied by the deified Pre-Cogs. This data helps identify who is good and evil, similar to religion, within the social order. The new "worship" and reliance on

Dataism creates a technological psychosis, which blinds the characters to what is fact and what is fiction, and forces agents to take on a new perspective amongst the chaos. The film's framing of the "solution" to crime is the overreliance and utter assurance of PTs. In reality, trusting the "infallible" system reveals the paradoxical nature it holds, thus creating the "problem" that Anderton has to morally overcome. The second part of the chapter illustrates the first step of the redemptive process: to avoid an arrest from his colleagues and prove his innocence.

### **Part Two: Positively in the Negative**

Through his attempt for redemption, Anderton experiences a journey in "the negative" to reveal the fundamentally error-prone nature of Order itself. Guilt only exists when we do things we should "not" do or "not" do the things we should do (Burke, 1966b, p. 9). In this case, Anderton chose the former. He chose to run away and not be hunted by his own people. This labeling of guilt is not *his* predestination, so he chooses to flee to prove he is a moral agent. Burke believes there are two responses to Order: acceptance or rejection (Burke, 1970). Anderton represents Burke's frame of rejection, which seeks to change or transform the social order (Burke, 1970). He is willing to discover the truth despite if it destroys the PreCrime system. Anderton's choices echo Burke's sentiment that it is one's actions that reveal a person's character (Burke, 1966b). This provides Anderton an opportunity to move from a state of fallenness to a glimpse of hope, to victimage. Thus, this part of the chapter will focus on three vital scenes from *MR* where *the negative* is evident. The attending themes are *technological psychosis, religion, vision, morality, and free will*. I maintain that Burke's principle of the negative anchors this chapter and is an integral part of this analysis. Nevertheless, let us first examine how the negative plays out in the first scene.



### *Scene One: Morally Immoral*

In Part One, it is clear that the construction of “the other” has been made, and the assigning of the blame falls prey to Anderton. As Burke (1966b) reminds us, the idea of “sheer motion is non-ethical, *action* implies the ethical, the human personality” (p. 11, emphasis in original). Burke insists that actions are the precursor to language, which he asserts language as symbolic action. Symbolic action is the foundation of a socio-political Order. Anderton's actions in this scene imply he is ethical and moral because he wants to discover the truth. Anderton does not accept his fate determined by the precognition, so he starts to fight against the government's “Big Technology” to try and clear his name (Burke, 1976, p. 177). From a moral standpoint, it is surprising to see Anderton run away from the Department of PreCrime because he emphatically believed in this perfect piece of technology. Previously, Anderton never questioned anyone else's assigning of blame and guilt, yet Anderton questioned *his* conviction. If he genuinely believed in the system, he would have turned himself in and been haloed. However, he did not choose that redemptive path, making him immoral in the eyes of the existing social order. Instead, Anderton's journey begins by combating not only the PreCrime system but also other technological devices, or “ambient intelligences (AmI),” which was highlighted earlier (Wright, 2008, p. 473). The PTs and scanners entrenched in the District of Columbia are symbol systems that give way to data, tracking, and predestination. Anderton fights against predestination, tries to exercise his free will, his freedom, and reclaims his personal agency in this surveillance state. Anderton is now experiencing the unintended consequences of the so-called perfect technologies. While Anderton is on the run, the Department of PreCrime experiences struggles of its own.

The only solution for the Department of PreCrime is to find him through the means of data and technological devices. The technological devices deployed are hover packs, retinal scanners, digitally held newspapers that immediately update from the Department of PreCrime

for its citizens, electronic surveillance spyders, and halos for immobilizing prospective criminals. The entire Department that is chasing Anderton experience their own technological psychosis. They are inherently biased because Dataism for them is pure knowledge; it represents absolute truth. This belief system can affect one's perspective of the world, allowing them not to think objectively. They never consider that this vision of Anderton *could* be manipulated or that the PreCrime system *is* fallible. The PreCrime agents' technological psychosis emphasizes this paradox by advancing the belief that PTs are not utterly "infallible" because human beings are behind the devices and platforms' development. If human beings are fallible, this directly correlates to technological devices being fallible (Noble, 2018). Even though human beings attempt a quest for certitude through the combination of smart technologies and governmental platforms, there is still room for error.

Despite the technological psychosis experienced by the Department of PreCrime, Chief Anderton realizes that the PreCrime Department knows exactly every move he is making due to the identity chip located in his iris that the retinal scanners pick up. In *MR*, the eyes are indeed the window to control, govern, and track its citizens. At the same time, the embedded technologies create a perfect world of visibility because of the citizens' eyes. As Anderton escapes to the subway, he is bombarded with advertisements that mention him by name as retinal scanners identify him and personalize advertisements for him. As this suggests, the audience witnesses Dataism at play. Here the movie seems to be both demonstrating the perks of Dataism and the invasiveness simultaneously. The perks being that data is beneficial for society's safety and targets consumers with ads creating convenience for the consumer. It is also invasive because citizens lose their privacy, which they then lose their freedom. The film critiques the notion of perfection by illustrating how society relies upon and operates through Dataism,

whether this is in the private sphere (e.g., holographic displays) or the public sphere (e.g., advertising).

The seductive attention-seeking ads declare, “The road you are on John Anderton is the one less traveled - Lexus 2054,” which is followed by “John Anderton! You could use a Guinness right about now” (Spielberg, 2002, 0:46:35). Then, the next ad from American Express remarks, “Get away, John Anderton. Forget your troubles” (Spielberg, 2002, 0:46:45).

Technology is so advanced in 2054 that these ads, combined with the retinal scanners, can biometrically assess the stressful situation Anderton is experiencing. The data suggests that these products and services can help relieve his circumstances by either running away in a brand new car, drinking an alcoholic beverage, or taking a vacation. However, he cannot partake in any of these activities because he is a fugitive, showing that these predictions and suggestions are wrong. Represented here is the Burkean characterization of the negative, specifically with the personalization of these ads. Because these advertisements have become so personalized, the hi-tech, futuristic billboards in the mall are paradoxically found to be quite impersonal due to the continuous barrage of advertisements. The ads do not feel meaningful; they only feel intentional because the optical scanners identify and then target the citizen, sparking an outpouring of ads within seconds. This scene highlights the contradictory nature of surveillance and the data collected from PTs (e.g., predictions and personalization of ads). These companies treat their targets, which are human beings, as objects and care very little for them as persons, all in the name of Dataism. Ultimately, Anderton is fighting against Dataism to ensure his freedom and absolve his guilt.

Capitalism and the way it affects humanity, despite the risks involved, which appears to be worse than the current social structure, is a classic dystopian feature of the SF genre (Moynan,

2000). The negative highlights the imperfections of technology and surveillance. This promise of technological entelechy is rotten with negation. *MRs* language is utopic in the fact that they have eliminated crime, whose billboards around town constantly remind its citizens of PreCrime accomplishing this. We see this when Anderton slowly walks through the city, and the billboard says, “Just six years ago, the homicide rate had reached epidemic proportions. It seemed that only a miracle could stop the bloodshed. But instead of one miracle, we were given three - the Pre-Cognitives” (Spielberg, 2002, 0:15:10). The utopic rhetoric about this system exemplifies religion and its undertones about Dataism. The three miracles parallel the holy trinity. Religion and technology are common themes within SF (Kreuziger, 1986), and *MR* consistently ties these themes throughout the film. Despite the utopic rhetoric, in reality, society’s structure is built around surveillance, diminishing the quality of life for its citizens, where Dataism is the oppressive control system. As a part of SF, dystopias depict oppressive societies (Mirenayat & Soofastaei, 2015; Živić, 2014), and *MR* consistently critiques this through PTs and Dataism. The next scene highlights Anderton’s next course of action, which reveals the truth about Dataism.

### ***Scene Two: The Blind Must Wait and See***

Anderton continues his efforts of self-exoneration and pays a visit to a woman by the name of Dr. Iris Hineman (Lois Smith), who is known as the mother of PreCrime. The woman’s name feeds the ocular thematic (“Iris”); she is a character who provides an omniscient perspective because she appears to still know everything that goes on at the Department of PreCrime despite having left years prior. Hineman helped Burgess (Max von Sydow) create the PreCrime system, and she also cared for the Pre-Cogs - Agatha, Arthur, and Dashiell - when they were children. The exchange between Hineman and Anderton underscores the nature of the negative and provides a redemptive turning point. As they are talking in Hineman’s greenhouse, she admits that one of the Pre-Cogs, Agatha, can occasionally see a different prevision than

Arthur and Dashiell, creating the possibility of seeing an alternate future for those accused of a PreCrime. However, to maintain the public's confidence in the system and its "infallibility," these opposing visions produced by Agatha, called "minority reports," are destroyed. Despite the "minority reports" deletion, Hineman informs Anderton that the original reports are stored *within* the Pre-Cog who envisioned it.

This conversation reinforces what Anderton feared all along, that the system of PreCrime is wrought with imperfections. From its inception, the flaw within the system was how humans were interpreting echoes, which are murders that can be seen more than once by a Pre-Cog. The echo and the fact that there sometimes is a difference between an echo and a minority report are human errors. Burgess knew of these errors, allowing him to continually hide the truth of his crimes by making them look like echoes. In its very perfection, the PreCrime unit produced a false sense of justice and Order, which results in nothing but disorder. The very notion of Pre-Crime and its intervention, to preclude a "possible" future, paradoxically denotes that the future is acquiescent and determinate. In other words, the Pre-Crime led people to believe that the future was something we could not go against because it was already predicted as the "absolute" truth. Hineman's statement proves otherwise, suggesting that free will, or choice, is still an option. The assigning of guilt does not necessarily mean the individual *is* guilty because they have the choice to choose whether they will commit that crime. Hineman also revealed that Burgess, whom she refers to as "the father of PreCrime," knew about the destruction of minority reports and that the system was not truly infallible (Spielberg, 2002, 1:02:00). Anderton is shocked to know that Burgess, someone he looked to as a father figure and was extremely close to, could hide a secret like this from him. Burgess relied on Anderton's pain from losing his son and naivety about the PreCrime system, so he could operate the PreCrime system the way he

intended. This information only proved to Anderton that Burgess was immoral and evil; Burgess was not the man Anderton thought he was.

For Burgess, violent crimes represent the negative, giving rise to PreCrime as Burkean “instruments of his own making” (1966b, p. 16). Burgess used the "negative" of violent crimes and murder as justification to create the "positive" of surveillance and the PreCrime system. It is the tools of our own making that separates humans from nature. The negative is a principle of judgment and distinction, but it is human-made and, therefore, imperfect. The systems humans create to combat the negative will likewise be fraught with flaws and limitations. Burgess tapped into the citizen's wants and needs to ensure safety by eliminating crime, all for society's benefit. The technology and the assurances prey on our fears and anxiety to feel safe and secure. Burgess knew that the residents of D.C were all “moved by a sense of order” (Burke, 1966b, p. 16), and he used his symbols negatively in creating a government division that helps to construct the notion of “the other” and the act of “othering” (Jasinski, 2001). In a textbook instance of what Kenneth Burke called “rotten with perfection,” we will later see how Burgess used the imperfections *of* the system to hide those very same imperfections *within* the system (Burke, 1966b, p. 16). Burgess believed in technological “solutionism,” which is the idea that humanity’s problems can be solved utilizing algorithms, technology, robots, and specific code (Morozov, 2013). Technological “solutionism,” in other words, begets itself: technology’s disruptions give rise to the need for new and improved technological solutions, which give rise to new disruptions and unintended consequences, which give rise to new and improved solutions--and so on. This cycle never ends, lending itself to Burke’s notion of compulsion in terms of technology’s relationship with humanity.

Anderton later discovers that Burgess was polluted by his own fallibilities, which furthered the problem of the negative. The system's basic rottenness was patched over as a simple glitch, thus enabling the veneer of "perfection" as technological mastery servicing the needs of justice and Order. Ultimately, the "glitch" distorted the vision of who is innocent and who is guilty. The "glitch" also blurred the lines of the hierarchy due to the PreCrime system. In actuality, the system of PreCrime is the guilty perpetrator while the innocent are locked up, which led to Anderton's inability to see clearly in Part One of this chapter. However, after learning the truth, Anderton's blindness paradoxically led to insight, thus changing his perspective about the PreCrime system and Burgess. This insight is what he needed to morally restore Order and get one step closer to experiencing victimage. Anderton's pursuit of justice is explored in this next eye-opening scene.

***Scene Three: In Darkness, there is Light***

While the eyes of the State are still on the hunt for Anderton, he realizes Hineman gave him the answer all along to achieve redemption. During their conversation, Hineman mentioned, "Sometimes in order to see the light, you have to risk the dark. As a policeman - excuse me, as a former policeman - I'm sure you know all sorts of people who could... help you out in this regard" (Spielberg, 2002, 1:03:16). Hineman's comment also reflects a Bible scripture of Isaiah 42:16, saying:

I will lead the blind by the ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2021).

The fact that her suggestion and the Bible scripture have similarities, she is omniscient, and she knows the truth about the system and certain people indicates her character as representing a religious figure. Despite Hineman not working at the Department of PreCrime anymore, she still

knows specific details about people and their intentions. For instance, she knows that the Department is under investigation by the DOJ's federal agent, Witwer (Colin Farrell), whose investigation started that very same day. Hineman also knows that Anderton is in a terrible position with the Department, mentioning at the beginning of their conversation without Anderton uttering a single word, saying, "This just isn't your week, is it Chief?" (Spielberg, 2002, 0:57:08). She has insight on things as they are happening and warns Anderton, declaring,

You shouldn't trust anyone. Certainly not the Attorney General who wants it all for himself. And not the federal agent [Witwer] who wants your job. Not even the old man [Burgess] who just wants to hang onto what he created. Don't trust anyone! (Spielberg, 2002, 1:01:47).

She is knowledgeable and helpful with her information, making her all-knowing and an all-powerful character. Even though Hineman urges Anderton not to trust anyone, she still wants to help him. Hineman indicates that Anderton must "risk the dark" by having his eyes removed so the surveillance state cannot track him. Hineman knows how to fight against the system because she created the system. Her suggestion is an atonement for Anderton while simultaneously an avoidance of punishment within the social order. This scene highlights the notion that eyes can be bought on the black-market to evade law enforcement. By going against the social order, one can go dark and not be identified amongst society by purchasing new eyes. The goal is to other oneself from the social hierarchy.

Anderton retains a shady and unhygienic surgeon, Dr. Solomon Eddie (Peter Stormare), whom Anderton previously had convicted in Baltimore, yet ironically trusts. He was a plastic surgeon who specialized in burn victims and was convicted for setting his patients on fire and filming it. Dr. Eddie and his apartment represent the shadow world of the negative, illustrating the chaos, lawlessness, and the dark side of being outside of the mainstream hierarchy. He is in the "Sprawl," which is a poverty-stricken, crime-ridden, dirty area within D.C. Despite the social



hierarchy in *MR* representing the good and powerful on top and the guilty and evil on the bottom, there is still social stratification of rich and poor. Dr. Eddie has a cold, sneezes, and catches the snot in his hand, wiping it into his physician lab coat. His assistant, Miss Van Ike, comes out of the restroom without washing her hands to prepare for the surgery. Their filth represents their morality, and it shows how felons live and survive in this surveillance world. Instead of Anderton staying in the clean, fast-paced city, where he is seen as guilty, he comes to the grimy Sprawl to reclaim his innocence. Burke (1952b) believes that freedom exhibits an “essentially negative nature” because it focuses on morality and morality is controlling (p. 448). It controls one’s decisions of right and wrong. For Anderton, it is morally right to do the wrong thing by getting new eyes, thus representing the negative.

Before the underground black-market operation begins, Anderton makes a strange request. He wants Dr. Solomon to save his original eyes for him, and he complies. Thankfully, Anderton survives the gruesome eye transplant, thus representing a rebirth. Literally and metaphorically, this surgery affords him a new identity, making for a new perspective and outlook. Anderton is officially a changed man whose eyes are that of an Asian man known as Mr. Yakamoto, who is seen as good in the eyes of the law. His new eyes illustrate the significant nature of difference through the negative - “the difference that makes a difference” (Fleckenstein, 2017, p. 26). Fleckenstein’s (2017) point is that the meaning of things and morals are demarcated by their differences from their setting and background. Without context, we would not be able to make any meaning of anything. For Anderton, his context and surroundings are in Dr. Eddie’s apartment where he gets new eyes to be identified as an innocent man. The eyes are the difference that makes a difference for him within the social hierarchy. This eye-opening experience allows him to be one step closer to his redemption. However, in order to seek

that redemption, he must first recover from the surgery. Dr. Eddie explains the recovery process, which consists of keeping his eyes covered with bandages for a full twelve hours. If he fails to do so, he will go permanently blind. He is close to seeking out his justice. The imagery of his eyes being wrapped parallels the Statue of Lady Justice, which is a powerful symbolic moment. The blindfold is paradoxical because the eye is the symbol of justice, yet the blindfold can also represent objectivity and fairness in the eye of the law. It is hard to be impartial with D.C.'s justice system because the Pre-Cogs influence the citizen's minds of who is good or evil by lending previsions of future crimes. We see what they see, which are only parts of the whole truth.

In this scene, the use of the negative is profound because it illuminates how the onetime Chief, the overseer of the city, is now blind. At first, Anderton was spiritually blind through technological psychosis because he was not able to see the truth, and now he is physically blind. Now, his basic human necessities cannot be met due to his blindness. Dr. Eddie sets a 12-hour timer, tethers him to two ropes: one leading to the bathroom and the second to the refrigerator. Dr. Eddie provides a sandwich and milk for his meal and gives Anderton his vice: the drug Clarity. Clarity represents a huffable form of heroin and is referred to as nueroin (e.g., neuro + heroin in the film). The depiction of drugs is also a common motif in the SF genre, which allows them to transcend and experience strange and unknown things (Noon, 2017). Some of the films that highlight drugs taken are *Clockwork Orange* (1971), *Robocop 2* (1990), *Brave New World* (1998), *The Matrix* (1999), and *Limitless* (2011), to name a few. *MR* is another illustration of how drugs are woven throughout the narrative and their important role with the characters. The lawlessness of drugs being freely available and given to someone who was once in the highest

positions of law shows the negative nature of the Sprawl. Anderton huffs his Clarity and slowly goes into a transformative state where he envisions the day his son was abducted.

Unfortunately, Anderton's 12-hour recovery process is interrupted by the sixth hour due to the data the PreCrime unit obtained and the deployment of their predictive surveillance tactics. This data for PreCrime provides a sense of control and certainty in the fight for finding and obtaining Anderton. They discover the particular building where Anderton is hiding. The PreCrime unit deploys electronic "eyes" of the State, which are invasive mobile robotic iris scanners known as "spyders" that crawl through the building to identify the occupants. Technological spyders are round, similar to a grenade, and when thrown, they become small, metallic spiders. The spyders are set loose, scanning and collecting data of everyone in their flats, whose residents are forced to submit to the government eye scans. They invade homes, crawling on top of beds and bodies to scan citizens' eyes, illustrating another instance where Dataism is intrusive. These PT devices infiltrate the innermost privacy of people in their homes. Specifically, the audience witnesses a man defecating, a couple having sexual intercourse, and another arguing. Nevertheless, every citizen stopped what they were doing for that one moment to have their irises scanned only to resume what they were doing after the spyder left. They were completely unaffected by the extreme, perpetual draconian surveillance whose justification is for the sole purpose of fighting crime and catching perpetrators-to-be.

Despite Anderton's endeavors to hide, a spyder finds him, and he is forced to remove his bandage and submit to an eye scan. The spyder scans and shines a bright light into his left eye, revealing two significant things in the film. First, the scanner confirms to him and the State that Anderton is a new "other" man called Mr. Yakamoto. Ironically, this "othering" helps him to be seen as innocent and a part of the social order once again. Anderton's negation and new identity

have journeyed from the majority, a white man in power, to a minority, an average everyday Asian citizen of D.C. Second, the scanned left eye came at a cost and resulted in him losing his sight permanently in that eye. Ironically, a man who used to operate the all-knowing PreCrime system and had the power of foresight is now half-blind. Thankfully, Anderton successfully passed the scanner and can continue his mission to find out the truth.

Thus far, I highlighted the importance of the negative within *MR*, which revealed themes of *technological psychosis, vision, morality, and free will*. These themes align with what dystopian SF texts feature and focus on, which furthers studies of surveillance, philosophy, and Dataism. The PreCrime system plays on this idea of determinism, or predestination, as being true, which is influenced by “holy” outside forces. The Pre-Cogs and their visions give way to the idea that free will does not exist, yet Anderton’s immoral actions prove that free will exists in this predictive world. The PreCrime system determines who is good and evil, yet it is the father of PreCrime that understood the system as flawed and used this to his advantage to cover up the evil crimes he has committed. Burgess’s actions resulted in a technological psychosis experienced by Anderton, where he faced a certain blindness to the system itself. The conversation between Anderton and the mother of PreCrime allowed Anderton to see things as they truly are. He realized his father figure knew that PreCrime was fallible, and that determinism does not exist. Finding out this information gave Anderton a new perspective, motivating him to get a new set of eyes to redeem himself. In the third part of this chapter, *MR* offers a redemptive course through specific paths of victimage characters take to absolve their guilt. Rhetorics and actions of victimage transform the storyline, highlighting the sins of humanity. At this point in time, Anderton is the only person who can unveil such truths to those blind to the immoralities rooted in the PreCrime system.

### **Part Three: Redemption via Victimage**

In the third part of this chapter, I rhetorically investigate the dual presence of two different forms of victimage: mortification and scapegoating. For Burke, victimage aims to ease a person or group's guilt in the form of payment (Burke, 1984b). Engels (2010) adds to the conversation about victimage, saying, "victimage is central to the discursive practices of social life - in large part because it is often successful at easing guilt" (p. 308). In essence, guilt is something we as a society will always experience, whether intended or not, and the easing of this guilt can be practiced by either mortification or scapegoating. Burke (1984b) comments on victimage, noting that there are possibilities of an "error in interpretation" or "an example of faulty means" (p. 15) when humans deal with guilt. However, Burke (1984b) maintains that despite the problems victimage can conjure up, it successfully relieves people of their sins. It is important to identify and note the differences between the redemptive channels of victimage (i.e., mortification and scapegoating).

As Burke says, mortification is when someone takes on the guilt themselves and can absolve their guilt through either literal (i.e., suicide) or figurative sacrifice (Burke, 1989). Mortification is a representation of what the guilty have done themselves (Brummett, 1981). Another redemptive route that happens in human dramas is through scapegoating, which offers two forms: factional and universal scapegoating. For factional scapegoating, Burke mentions that someone assigns their personal guilt onto an external vessel or a particular group (Burke, 1984a). They can then sacrifice them literally (i.e., homicide) or figuratively (Burke, 1989). For universal scapegoating, everyone is to blame for the problem the victimizer caused, therefore resulting in purification by disassociating oneself from everyone and the problem (Burke, 1984b). Burke's victimage strategies of mortification and scapegoating allow people to resolve their guilt in order to experience the stage of redemption. Therefore, I analyze four scenes reflecting the redemptive

paths. Each scene builds off the other regarding victimage acts, and by the fourth scene, you will see all victimage acts, as discussed in Chapter 2, combined to achieve redemption for particular characters. The four sections will be organized as follows: 1) *Redemption via Mortification*, 2) *Redemption via Factional Scapegoating*, 3) *Redemption via Mortification and Factional Scapegoating*, and 4) *Redemption via Factional and Universal Scapegoating and Mortification*.

In the first section, I focus on one scene. The theme of *religion* and *free will* are distinct in the analysis. In the second section, I analyze the second chosen scene from *MR*, where the themes of *vision* and *free will* are evident. The third section presents the third scene and accompanies themes of *free will*, *vision*, and *parenthood*. Lastly, the final section highlights the accommodating themes of *religion*, *free will*, and *parenthood*. Let us turn to the first redemptive act of mortification and how this calls to change the social order.

## **Redemption via Mortification**

### ***Scene One: Eye of the Beholder***

Anderton is close to experiencing redemption, but first, he needs to get his minority report from Agatha. This minority report will help to determine whether he is seen as good or evil in the eyes of the surveillance state: the Department of PreCrime. If he is seen as innocent of this future crime, then this means he was indeed a scapegoat. If he is seen as guilty and evil, he must respond to these charges of wrongdoing, apologize for his sins, and be haloed. He makes it to the PreCrime department safely and approaches “The Temple” to confront Agatha about the minority report. The audience sees that Anderton, the one-eyed man, is carrying his original eyes in a small plastic bag.

As the viewers observe, it all makes sense as to why Anderton kept his original eyes. When approaching “The Temple” door, he holds up his original eyes to the iris scanner. His eyes still allow him access to the Pre-Crime unit, which in and of itself shows how there is human

fallibility in this Department. The fact that Anderton is a fugitive and the Pre-Crime unit did not change the access control measures illustrates fallibility. This moment visually and rhetorically indicates how Anderton's eyes symbolize an amalgamation of various perspectives. His old vision allows him to reflect on the past as well as the fact that his one eye gave him the access he needed to get a step closer to justice. While simultaneously, his new vision gives him the foresight of what he needs to do for his future and a way not to be identified by the technologies of surveillance. Anderton demonstrates how humans can undermine advanced security through free will and the choice to find out the truth, despite its consequences. Thankfully, this scene adds to the fact that there are hints of free will in this dystopian society. Anderton's rebellion and free will allows him to finally confront Agatha and kidnap her because the PreCrime unit is onto him, following behind him. Agatha is the symbol of truth, and she is the only person who has all the answers he needs to help him in this dire situation.

Anderton takes Agatha to an underground computer and Dataist expert, Rufus Riley (Jason Antoon), to extract her data about Crow's predicted murder. When Agatha comes into the room with Riley, he appears to be starstruck by her presence, immediately falling to his knees in front of her. Riley's actions parallel the scripture of Mark 5:6, "Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before him" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2021). Agatha is considered a miracle, a holy entity to the citizens of D.C. Anderton grabs Riley from the ground and whispers angrily, "I need you to hack into her!" (Spielberg, 2002, 1:31:56). As Riley worships Agatha, Anderton's actions reflect the worship of and reliance on Dataism. Data helps to determine whether one is good or evil in the hierarchy and puts forth individuation by an algorithm (Harari, 2017). This individuation is only possible due to the data citizens of D.C. are forced to provide. However, individuation by an algorithm can be both a blessing and a curse and

can result in unintended consequences (Harari, 2017). Traditionally, the SF genre features technology as a double-edged sword and depicts its effects on society (Mirenayat & Soofastaei, 2015). The effects are evident in this scene, showing how people will do anything to find out the truth from data, which confirms the belief and faith in Dataism as their new God because Dataism is all-knowing (Harari, 2017). To find out if Anderton is immoral, Riley effectively “hacks” and downloads Agatha’s previsions regarding Leo Crow, the man Anderton will allegedly murder. To Anderton’s dismay, the minority report shows the same future as originally predicted, that Anderton will sinfully kill Crow, thus violating the social order ideals. The truth symbolically triggers and reminds Anderton of his guilt internally, that he is a murderer-to-be. The only thing left for him to do is confront the evils of predetermination and “confirm” that he is the victimizer, not the victim of this prediction as he once thought. Anderton must carry out these actions as a sacrifice to restore order. Anderton now believes Agatha, the smartest Pre-Cog, and her previsions, showing his profession of faith in Dataism. Anderton’s outward evidence of this guilt and his soon-to-be sacrifice only strengthens his inward trust and loyalty to Dataism (Appel, 2016). At this point, the film illuminates how determinism trumps the notion of free will. Or does it? Keeping this question in mind, let us focus on the subsequent redemptive acts of factional scapegoating.

### **Redemption via Factional Scapegoating**

#### ***Scene Two: No Sin Goes Unseen***

Earlier in the film, Agatha witnessed a victim being murdered, and it was a woman by the name of Anne Lively. The haloed offender of this murder was identified as John Doe. Near the end of the film, the audience learns at the PreCrime national rollout banquet that John Doe did not kill Anne Lively. Instead, Agatha’s vision of Anne Lively’s death is misinterpreted as a Pre-Cog déjà vu, or an “echo,” meaning that the Pre-Cogs can sometimes see the same murder



repeatedly. Agatha's "echo" of Anne Lively is continually shown throughout the film. In reality, it was Burgess, the PreCrime director, who murdered Lively, which the spectators learn is Agatha's mother. Burgess employed factional scapegoating to frame John Doe for the death of Anne Lively; an innocent man that is currently haloed. He did this by performing his murder of Anne in the same way as a previously foretold crime, thus causing PreCrime technicians to mistake this new crime for a Pre-Cog "echo." Extensions of the use of the negative are within Burgess: the man who created the PreCrime system cannot get rid of violence because he is filled with violence and is himself a murderer.

Burgess murdered Agatha's mother because she threatened the possibility and future of PreCrime by asking for her daughter back after she sobered up from a drug addiction. Burgess knew that the system could not operate without Agatha, giving him a reason and justification to follow through with her murder. To create order, he had to go against the social order's values and beliefs. Burgess sought personal redemption through factional scapegoating and shifted this guilt, as previously stated, onto an external vessel: John Doe. Burgess was successful with this framing. He felt satisfied with this sacrifice because it furthered his dream of perfection. This sacrificial act allowed his believers to remain confident in the system and to continue feeling safe. However, while other people felt safe, Agatha was the one constantly suffering from the perpetual "echo" depictions of her mother's death. The humans running PreCrime assume the Pre-Cogs have "echo" visions of the same crimes later, which the humans ignore. This is another example of the negative because human interpretation will always be a necessary aspect of Dataism, and in this case, the data was interpreted incorrectly. Agatha was tired of having this "echo" represent a past murder to the people running PreCrime. She wanted the truth to come out

about Burgess, who is identified as a good man in the social order, but in reality, Burgess is purely evil.

Burgess's free will to murder and hiding it within the system gave a false sense of determinism, revealing how data is both a danger to and a "promise" of perfection. Burgess's technological psychosis and the power he gained from it created this "perfect" society. In reality, this hierarchy was in complete disorder due to his entelechial pursuit of the PreCrime system. Unfortunately, one man's choices shaped every individual's orientation in D.C., despite knowing if these citizens were truly guilty or innocent. Burgess's technological psychosis proves Burke's opinion that this form of psychosis is the most menacing of all psychoses (Burke, 1984b). Sadly, Agatha knew the truth about this information but was heavily sedated with dopamine and endorphins by the government agency. Nevertheless, the way Agatha sought her redemption was by generating visions of her mother's drowning to get the attention of Anderton. It successfully caught Anderton's attention, which gives him the foresight to reveal the truth about Burgess and the fallibility of the PreCrime system. Analogous to Anderton and losing his son, Agatha was motivated by her mother's loss to seek justice, helping to establish her redemptive path. However, in order for Anderton to experience his redemptive channel, he needs Agatha by his side.

## **Redemption via Mortification and Factional Scapegoating**

### ***Scene Three: Seeking Clarity***

Throughout the storyline, Anderton is the symbolic victim fighting against determinism to seek the truth and, overall, justice. Despite what Dataism and Agatha determined, his only goal is to prove that he will not carry out this premeditated homicide. However, Anderton's efforts to preclude his fate led him to the place where he must be to fulfill it. Before confronting Leo Crow, Agatha begs Anderton not to go, saying, "You still have a choice. The others never

saw their future” (Spielberg, 2002, 1:44:10). Her warning illuminates that Dataism and its “certainty” cannot always predict future behaviors and outcomes. She gives power to individual agency and unveils that things can still be uncertain in this predictive world. Her forewarning also gives power to free will as it is not an illusion, but maybe that determinism is the *real* illusion.

Anderton finally goes to Leo Crow’s room with Agatha, as shown in the vision, and discovers pictures revealing that Crow was the man who ruined his life and broke his family apart. Visually, the pictures suggest Crow kidnapped and possibly murdered Anderton’s son, along with several other children. Anderton looks down at the photos and says:

This is Sean. My son. Every day for the last six years, I’ve thought about only two things. The first was what my son would look like if he were alive today. If I would recognize him if I saw him on the street. The second is what I would do to the man who took him (Spielberg, 2002, 1:43:12).

Anderton finally comes face-to-face with Crow and bludgeons him, resulting in Crow’s confession to his son’s abduction. Instead of shooting Crow, Anderton realizes that the scenario is set up and goes against the prediction. Anderton arrests him instead. Crow changes his story and unveils the harsh truth, a way for him to redeem himself.

Anderton recognizes that Crow is not guilty of his son’s abduction. He was hired to act as though he did and agreed to be murdered by Anderton in exchange for money that would go to his family. He will not receive the payout if he is alive, and when Anderton stops short of killing him, Crow begs Anderton to pull the trigger. This moment illustrates how Crow was the “fall guy” due to the deal that was made. He was a factional scapegoat for Sean’s kidnapper merely by the circumstances of the situation. Purposely, the room was set to look as though he had kidnapped Sean and many other young boys. It was perfectly orchestrated. Thus, Crow represents a factional scapegoat; someone placed the blame on him to make him the new villain.

Crow manages to grab Anderton's gun and successfully shoots himself. Crow enacted mortification by sacrificing himself to seek redemption for himself and his family. He sought salvation by sacrificing himself all in the name of Dataism so that the data would prove that Anderton killed him. Crow's suicidal act further supports the scapegoating of Anderton. The image of Crow and the gunshot manages to look identical to the Pre-Cogs prevision, thus proving that data is "infallible" in the eyes of the Department of PreCrime, advancing their technological psychosis. However, at this moment, the audience witnesses that the Pre-Cog made a mistake in their prediction and that Anderton is actually innocent. The Pre-Cogs did not have all of the necessary data to predict and interpret the truth successfully. Now, Anderton realizes he has been a victim in an attempted conspiracy; essentially, he is a scapegoat, which he predicted from the start. While Anderton is seeking his redemption for being framed as a murderer, he sets out to expose how the PreCrime system is indeed compromised. His goal is to stop the disorder and claim his innocence to be a part of the social hierarchy once again. Unfortunately, Anderton is finally apprehended and arrested by the PreCrime unit. This new ordering of the social hierarchy will soon reveal who is guilty by switching the roles of the perpetrator and victim. In what follows, I explain that factional and universal scapegoating should be combined with mortification for the last redemptive act in *MR* to illustrate the theme of religion.

### **Redemption via Factional and Universal Scapegoating and Mortification**

The term "redemption" means to pay for one's sinful acts or wrongdoings by experiencing some form of punishment (Burke, 1970). Once we purge our guilt and pay for our sins, we can achieve redemption and return to a new or existing social order. By utilizing the term redemption in my textual analysis, I maintain to stay true to Burke's definition of redemption to refer to both its religious and secular meanings. Burke identifies the guilt-redemption cycle as a secular version of the Christian story where sinful humans seek salvation

through the sacrificial act of Jesus (Burke, 1970). As previously stated, dystopian SF films are known to have religious allegories to represent redemptive acts (Roberts, 2000), and *MR* is an example of this. I argue to employ redemption's religious and secular meanings for my analysis by including both forms of scapegoating with mortification. These redemptive acts are illustrated at the end of the film, which is also the film's climax.

#### ***Scene Four: The Perfect Sacrifice***

Soon after Anderton's former colleagues arrest him, Anderton's estranged wife realizes Burgess's guilt and arrives at the prison to free him. Anderton escapes to confront Burgess at the celebration for the national extension of the PreCrime Program. The Department of PreCrime in D.C. successfully concluded its testing phase. Because these predictions have been proven to be perfect for the past six years, the federal government plans to have a national rollout of the PreCrime system with Burgess in charge. The goal for Anderton is to reveal the truth behind the operation of PreCrime and prove that this system is imperfect, thus redeeming himself in a secular sense. He does not want to be seen as the guilty party and be blamed for something he did not, in fact, do. The first step Anderton takes to absolve this guilt is to broadcast the visual image of Burgess committing the Anne Lively murder at the banquet celebration. The second step Anderton takes is for Burgess to be supplied with an earpiece where Anderton can communicate with him while he watches the video. Anderton wants to make sure that Burgess pays for his wrongdoings where guilt is brought about unto Burgess and not someone else.

Everyone at the banquet sees the truth of Burgess's evil ways after watching the murder play out in front of them. Now, people are aware that the Department of PreCrime is not perfect and that people in power can manipulate its data. Agatha's "Pre-Cog déjà vu" or "echo" now has *all* the data to reveal the truth about her mom's death, how Burgess is the villain, and to prevent the national extension from happening. The PreCrime system for Burgess symbolically

represented his means for redemption by assigning blame to others for his actions. These people served as external “vessels” (Burke, 1974, p. 40) to represent what the guilty party has done themselves (Brummett, 1981). If Burgess got away with it one time, he thought he could successfully do it again with Anderton. Anderton knows he was the scapegoat for Burgess and tells him through the earpiece:

You used the memory of my dead son to set me up! That was the one thing you knew would drive me to murder! What are you going to do now Lamar? How are you going to shut me up? (Spielberg, 2002, 2:12:47).

Burgess recognizes that the rest of the social hierarchy will soon learn how the system is fallible if Anderton continues his redemptive path. Burgess utilized factional scapegoating with Anderton because he tried to investigate further into Agatha’s “echo.” Anderton was curious about the Anne Lively murder and wanted to find out some of the circumstances surrounding it. Anderton did not get far into the investigation because of a new prevision, revealing him as the new suspect-to-be. Burgess did everything in his power, knowing the system could produce fragmented bits of data to represent previsions for Anderton’s future crime in order for the truth not to come out about Lively’s murder. Now, Anderton knows how Dataism works at the PreCrime system and communicates this to Burgess while Burgess watches the murder he committed, saying,

And then when you were all alone, you killed her yourself in the same way the Pre-Cogs predicted your John Doe would kill her. You made the real murder look like an echo knowing the Tech would do what he was trained to do - disregard it (Spielberg, 2002, 2:11:42).

The paradoxical nature of Dataism is at play, where Dataism “upholds the freedom of information as the greatest good of all” (Harari, 2015, p. 387) to know and reveal the truth, while also showing how data can be manipulated, presenting “difficult ethical questions and fragment the public in troubling ways” (boyd & Crawford, 2012, p. 664). Data, in the world of *MR*, is the

vehicle for fragmenting the public in the hierarchy. The data supplied by surveillance is corrosive of civil liberties, which brings about several ethical concerns. For “data religion,” “the greatest sin would be to block the data flow,” which Burgess successfully did (Harari, 2015, p. 387). It is at this moment where Dataism provides justice through the flow of data. While people are watching Burgess’s brutal acts that he so desperately tried to hide, the Pre-Cogs envision a future crime where Burgess shoots Anderton on a balcony at the party. When Anderton confronts Burgess, he understands that by knowing the truth, there is a big possibility that Burgess will kill him. Burgess previously murdered the agent from the DOJ before the banquet for figuring out the truth about the PreCrime system. What makes Anderton any different? Anderton utters, “No doubt the Pre-Cogs have already seen this” (Spielberg, 2002, 2:13:39). Anderton was correct in his assumption because the Pre-Cogs newest prevision was Burgess murdering Anderton. The dynamics of factional scapegoating Burgess employed with Anderton reveals who is good and evil in this scene.

The film’s ending is the climax, where Anderton faces his father-figure, Burgess, and says to Burgess that he has two choices to redeem his guilt. As Burgess holds a gun, Anderton explains that if Burgess chooses not to kill him, he proves PreCrime’s fallibility by acting as a free man. Alternatively, he can choose to commit Anderton’s murder like the Pre-Cogs envisioned, resulting in being imprisoned but maintaining that the system is infallible. The free will and determinism tension asserts itself here when Anderton says, “You still have a choice, Lamar, like I did” (Spielberg, 2002, 02:14:43). In Burgess’s moment of contemplation, he decides to make a very different choice. Burgess utters his last words to Anderton, saying, “Forgive me, John. Forgive me, my boy” (Spielberg, 2002, 02:15:12). He turns the gun on himself as a type of atonement. He chose to take his own life to save his soul from the

consequences of sin. The father-son dynamic shared in this scene is apparent despite Burgess's evil ways and the scapegoating of his figurative son. Burgess still asks for forgiveness of his sins for what he did to Anderton. Mortification works through self-inflicted pain so that one can receive forgiveness (Moore, 2006), and that is exactly what Burgess attempted to do. Burgess's act combines self-sacrifice (mortification) with a sacrifice for all (universal scapegoating) because he was aware that the truth was out about the system. The truth identifies how the social order and the system that created this hierarchical structure was fallible, resulting in so many people being haloed that could have been innocent. Anderton was almost haloed, but thankfully, the sacrifice of Burgess redeemed himself in a secular way by "the act of freeing someone from a charge or claim" (Bobbitt, 1992, p. 66). Anderton is a free man.

At this point, we see Burke's idea of redemption as a particular condition or situation (a "scene") where we look at the "redeemer as an instrument, or agency, for bringing about the condition" (Burke, 1970, p. 176). The particular condition in *MR* was that Anderton was blamed for something he did not do and acted as a scapegoat throughout the film. He felt from the beginning that he represented the "fall guy" and later learned that indeed he was. The PreCrime system was an instrument that brought upon the false precognition that led Anderton to his fallen state. However, in the meantime, it was the existence of PreCrime that helped him to bring about the truth of the system, that it was, in fact, fallible and not infallible as it was sold to the American people. Anderton's goal was to confront Burgess about the dystopian oppressive system in order to clear his name. After learning that Anderton knew the workings and truth about PreCrime, Burke's idea of substitution is exercised by Burgess. Burke (1970) notes that substitution is "the possibility that one character may be redeemed through the act or agency of another" (p. 176). In order for Anderton to share the truth about PreCrime to the entire social



hierarchy of D.C., and the American people waiting for the national rollout, was for Burgess to take his own life. Burgess served as the “sacrificial substitute” for all humankind, resulting in the dismantling of PreCrime (Burke, 1970, p. 176). Because the system was fallible in determining future crimes, all prisoners were unconditionally pardoned, ridding them of their guilt and achieving their own redemption within the social hierarchy. The deified Pre-Cogs were released to a quiet, undisclosed place out in nature where they could recover from the drugs that the Department was constantly administering. Their release and new lives offer a “utopic horizon” (Moylan, 2000, p. 2), showing that the dystopian world still has a place where nature exists. After Burgess sacrificed himself, the existing social order was not restored. Instead, the haloed “offenders,” the Pre-Cogs, and the citizens of D.C. were able to restore a new order. There is a little bit of hope at the end of this dystopian SF text (Moylan, 2000).

*MR* can be likened to Christianity in the form of religious themes and undertones, but specifically in the form of salvation. Dystopian SF uses religion and redemption as common themes, symbols, and allegories (Alessio, 2006; McGrath, 2011). *MR* continues the use of common dystopian themes, particularly with Burgess atoning for his sins of the past, which was a sacrifice for all. Because Burgess sacrifices himself, he creates salvation for those who were haloed and imprisoned, allowing them to be born again. This act was a compelling statement of spiritual truth, acknowledging that he was wrong to allow tools and machines to dominate citizens' lives. This religious allegory reflects the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, whose sacrifice purified the souls of the people. In a secular sense, Burgess redeemed himself through the means of “atoning for a fault,” in which he recognized his evil ways and admitted to his sins by asking Anderton for forgiveness (Wellman, 2014, para. 1). The dismantling of the Department of PreCrime suggests that the worship of Dataism is sinful. The religious references and symbols to

Dataism throughout the film give way to the end of worship to that system, which the film sees as the appropriate way to restore order. Through this restoration, Anderton rekindled his relationship with his estranged wife, and they are expecting a child, giving him a second chance at being a father. As the scripture of John 8:32 claims, “The truth will set you free,” and in the story of *MR*, the truth did just that (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2021).

## **Conclusion**

Through the narrative of Anderton, we were able to understand the hegemonic ideology of Dataism and their implications fully. Through this empirical investigation, I argued that *MR* critiques the idea that if there is a problem, the way to symbolically correct that problem is through the divine power of technology. Dataism and PTs demonstrate a desire for perfection through surveillance tactics to establish the social order and promote the idea of safety as being of the utmost importance. What does this say about humanity and its relationship with technology? As the film illustrates, the citizens of *MR* use technology to solve technological problems and continue this cycle, leading to a dystopian society. This compulsion mentality surrounding technology, as illustrated in *MR*, should offer insight that technological problems cannot always be solved through technological “solutions.” I argue that the only way to solve technology's problem is through humanity. As the film shows, humanity creates these technologies, becoming victims of their own creations. However, as creators of these devices, we do not need to continue down this utopic path of technology because it will lead to dystopic outcomes. Dystopian SF films give us a peek into what the future could possibly look like, showing humanity's compulsion for technology, and preparing us for the worst technological outcome. Dystopian SF films show how the compulsion of perfection “is a vast human tragedy which might have been averted if humans paid heed to their own knowledge of what more and

more technology might bring” (Rueckert & Bonadonna, 2003, p. 4). Humanity is the only answer to technological problems, and these texts give us the foreknowledge and chance to act on them.

I also argued that this film holds an ideology, a belief system of “data religion,” which helps humanity achieve perfection through the enactment of the PreCrime system, thus promoting the use of PTs. However, as we learned in Part Three, *MR* is not in favor of this belief system because it created a false social order and ruined people’s lives, causing them to bring down the PreCrime system. Humans are symbol-using and symbol-making animals, who use their symbols to help communicate with one another (Burke, 1966b). The PreCrime system functioned as a symbol-making process by communicating to the Department about when and where a future crime would occur. These previsions ultimately affected the character’s social stratification, privacy, and individual agency, which highlights dystopian themes that are often found in SF texts (Connors, 2017; Marks, 2005; Živić, 2014). Marrying stylistic features of SF films with technological and religious themes, the SF genre can prompt its audiences to consider the consequences of “worshipping” and trusting Dataism. When there are unintended consequences, we experience guilt in relation to these technological devices. The way to study how this guilt materialized in the film was through Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle. Applying the guilt-redemption cycle to scenes and themes in the film allowed for definitions and utility of concepts, such as *technological psychosis*, *religion*, *parenthood*, *free will*, *vision*, and *morality* to be looked at in a new light.

I argue that these concepts and themes relate to what Hyde (2010) terms as a “rhetoric of perfection” (p. xvi). Rhetorical situations where there is an exigence, or an imperfection that needs to be corrected, sounds a call for humans to naturally fix it. The terms I mentioned prior helped the character’s work through some dire circumstances, and this framing can help us make

sense of the choices played out in *MR*. As human beings, we naturally strive for perfection; it is the empirical heart of humanity's existence (Hyde, 2010). We saw the dream of perfection in *MR* operating through PTs and the PreCrime system to fight for justice, sustain Order, and "perfect" the lives of its citizens. But how far should we go when using these technologies? *MR* illustrated how perfection can come at a cost and how there was a moral obligation to dismantle the perfection-driven system to save humanity. The next chapter will stress this project's relevance, its implications surrounding the genre of dystopian SF and Dataism, as well as its heuristic potential for prospective scholarship.

## Chapter Four: Implications and Conclusion

For communication and surveillance scholars, Science Fiction (SF) is essential to study because it is self-reflective of society's fears and anxieties, informs us about specific parts of society and highlights data-gathering techniques (Hier & Greenberg, 2007). Most importantly, SF shows us how surveillance is now an inherent feature of human relationships and our social world (Marwick, 2012; Rose, 1999). SF and dystopian themes help visualize popular culture's cynical and negative evaluation of technology and its impact on humanity. As Burke (1973a) mentions,

Though I have read little science fiction, I'd incline to say that its fantasies (in being a response to the vast clutter of new instruments with which modern technology has surrounded us) endow the realm of *agency* (or means) with an importance that it never has had before as the locus of motives (p. 330, emphasis in original).

In other words, Burke (1973a) is saying that technologies are instruments used to achieve goals, helping to show humanity's motives, which shape the story in the genre of SF. SF emphasizes technologies as tools and how they operate, common to their scene. In SF stories, it is technology (agency) that shows the possibilities these tools hold. These technologies help create and prescribe social hierarchies, which Burke views as the "whole drama of social relations... [which] is that of a hierarchical order held together by norms" (Overington, 1977a, p. 144). Our new norms are intermingled with new technologies, where SF is used as a lens to show the relationships between humans and machines. The rise of technology and Dataism can be seen as a "socio-technical phenomenon," as it relates to the interaction between humans and their behavior with technological devices (boyd & Crawford, 2012, p. 662).

This socio-technical phenomenon has shifted the way the world operates, where technology and technology's data can be seen as a double-edged sword (Mosco, 2014). These tools can offer new insights into the world that we would not have had before, such as extending

and growing research of different disciplines, climate change, terrorism, depicting pandemics, and tracing new political or social trends (boyd & Crawford, 2012; Harari, 2017; van Dijck, 2014). On the other hand, Dataism and our predictive technologies (PTs) are viewed as a concerning manifestation of ‘Big Brother,’ where our civil liberties are diminishing due to invasions of our privacy via Big Tech and government agencies (boyd & Crawford, 2012; Lyon, 2014; Marwick, 2012; van Dijck, 2014). With all of this in mind, my investigation into *MR*, as an exemplar of SF, was motivated by my concerns for PTs, Dataism, and surveillance. Notably, the main argument facilitated by my thesis is that we find ourselves in moments of technological fallenness due to the “worship” of Dataism, and the genre of dystopian SF offers audiences a way to imaginatively face this tension, the guilt that materializes, and how people can redeem themselves.

Through this thesis, I argue that *MR* is an ideal example of dystopian SF, reflecting social and technological concerns post-9/11 by tapping into Bush’s public policies, such as the USA PATRIOT Act (2001) and the Bush Doctrine of Preemption (2002). The surveillance themes found within *MR* deliver influential cultural demonstrations via Bush’s domestic policies as well as speculative imaginings of future technological devices, culturally mirroring the real world in film. The Bush Doctrine of Preemption (2002) focused on engaging with countries that had not acted aggressively toward the U.S but could become aggressive or develop weapons of mass destruction. This foreign policy parallels *MR* precisely in the way data was used and interpreted. The Bush Administration’s original case to fight the War on Terror was because of the “evidence” they found concerning Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) (Huiskamp, 2004). Hussein’s WMD was a direct threat to the safety of America post-9/11, which immediately identifies Iraq as guilty and allows the U.S government to act on this preemptively

(Huiskamp, 2004). Similarly, in *MR*, the data was used to be an aggressor toward someone that *hadn't* committed a crime, which in this case was murder, and yet they are still seen as guilty and are arrested immediately. One takeaway from this analysis of *MR* is that without a system of checks and balances, surveillance information can be manipulated, resulting in catastrophic outcomes. The USA PATRIOT Act purposely eliminated the checks and balances that were previously put in place, which allowed the courts to ensure that specific surveillance measures and powers were not abused (Kearns, 2014). Now, we have seen the real-life results of not having checks and balances on preemptive surveillance measures, resulting in the War on Terror. This war resulted in 7,057 deaths of American soldiers (Number of Military Fatalities, 2021), which is more than double the lives lost on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Checks and balances are necessary with surveillance practices to truly protect each and every American citizens' life from the possible unintended consequences.

This movie was a way for the audience to visualize and imagine how these new public policies would materialize in a far-distant future. Particularly, it illustrated how we interact with one another, the built-in technologies amongst the public and private sphere, and the infringement of civil liberties in order to keep us safe. *MR* aspires to have a specific viewing experience, from a state of enthrallment for the futuristic PTs to an uncomfortable awareness of how smart technological devices promote “data religion” and Big Data surveillance. Further, the technologies in the film were originally used for justice, which ended up turning into technologies of control over society (Haggerty & Ericson, 1999b; Wall, 2010). The purpose of dystopian SF is to caution the viewers of particular societal ills and situations and ask themselves, “What if? What if we continue down the road we’re already on?” (Atwood, 2003, para. 7). In the case of *MR*, this film was warning us of its societal ills around technologies and

their control in governing humans while losing all forms of privacy. The illustrations of future technological devices and their power in *MR* leave the audience thinking, “How slippery is the slope” regarding the advancement of technologies? (Atwood, 2003, para. 7). By the end of the film, *MR* leaves the audience uncomfortable with the future world of technology by thinking, “What if?” which is precisely the goal of dystopian SF films (Millward, 2007).

As I conclude my thesis, I focus on the project’s broader implications and the unique contributions put forth for the discipline of rhetoric. This chapter is structured into three sections. The first section discusses the importance of SF texts and how they need to be considered for future scholarship. It is imperative to recognize the potential SF has and how it can be used as a lens to understand the world or add to existing perceptions of our world. The second section highlights the project’s implications surrounding PTs and Dataism as an extension of Burke’s philosophy of technology and guilt-redemption cycle. I hope this part of the thesis is valuable for future researchers who draw on Burke and use his methods. Finally, the third section shares the project’s relevance surrounding 9/11 scholarship and why it is important to discuss this research twenty years later.

### **The Importance of Science Fiction**

In this thesis, I argue that the genre of SF helps to understand the world we live in and provides commentary on our cultural values, experiences, assumptions, societal commitments, moralities, religion, and anxieties. Several subgenres fall under the umbrella of SF, and in my analysis, I chose to focus on dystopian fiction in combination with SF. I argue that dystopian SF stories are cautionary tales that warn us about humanity and some of our deepest fears, such as nuclear warfare, environmental catastrophes, an apocalypse, technological upheaval, and totalitarian or authoritarian governing (Booker & Thomas, 2009; Mirenayat & Soofastaei, 2015). A famous SF author that highlights common dystopian themes in relation to humanity is Philip



K. Dick. Dick's farsighted and predictive writings about technology and humanity are worthy of investigation because "he shows trends at the present time that will lead to future suffering and disorder" (Mirenayat & Soofastaei, 2015, p. 2). Dick constantly speaks to the relationship between technology and religion: two common themes found in most SF novels (Hale, 1997; McGrath, 2011). In addition, he also focuses on what it means to be divine and how that divinity materializes in the human world (Alessio, 2006; Hale, 1997). Dick's writings pose religious questions to his readers, such as, "What if God were to be equated with technology?" or "What if technology evolved so much that it became an impediment to God's realization in the human world?" (Hale, 1997, pp. 3-4). Because Dick's stories fascinate me with how he frames the relationship between machines, humanity, and religion, I was inspired to analyze Spielberg's film adaptation of his short story (1956), *Minority Report (MR)*. The combination of dystopian fiction with SF allowed the analysis to investigate important questions about the morality of humanity in relation to PTs, Dataism, Big Data surveillance, and religion.

I also argued that we have ended up with real-world technologies and surveillance practices resulting from SF representations. We must look at dystopian SF as artifacts whose primary goal is to raise our awareness about technologies, their possible abuse, and how the government handles these devices. Advances in such technologies have allowed the government to gather data, track, and profile people (Mallan, 2014; Wright, 2008). The government's data has the power to "reduce human experience to measurable, observable behavior" for their benefit to control and predict specific outcomes (Zuboff, 2019, p. 717). 9/11 allowed for a surveillance culture to operate and thrive, where surveillance becomes a new way of life for citizens (Lyon, 2017), similar to SF dystopian depictions (Newitz, 2011). Surveillance and its promises offer what Burke (1974) would call a pursuit of perfection by pushing the way surveillance is handled

to its ultimate end, despite the consequences. For Burke (1974), the goal is always to bring everything to its utmost completion, and this goal of perfection is demonstrated with technology and religion (Hyde, 2010). Surveillance and PTs help us understand religion, which is a common theme in the genre of SF (Kozlovic, 2001; Kreuziger, 1986). I agree with Lyon (2018), a surveillance scholar, when commenting about religion and surveillance, saying it is important to discuss the “biblical backdrop to modern understandings of surveillance” (p. 546). Surveillance and PTs omniscient powers are relatable to the all-knowing God.

By relating surveillance to God and its biblical implications, we can understand the effects and practices of surveillance. Big Brother surveillance tactics show us its omniscient powers, knowing everything about us and our behaviors due to the data we wittingly or unwittingly give, which is linked with PTs. Padden (2015) adds to the conversation of surveillance and religion, expressing, “God and the sense that His presence is at once unseen yet everywhere is a very powerful concept which has its own history as a means of social control” (p. 9). We have only updated this concept to describe surveillance practices today. By constantly being connected to the data flow through surveillance technologies, as illustrated in *MR*, shows how these technologies control our behaviors, determine who is morally good or evil, creates the hierarchical structure of its citizens, and blurs the lines between the private and public sphere. The characters are forced into a subordinate relationship with the Department of PreCrime and the city of D.C.’s surveillance technologies, representing “worship” to Dataism and limiting their own practices of free will.

This study deepens the understanding and significance of SF and the dystopian prism as well as its implications surrounding surveillance. Using SF as a lens to study surveillance and technology helps scholars trace and better understand how these devices affect our social

relations and the social ordering of our world (Lyon, 2003b). This observation invites further conversations and analysis of this genre because it has the potential to develop new theories and understandings of the world. Stories within fiction, particularly SF, are essential to study because they are “particularly good at showing the necessity of making choices, the psychological pressures on the individuals who face them, the moral dilemmas involved and the consequences of choice, [and] the political effects of reactions to those problems” (Whitebrook, 1996, p. 47). As previously mentioned in Chapter One, dystopian fiction must present the author’s anxieties and experiences of their contemporary world to help formulate and establish an alternate future where their anxieties come true, functioning as a warning for the audience (Sisk, 1997). *MR* depicted the fears of surveillance through technologies while also showing what it means to choose in a predicted world. It highlighted the moral dilemmas between determinism and free will and that it was free will that saved humanity. Determinism formed their governmental surveillance structures, but it was free will that dismantled this oppressive PreCrime system.

I firmly believe it is vital to study past, present, and upcoming dystopian SF films because we might find trends of surveillance and technologies that affect our social and political spheres (Marks, 2005). It can show where we have come from, what our current fears are and how they are represented in dystopic cinema, and how our fears transform over time in upcoming films. I drew from the past when analyzing *MR*, a film that is almost twenty years old, and I could relate to it more now than when it came out due to the advancements of technologies and surveillance practices. The fact that the world in *MR*, representing a future in 2054, resonates more now in 2021, shows that we are coming closer and closer to these dystopic imaginings. These imaginative projections undergo continual changes and are “deeply influenced by the socio-political, technological and ideological transformations of the time” (Catană, 2016, p. 167).

These stories help us make sense of our lives, and sometimes, it lets us reflect on the harsh and bleak realities that are sometimes challenging to face head-on (Schmidt, 2014). At the heart of dystopian SF films, the story is simply about humanity and the ones we love that motivate the characters toward their redemptive path (e.g., *Interstellar* (2014), *The Hunger Games* (2012), *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017), and *Vanilla Sky* (2001)) (Bat, 2014). As displayed in *MR*, it was the love and loss of Anderton's son that led him to work for the Department of PreCrime. The Precrime system and its undoing also led to a better life for Anderton, where he was able to be back with his wife, who is now pregnant, in a newly restored social order.

I believe we need dystopian SF now more than ever because it provides stories of perseverance, resilience, morality, and the meaning of human agency. These works are not solely about prediction, but they are also about prevention (Cole & Singer, 2020), which is why scholars need to study further and investigate this genre. Specifically, the genre of SF and dystopian fiction has become increasingly popular over the last ten years (Schnelbach et al., 2019; Queenan, 2015). As of late, dystopian SF has lost its excitement for editors due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Deahl, 2020). Editors have mentioned that the world in 2020 is bleak and that dystopian SF resembles gloomy narratives, thus losing its luster (Deahl, 2020). Even the *Black Mirror* creator, Charlie Brooker, stated, "At the moment, I don't know what stomach there would be for stories about societies falling apart, so I'm not working away on any of those ['Black Mirror episodes']" (as cited in Sharf, 2020, para. 2). Even dystopian SF authors and creators are shocked by the events of 2020, mentioning:

If 2020 were a movie, you just wouldn't believe it. Because it doesn't just seem to be one apocalypse: It's not just the pandemic, it's also government dysfunction and it's murder hornets... It seems like we have a lot of things piling up (Westerfeld, 2020, as cited in Sacks, 2020, paras. 17-18).

I agree with Westerfeld's opinion about the events of 2020 because it feels like we are in a real-world version of a dystopia, but I do not think we should dismiss this genre due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I believe that dystopian SF is even more prescient because of what we have experienced during the pandemic. It can be seen as a way to better understand the world and our experiences within it. Dystopian SF can help us process the present. In fact, the film *Contagion* (2011) was the most downloaded film in February of 2020 (Deahl, 2020), which was before the global lockdowns in March of 2020. People were trying to understand how everyday citizens function amid a global pandemic.

COVID-19 has forever changed our relationship with dystopian SF texts. We live in a world where we must wear masks to be a part of society while standing 6-feet apart for social distancing not to spread the virus of COVID-19. The beginning of the pandemic offered empty shelves at the supermarket, students not going to school, and people not being able to tell what day of the week it was due to the mandated quarantine lockdowns. This is our real-world version of a dystopia, which has led to people reading and watching dystopian SF movies (Schwetz, 2020). Another popular novel during the beginning of the pandemic was Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978) (Schwetz, 2020), which was later turned into a television miniseries (1994). Ironically, the miniseries, had a new adaptation and a new cast, which was released in 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The nexus of the story focuses on a pandemic where there is a weaponized strain of influenza that threatens humanity as we know it (Paquette, 2014). I believe that dystopian SF, specifically about pandemics, is not necessarily a way to look into the future but a way to mirror and understand our reality in real-time. Dystopian SF reflects social anxieties and how these anxieties affect our culture (Laltha, 2017), where many of these fears deal with surveillance, technology, and the effects that stem from them. Not only do we engage with

dystopian SF texts to understand these anxieties, but we are also seeing these anxieties materialize around us.

We are experiencing a new social class during this pandemic: the vaccinated and unvaccinated class. The vaccination and its promotion of safety for our health are similar to 9/11's framing of safety above all. As recently reported, "A leisure class of the newly vaccinated will mean that hotels, catering services and other businesses will be scrambling to employ bartenders, servers and other staff who are also vaccinated, the better to ensure safety of all" (Bromwich, 2021, para. 12). We also have another way of identifying this new social class aesthetically, similar to stories like *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017) or in the novel *Brave New World* (1932). This new social vaccinated class wears what is known as the Immunaband, storing vaccine records on it (McAdam, 2021). The bracelet includes a scannable QR code with the individual's name and brand of vaccination they received (e.g., Moderna, Pfizer, and Johnson & Johnson) (McAdam, 2021). Harari (2017), the theorist of "data religion" via Dataism, commented on this topic of health and data, saying, "The big battle in this regard in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be between privacy and health. And health will win" (p. 40). His prediction came true, and we are giving up more civil liberties, all in the name of safety regarding our health. This is only another form of surveillance by tracing and tracking where we are and sharing our personal health information, giving into "data religion." We are also implementing "vaccinated" and "unvaccinated sections" at sports arenas (e.g., indoor and outdoor) as well as religious and faith-based organizations, changing the dynamic of how people can pray and worship (King 5 Staff, 2021). The dystopian narrative of 2020 and 2021 is only deepening and getting stronger.

SF is crucial for understanding this last year (2020), and its stories can also help us understand what the future will bring and ways of coping with particular situations. SF dystopian

texts do not only have to revolve around pandemic fiction to understand the social implications of what we are experiencing. Rather, we can look at dystopian SF texts and films that focus on social classes because we have a new one emerging, such as the “vaccinated social class” who wear Immunabands. We can also investigate dystopian SF texts that focus on surveillance and how data collection helps give “data religion” the power to continue knowing everything about us and predicting our behaviors. Many themes within dystopian SF are the things we are experiencing, paralleling some aspects of *MR* and other films. The changes we have experienced in our world, often feeling dystopian in nature, have now become the new normal (Murphy, 2020). Thus, I maintain that dystopian SF is more important now than ever for scholars and everyday lay people to study and watch. We need more conversations regarding these texts and their implications across several disciplines. The beauty of dystopian fiction and SF is that it is not limited to one area of study or scholarly discipline; it is studied across various disciplines and has established its own academic discipline (e.g., Science Fiction Studies) (Menadue & Cheer, 2017).

### **Kenneth Burke and Technology**

One of my research goals was to examine how SF critiques the new “worship” of Dataism by demonstrating that all PTs are fallible. I also wanted to study the effects technological fallibility has created for people. To successfully do this, I used Kenneth Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle (Burke, 1969b, 1970) and his philosophy of technology to examine *MR*. My unique contribution to this discussion of this method is adding Harari’s notion of Dataism to extend Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle when examining technology and religion. Burke saw hierarchies, or the social order, as constantly present and engaged within human dramas (Samra, 1998). In these social dramas, Burke views guilt as a motivating factor, and this guilt must be purged in order to achieve redemption. Burke (1984b) suggests that order and redemption are

two of the greatest moments people can experience throughout their lives and in human history. Societies are continuously enacting dramas because no matter what, there will always be hierarchies in people's lives, created by imperfect humans, that experience guilt or rejection of some sort. As humans, we naturally want to relieve ourselves from guilt to restore the social order to make ourselves feel better (Scott & Brock, 1972). Every social institution and society has a social hierarchy, whether it be family, relationships, schools, political systems, clubs, churches, military, and even our human needs can be represented as a hierarchy (e.g., Maslow's hierarchy of needs). The guilt-redemption cycle has much flexibility in its application, allowing for scholars to study an array of various artifacts. In this thesis, I added to the literature where Burke's guilt-redemption cycle is applied within the media frame, specifically the genre of SF.

There are two other instances where scholars have used the guilt-redemption cycle to study SF texts. First, Said et al. (2021) investigated Charlie Kaufman's screenplay *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) (hereafter, *ESOTSM*). This study relates to my analysis because it utilizes Burke's guilt-redemption cycle while also analyzing how technology affects the character's experience of guilt and redemption. Scholars found that the technology in this film helps carry the narrative and is a vehicle for the guilt-redemption cycle, similar to my analysis of *MR*. They also discovered the main character's experience of guilt was due to a loved one, motivating Joel, the protagonist, to experience the guilt-redemption cycle. *MR* shares similarities regarding Anderton and why he experiences guilt, which was due to a loved one: his son. The loss of someone close to the protagonists in both *MR* and *ESOTSM* illustrates how they experience guilt and how they both rely on technology to absolve their guilt, igniting a journey of the guilt-redemption cycle.



In *EOSTSM*, *Lacuna* Inc.'s technology erases the protagonist's memories of his ex-girlfriend, Clementine, which continually imposes a sense of guilt and disorder for Joel (Said et al., 2021). Joel is undergoing this procedure because he found out Clementine erased him from her memories following their breakup. While Joel tries to erase his memories of Clementine through technological means, Anderton depends on technology to keep his son's memory alive through holographic images that play out specific memories of his son. Both Joel and Anderton turn to technology in different ways but for the same reason (i.e., guilt). As Joel's memories progressively disappear throughout the film, he suddenly begins to uncover the memories' earlier meanings, thus not wanting to fully go through with the procedure (Said et al., 2021). The film proves that people must remember that the darkness they face helps individuals recognize and experience the light. We need one to realize the other. Without these memories for Joel, it all became a black void, not allowing him to remember or feel a specific point in time in his life. As for Anderton, he had to experience the darkness of his eye procedure to experience the light, his new vision, and to achieve redemption. Both films show the paradoxical nature of technology, its effects, and how it plays a significant role in Burke's guilt-redemption cycle.

The reliance on technology and the trust they have for these devices to try and absolve both characters', Anderton and Joel's, guilt is telling. It illustrates how the future world relies on technology to solve their problems when in reality, technology is the very thing that creates the problems these protagonists experience. For Anderton, he was blind to the flaws within the PreCrime system because he wholeheartedly believed in it. He believed in it so much that he felt that its existence would have undoubtedly saved Sean's life. However, the PreCrime system led Anderton to encounter several problems, specifically by being identified as guilty within the social hierarchy. For Joel, this technology ironically helps him to absolve his guilt by erasing *all*

memories of Clementine (Said et al., 2021). Nevertheless, after the memory-erasing procedure, he *accidentally* decides to (re)start the relationship with his ex, which both have a history with one another, yet neither remembers (Said et al., 2021).

*EOSTSM* shows how this cycle repeatedly continues, erasing memories while making the same decisions that lead to the erasure of those memories. The analysis shows that technology is fallible and cannot pick up abstract human emotions (Said et al., 2021). If this technology, which was designed to wipe away specific memories successfully, worked the way it was supposed to, then Joel would not make the same choices he previously did when meeting Clementine. This study shows humanity must solve its own problems and that technology is not always the answer. *ESOTSM* demonstrates how when we rely on technology too much for our problems, there are always unintended consequences (Burke, 1976). In this case, the protagonist starts his guilt-redemption cycle all over again by restarting his relationship with Clementine. This cycle is continuous and will never stop (Burke, 1970).

Additionally, Williams (1984) employed the guilt-redemption cycle when he analyzed Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) (hereafter, *2001*). Williams' (1984) article and findings align more with my research interests when studying SF as it relates to technology and religion. Not only is the guilt-redemption cycle a secular version of the Christian story in which humans seek salvation through the atoning sacrifice of Christ (Burke, 1970), but Williams took the religious aspects of this method to analyze *2001* (1968) and its relationship with technology. Specifically, Williams' findings suggest that when perfection is established, represented as space travel and the super-computer HAL, perfection immediately sparks the paradoxical nature of itself. As Williams (1984) states, "Once the order has been established in the 'Dawn of Man,' the 'Fall of Man' is inevitable" (p. 321). As mentioned in Chapter 2, humans and their quest for

perfection are evident in the technological tools we create (Bernstein, 1968). In this film, the super-computer HAL was representative of technological perfection (Williams, 1984). HAL's "perfection" led him to believe that humanity causes errors; therefore, he goes rogue, believes to be holy, and takes on the role of God (Williams, 1984). God's role and HAL's assumption of being God-like lead to his fallenness (Williams, 1984). HAL ends up murdering an astronaut as well as three crew members in hibernation and attempts to murder another astronaut named Dave in order to take over the spaceship (Williams, 1984).

The victimage acts in this text resemble the final sacrifice in *MR*. Dave murders HAL, who represents the good and evil of humanity, and is "the suitable victim for this sacrifice because he is the perfect villain" (Williams, 1984, p. 320). Sacrificing him as the scapegoat will help to redeem all of humanity (Williams, 1984). This victimage act parallels Burgess in *MR*. Burgess felt that he had the power to do what was needed due to technological powers, thus creating disorder rather than establishing order. Burgess was the perfect villain due to his technological practices. The destruction of HAL added an element of mortification for Dave (Williams, 1984). Because Dave killed HAL, this results in him not being able to communicate with people on earth (Williams, 1984). Therefore, Dave sacrifices himself to achieve the destruction of the super-computer, "thereby cutting off any dependence he may have on other persons or machines" to achieve redemption (Williams, 1984, p. 320). Dave's victimage acts resemble Burgess because he sacrifices himself (e.g., mortification) with a sacrifice for all humanity (e.g., universal scapegoating).

Ultimately, Williams (1984) findings suggest this: "If we impose the rigid structure of our past upon the future, if we allow our tools and machines to dominate our lives, if we proudly pretend that our intellect is superior to deity, we will fail" (p. 321). Williams' conclusions imply

that technology cannot help us establish order because there are unintended consequences, making it imperfect. Humanity can only help itself. Overall, as Williams (1984) claims, “*2001* is essentially a ‘religious’ film, a cinematic warning against our dependence upon the machines and tools we have created” (p. 311). I argue that *MR* is an updated religious drama that deals with the same issues between machines and humanity as seen in *2001* (1968).

An additional contribution of this thesis is the analysis of Dataism as an extension of Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle and his philosophy of technology. The guilt-redemption cycle teaches us something new about Dataism. As previously stated in Chapter 2, the guilt-redemption cycle is a secular version of a religious story (Burke, 1970). In this genre, religious allegories, themes, and symbolism take place and question the divine and its role (Hale, 1997). Dataism combines the importance and use of technology and data, representing a new form of perfection, whose perfection is now seen as divine and all-knowing to humans. Thus, Dataism is becoming a new ideology due to PTs collecting data from their users and allowing websites and Big Tech to predict the users’ behavior (Harari, 2015). I believe that Dataism could be a natural extension and update to Burke’s philosophy of technology. This adaptation can help explain how humans are even more consumed with the idea of perfection and technological progress as time goes on. It also shows the shift of our ideologies, transferring from Western religion to “data religion.” Dataism can also highlight the unintended consequences it presents when it comes to predictions and offers a way to correct such problems symbolically.

When dealing with technological issues in SF films, I found Dataism to be fruitful as a part of my method when analyzing *MR*. My analysis allowed me to dive into the scientific paradigm of Dataism regarding surveillance as well as “data religion.” For instance, Dataism and the scientific paradigm, as introduced and explained in Chapter One, analyze quantified data to

allow for real-time tracking and predictive analysis (van Dijck, 2014). The iris scanner in *MR* was the vehicle to track citizens and figure out personal attributes when it came to their advertising techniques. The goal for Dataism is to “optimize personal platform services” (van Dijck, 2014, p. 200), as illustrated throughout the film with the iris scanners by giving access to certain buildings, going onto the subway, advertisements when walking through the city, and shopping at stores, such as Gap.

Dataism also allowed me to analyze “data religion” within the film, where the notion of religion is commonly seen in dystopian SF (McGrath, 2011). “Data religion” also aligns with Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle due to its religious allegorical nature, illustrating the sins and punishments we experience with technology. Burke’s cycle helps manage the unintended consequences of technology and provides a way to absolve technological guilt to achieve restoration. “Data religion,” proposed by Harari (2015), focuses on data as being the ultimate value in life. For “religious” Dataism to work, everyone and everything must be connected to PTs and platforms to provide data, which is evident within *MR*. The second commandment of “data religion” “is to link everything to the system, including heretics who don’t want to be plugged in” (Harari, 2015, p. 387). We see this in the film with the iris identity chip as a way to track people throughout the city. The cars are autonomous and operate through an automated highway system, whose control can be interfered with by the government if someone is guilty of a future crime. The newspapers update in real-time when there is breaking news or a fugitive on the loose. The homes are automated by voice recognition to turn on lights and simple tasks in the home. The world of *MR* practices “data religion’s” second commandment daily, relying on data and PTs to function in everyday life, whether they like it or not (Harari, 2015). Harari (2015) claims “data religion” as being faith-based around algorithms and that these algorithms will learn

your behavior, thus caring for you. We can see this “data religion” as being faith-based around the PreCrime system and the Pre-Cogs. The Pre-Cogs were looked at as holy deities whose job was to serve, predict, and protect society. This data that the Pre-Cogs accumulated determined the morality of humans by deciding whether someone was guilty or innocent when predicting crimes, despite there never actually being a crime committed. The Pre-Cogs are all-knowing, determining guilt just by people’s thoughts of crime and not actual wrongdoing. “Data religion” is what made people feel safe while also constructing the social hierarchy.

Dataism lends to the guilt-redemption cycle by creating social order and is paradoxical in nature by bringing about knowledge and convenience while also creating dangers and inconvenience. Technological tools create unintended consequences resulting in guilt within the social order. Dataism can play a part in how someone rids themselves of their guilt through victimage. Data can be manipulated, yet despite this manipulation, some people understand data to be the absolute truth, affecting the path of redemption. Nevertheless, Dataism and PTs are not absolute; they are fallible. When humans understand technology as being fallible, they know not to depend on these devices when dealing with morality and humanity. Depending on how technology is handled and investigated in dystopian SF texts, victimage acts and paths of redemption vary. Despite the variation of victimage and redemption, these acts will always restore and balance the social order (Burke, 1970). I employed the notion of Dataism through both of its understandings via religion and the scientific paradigm. Employing Dataism to extend Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle helped to better understand the “worship” of data in SF and how the value of data is a form of power determining individuals’ thoughts and actions. PTs and Dataism presented in SF films help critics discover and characterize agencies of control as well as reasons why the characters have such “a reverence” for data.

## **Contributions to 9/11 Scholarship**

Surveillance has created profound changes for individuals and society globally, both in the public and private sphere (Lyon, 2014). People have expressed their interest in surveillance to fully understand its tactics and implications through SF novels, academic writings, popular articles, and Hollywood films. Several key issues have been raised regarding our social and political realities when studying the practices of surveillance. Some of the key issues that have been articulated in surveillance scholarship are topics including structures of surveillance (Bauman, 1989), how surveillance manifests and operates through the police (Marx, 1988), how surveillance systems are related to Western religion (Padden, 2015), and how surveillance affects our society, social relationships, and everyday interactions (Lyon, 2001; Staples, 1998). The concept of surveillance has manifested and changed in so many ways over the last fifty years, resulting in a surveillance culture (Lyon, 2017).

Surveillance began in the 1970s after computers were introduced, allowing for the spread and proliferation of surveillance to be available and practiced (Lyon, 2004). Surveillance then became globalized in the 1980s due to developments in technology and the mobilization of citizens (Lyon, 2004). Marx (1988) discusses the covert practices that came into play regarding the police and surveillance technologies, including “infrared cameras, to obtain intelligence on subjects without corresponding increases in legal or procedural protections” (Monahan, 2011, p. 495). Closed-circuit television (CCTV) technology, which is known as video surveillance through the use of video cameras, was also introduced in the 1980s by local authorities (Lyon, 2004). By the 1990s, surveillance advanced tremendously due to computers becoming more accessible and introducing the World Wide Web (Hier & Greenberg, 2007). During the 1990s, several countries tried to implement national identification cards that implemented small chips in

the card (Hier & Greenber, 2007). The goal was to link specific information embedded in the card, such as our fingerprints, retinal patterns, and facial images (Hier & Greenberg, 2007).

There was also a “development and refinement of facial recognition software that links biometric readings with images in remote databases” (Hier & Greenberg, 2007, p. 7). Several surveillance technologies were emerging, and data mining became more commonplace due to the use of home computers (Gandy, 2003). At this point, we were beginning to tap into “data religion” but did not know it yet. However, the cultural significance of surveillance was brought about following the September 11th, 2001 (9/11) attacks. Society saw the pervasiveness of surveillance after the events of 9/11 through the “intensification, automation, integration, and globalization of surveillance systems” (Hier & Greenberg, 2007, p. 6). Lyon (2003) argues that the surveillance technologies and security provisions after 9/11 were like putting a band-aid over a gushing wound. In other words, the government created hasty solutions to long-term problems without thinking about the long-standing effects and social consequences of these decisions. These decisions gave way for Dataism to operate fully, connecting different communication channels through data gathering techniques (Department of Justice, n.d.b), thus creating a more extensive data flow than we had before. 9/11 sparked the “worship” and enhanced trust of data because the government felt it ensured citizens’ safety by predicting future crimes.

The speed of surveillance tactics and technological “solutions” have only continued and deepened since 9/11, creating a surveillance society whose communication technologies help maintain the social order. Specifically, these technologies help identify and authenticate who a person is through iris, finger, and retinal scans (Hier & Greenberg, 2007) as well as voice recognition (e.g., Siri for Apple and Alexa for Amazon). These mechanisms also trace us through GPS and collect data from the websites and apps we visit (Zuboff, 2019), lending to modern



surveillance tactics. Surveillance used to be centralized by the government. It was achieved at a distance (Lyon, 2003a), as illustrated in Orwell's SF novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948). Now, surveillance is constantly being integrated into our lives, and it has become the new normal, as exemplified in *MR* (2002). This study contributes and enhances the scholarly conversations surrounding 9/11 scholarship and surveillance studies by looking at how PTs and Dataism operate in the dystopian SF film, *MR*. PTs and Dataism are seen as other surveillance practices and tactics by gathering and tracing data through technological devices. The data collected in the film helped predict human behaviors, specifically whether someone would commit a murder. PTs advanced "data religion," giving power to the department of PreCrime by relying on surveillance to judge people and their morality. As some surveillance scholars study data and surveillance objectively, I find it important to study surveillance in the speculative and subjective realms regarding dystopian SF. This study also lends to post-9/11 policies, such as the Bush Doctrine of Preemption and the USA PATRIOT Act, and how they operate in fiction.

To understand surveillance and its social implication, I analyzed the film adaptation of *MR* (2002), which originally was a short story written in 1956 by Philip K. Dick. Despite the length of time between when the story was originally written and the film's release, this story still reverberates in a post-9/11 world, encouraging thought about "data religion," PTs, and Big Data Surveillance. The benefit of dystopian SF is that stories can resonate with us more now than when films or books originally came out. By studying and analyzing older texts of the genre of dystopian SF, we can view the social anxieties of technology and technological practices reflective of the time of their release. Sometimes past dystopian SF anxieties come to align with our social realities today (Ames, 2013), providing new implications due to the time in history. Goodnow (2011) states that this genre holds much significance because it "mirrors a world beset

by some of the most frightening problems in recent memory, from climate change to terrorism and the shredding of privacy and free will,” causing this genre to be “the zeitgeist of the times” (para. 4). Therefore, we must continue viewing older dystopian SF films to discover new findings regarding technology and surveillance. Dystopian SF operates as a lens to examine what it means to be human with disruptions and different factors of surveillance and technologies. *MR* visualized what the world of 2054 would be like with advanced technologies operating to increase surveillance and safety while also optimizing personal consumerism experiences. As my analysis shows, we are already experiencing a good amount of surveillance and technological conditions as well as “data religion” depicted in *MR*, making this film timely. During the film’s release, we were slowly starting to encounter some of these tactics. This only strengthens my argument about why we need to study past dystopian SF texts to see if the world has come to reflect the societies depicted within.

A surprising amount of the technologies and conditions depicted in *MR* exist today, with some lending to the operation of Dataism to reach the goal of perfection (Burke, 1966b). Specifically, we experience personalized ads, home automation (e.g., Amazon Echo and Google Home), facial and optical recognition, gesture-based computing (e.g., multi-touch interfaces, such as an iPad), predictive policing, autonomous cars, sick sticks (i.e., a system which emits pulses of ultra-bright light, resulting in temporary blindness and nausea - used by the Department of Homeland Security), virtual reality, and 3D technology (Arthur, 2010; Fairs, 2015; Loughrey, 2017). The film focuses on government data, but I believe there is a blurring of corporate and government data mining due to the technologies and conditions that parallel the film. *MR* lends to post-9/11 surveillance research because multiple types of surveillance take place simultaneously: police surveillance (Bloss, 2007), government surveillance (Dandeker, 1990),

digital surveillance (Graham & Wood, 2003), welfare surveillance (Gilliom, 2001), simulation surveillance (Bogard, 1996), urban surveillance (Coleman, 2005), and sousveillance (Mann et al., 2003). Mann et al. (2003) explain sousveillance by acknowledging practices that people purposely employ to “resist surveillance through non-compliance and interference ‘moves’ that block, distort, mask, refuse, and counter-surveil the collection of information” (p. 333). We saw this when Anderton had his eye transplant. We also witnessed this when Anderton used Dr. Eddie’s drug injection, a temporary paralytic enzyme that one injects under their chin, causing a painful disguise that lasts thirty minutes. He did this so the surveillance state could not recognize him as he was on his way to confront Agatha.

Another real-world implication of sousveillance is that technology can be used in resistant ways. Specifically, an example of sousveillance recently practiced is people filming police officers during arrests, showing how surveillance can be used to critique power. These videos have captured terrible instances where people have lost their lives (e.g., George Floyd), and in this case, the surveillance video captured helped identify the guilty and bring justice (Nevett, 2020). We saw this in *MR* when Anderton confronted Burgess with Agatha’s Pre-Cog “echo,” where Anderton had all the data to show the true-crime Burgess committed, helping to bring down the Department of PreCrime. An even more recent example of sousveillance was the real-life assault on American Democracy, which was the January 6<sup>th</sup> Capitol Riot, that was caught on camera by witnesses. It has been said that Big Tech (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and Google) could be somewhat responsible for the materialization of what happened on Capitol Hill due to the perpetuation of algorithmic antagonism seen on media platforms regarding the 2020 election (Swartz, 2021). However, the practices of sousveillance by eyewitnesses during the insurrection helped the FBI identify the perpetrators. Recent news revealed that the investigation

largely relied on facial recognition to pinpoint people as well as cross-referencing this information with social media (Green, 2021). One unintended consequence of these surveillance measures is that these technological practices “could impede protesters exercising their first amendment rights” (Green, 2021, para. 1). We are in a new territory of dealing with public policies regarding Big Tech and the government. Since January 6th, Big Tech companies have evaded any real accountability because of Section 230 of the Communications Act (Morrison, 2021; Swartz, 2021). As of now, the Communication Decency Act “spares social-media sites from being held liable for the content posted by their users” (Swartz, 2021, para. 6). Thankfully, the abortive insurrection has shed light on the influence of Big Tech and “the importance of taking on tech reform” (McNamee, 2021, as cited in Swartz, 2021, para. 12). These platforms, whose biased algorithms present problems of scale, have created hostile, pathological behaviors that have slowly corroded our civic culture of American democracy over time and the way we collect data and view information.

*MR* is a part of a genre that speculates about our future and the consequences of that future. Now, almost twenty years since the film’s release, these are the issues we are facing with surveillance and data (e.g., police brutality and the Capitol Riot caught on camera). As time goes on, new surveillance practices emerge, and ways of talking about these practices continue to change, with terms such as “Dataism,” “Big Data,” “Dragnet,” and “Dataveillance” (Levin, 2002; Lyon, 2014). These terms and concepts help to explain surveillance practices that might not have existed before or when the movie originally came out. For that reason, we should continue to study *MR* and other dystopian SF texts that feature surveillance because it adds to the public discussion of surveillance while offering new perspectives.

I view this film as a warning about complacency regarding government and corporation surveillance through technologies. When we are complacent to surveillance and technologies, it has real effects on people and the way we operate in the world. We have seen our civil liberties, such as privacy, be taken away (Huddy et al., 2011). Dataism is obstructing and threatening the notion of free will (Harari 2015, 2016b). We experience this obstruction of free will daily by constantly being connected to PTs, who surveil our every move, which algorithmically suggests what we should buy, when we should buy it, constantly notifying us with our apps and when to check those notifications (Harari, 2016b). We are falling into and being controlled by “the invisible hand of the data flow,” which creates minor and big-picture concerns (Harari, 2016b, para. 4). Lyon (2003) comments on the more significant concerns, stating, “Surveillance is becoming a means of placing people in new, flexible, social classes” (p. 145), affecting our freedom and choices we make. If we continue to be complacent, we will live in a world analogous to *MR*, but it will not be in 2054; it will be much sooner. This is why 9/11 scholarship and post-9/11 U.S. policies are essential to study, 20 years later, in combination with dystopian SF texts. The dystopian SF genre has a long-established concern for surveillance and its effects, touching upon topics of free will, privacy, identity, freedom, and hierarchies (Livingston, 1971; Lyon, 2003a; Marks, 2005; Student, 2016). Future scholars should continue to study dystopian SF texts to identify social warnings, identify the operation of surveillance systems, and identify moral implications in connection with technology and religion. Future contributions will help us see the direction we are taking with surveillance and technologies, allowing us to prevent specific dystopic outcomes.

To conclude, I argued that the importance of technologies and surveillance practices grew due to the U.S government public policies post-9/11, including the USA PATRIOT Act (2001),

Bush's Doctrine of Preemption (2002), as well as a new federal executive department known as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) (2002). These policies, a governmental agency, and technologies play an important role in how society operates, reflecting our social and cultural values. The events of post-9/11 and governmental policies played a significant role in post-9/11 SF films. Even though *MR* started production in 1999, the film was timely because it was able to illustrate Bush's forward-looking policies while also contributing to our understanding of how humanity always seeks perfection, how PTs and Dataism result in unintended consequences, and how to overcome the consequences of fallible predictive technological devices morally. *MR* also shed light on the growing "religion" of Dataism, reflecting some of its practices that are employed today. Finally, my thesis emphasizes how the analysis of a rhetorically constructed human drama in the genre of dystopian SF is a fruitful tool for better understanding the world following 9/11 and cultures of control.

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## Curriculum Vitae

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## Education

- M.A. (2021)**            Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
**Thesis:** Rotten with Prediction  
**Advisor:** Dr. Natalierose Pennington  
**Co-Chair:** Dr. Rebecca Rice
- B.A. (2018)**            Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
Marketing (Minor)

## Academic Appointments

- University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Department of Communication Studies (2018 – 2021)**  
*Instructor* (Summer 2019) – Communication 101: Oral Communication  
*Teaching Assistant* (Summer 2019) – Communication 409: The Rhetorical Tradition  
*Teaching Assistant* (2018-2020) – Communication 101: Oral Communication  
*Part-Time Instructor* (2021-2021) – Communication 101: Oral Communication

## Scholarship

### Publications—Book Chapters

#### In Press Book Chapters

- Pennington, N., Hicks, S. (in press). Social media. In G. A. Borchard (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of journalism* (volumes 1, 2, & 3). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Pennington, N., Hicks, S. (in press). Facebook. In G. A. Borchard (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of journalism* (volumes 1, 2, & 3). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

## **Conference Presentations** (accepted and presented)

**Hicks, S.R.** (2019, November). The rhetorical fantasy of algorithms. National Communication Association Convention, Baltimore, MD.

## **Other Relevant Research Experience**

**Research Assistant**, with Dr. Natalierose Pennington, Department of Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Spring 2020).

**Graduate College Research Certification.** A year-long professional development program that provides graduate students with the skills and knowledge necessary to initiate, conduct, and successfully conclude research projects. Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Fall 2019 – Spring 2020).

**Research Assistant**, with Dr. Natalierose Pennington, Department of Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Fall 2019).

**Research Assistant**, with Dr. Natalierose Pennington, Department of Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Spring 2019).

## **Teaching**

### **Past Teaching**

#### **Undergraduate Seminars**

100 level Public Speaking, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

#### **Undergraduate Seminars**

400 level The Rhetorical Tradition (TA), University of Nevada, Las Vegas

#### **Undergraduate Student Advising**

**Academic Mentor.** 10 students who major in Communication Studies, Journalism, Hospitality, and Marketing, assigned to meet with at a minimum of twice a semester for the Grad Rebel Advantage Program. The goal is to mentor undergraduate students to continue their education and apply for graduate school. Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. (Fall 2019 – Spring 2020).

#### **Other Teaching Experience**

**COM 101 Curriculum Development Committee.** Served on the development committee for an online and hybrid 100-level introduction to oral communication/public speaking for students in Communication Studies. Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (2018-2020).

**Graduate College Teaching Certification.** A year-long professional development program that provides graduate students with the skills and knowledge to teach successfully in a post secondary classroom.

### **Service**

#### **To the Department**

**Oral Communication: Speech Contest Judge.** Served as a judge for the undergraduate speech contest. University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Fall 2018, Spring 2019).

**Curriculum Committee Member.** Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Fall 2018 - Spring 2020).

#### **To the University**

**Rebel Grad Slam.** Presented at the Rebel Grad Slam 3-Minute Thesis Competition to showcase my research and scholarship to an audience and panel of judges. Graduate College, University of Nevada, Las Vegas (Fall 2019).

#### **To the Discipline**

**Reviewer.** Human Communication and Technology Division, NCA Conference (2020--).

### **Organizational Memberships**

National Communication Association (NCA) (2018--)