

## **Workings of Cyborg: Bridging Humans and Machines in *The Matrix***

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### **Abstract**

Machines are human-made objects and subservient to humans. However, the simulated world dominated by cyborgs has led the humanity to postmodern fluidity. The cyborg, an artificially intelligent machine works with extra super power either inspired by divinity or satanic impulse. This article studies how *The Matrix* (1999), a science fiction film, blurs the distinction between human beings and simulated reality. The Wachowskis, the writers and directors, bring fusions between humans and the machines. The film unfolds the dynamics of human–machine interface in which humans ultimately remain subservient to machines. The study interprets the film from the postmodernist perspective concentrating on the ideas of Fredrick Nietzsche, Jean Francois Lyotard and Davis Ashley, who characterize postmodernism as indeterminacy, confusion and absurdity. It reflects on the question whether machines are doing good to humanity. It analyzes the movie from the lens of cinema as a culture industry. Its finding suggests humanity is trapped in a complex chain of simulated reality. The study adds insight on how Cyborgs have blended the material with virtual reality.

*Keywords:* artificially intelligent machine, cyborg, simulated reality, technological society

### **Introduction**

The cinema industry has recently begun to introduce cyborgs that assist human beings and are endowed with an ability to think in their own ways. They interestingly get power by solar system, batteries or even from bio electric chargers plucked on human heads. They can, by their actions, influence the humans who cannot distinguish whether they are living in the real world or the virtual reality. Cyborgs seem to have enslaved the humans in the matrix, from where they are unlikely to be free. The technological advancement has taken human beings to an indecisive, uncertain and absurd post- modern position. But the cyborgs have also interestingly

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blurred the matter- physical phenomena and the mind. It is hard to know whether this blurring of the mind and matter is good or ominous. The cinema industry, now, has double responsibilities. On the one hand, it has to present itself as the deliverer of art and aesthetics and on the other, it cannot be indifferent towards its global industrial economics. The film producers are forced to address the demand of time and the contemporary culture by introducing high technology in their products. The high- tech machines have influenced the film industry.

*The Matrix* deals with how people are making use of machines in the everyday life affairs. It depicts future in which humanity is both enchanted and struggling to free itself from these thinking machines and simulated reality. The film approaches to action scenes influenced by the Japanese animation and the martial arts film of Hong Kong action cinema. This study makes an attempt to find the answer of the question like whether human attachments with the Artificially Intelligent Machines have led humanity to a better world than the one we are presently living or to a complex postmodern maze from where we can never come out. It analyses these aspects using the idea of postmodernist critics and the critics of culture industry. It focuses on how the film *The Matrix* has bridged the art, culture and technology to make it quite successful one in the history of film industry.

*The Matrix* has received a due attention from different critics and scholars. Here, this paper picks up some critics who have given their thoughts on this movie and some other criticisms on the cyborgs relevant to this project. It seeks to find the gap that these criticisms have not yet addressed and thereby takes a point of departure from them.

The Hollywood and Bollywood Cinema industries have exploited the modern advancement of science and technology to satisfy the viewers with their products. They have introduced the Artificially Intelligent Machines (AI Machines) as strategy in the action films to provide heightened effects on audiences. Karki (2015) finds that the characters in the Hollywood and Bollywood expose their rigorous body movements revising the Hongkong martial arts technique. Talking about the cinematic hero, Karki explains, “In the modern world of informatics, cyber hero combines genetically-engineered body and the artificial intelligence to serve the human race; he further adds: the popular Hollywood and the Bollywood action heroes amalgamate the body and the technology to maintain order in the society” (The Bollywood, p. 67).

These lines denote the cyborg phenomena of a combination of half man and machine. The cyborg bridges bodies with souls. It has either a divine or an evil influence on it. The divine influence inspires it to work for the welfare of humanity

whereas the opposite one to the destruction. Here, Karki assumes that the cyber hero is synonymous to social order and can serve humanity. He takes genetically engineered image in a positive light. The film industry utilizes rather both possibilities of the workings of cyborg instead of only serving to the world. Downey (1995) claims that cyborg has become a part of cultural production rather than a mere technological phenomenon.

Although cyborg image originated in space research and science fiction to refer to forms of life that are part human and part machine, it is by no means confined to the world of high technology. Rather, cyborg anthropology calls attention more generally to the cultural production of human distinctiveness by examining ethnographically the boundaries between humans and machines and our vision of the differences that constitute these boundaries. (p. 265)

The cyborg now opens up the possibility of going beyond the physical reality with a vision to experience a new world where the boundaries between the humans and the machines are blurred.

### **Cyborg : Real and Virtual**

According to Bostic (1998), as theoretical texts reiterate, the cyborg is both real and fictional- through it we anticipate the implication of emergent technology in which we foresee the final blurring of distinctions between reality and virtuality. The cyborg is no more hypotheses: it has already become a cultural icon and is synonymous with our millennium threshold. The cyborg is the image of a human floating in space, of human on the moon, on Mars, on a voyage to exploding new galaxies. It is all aliens we imagine and through which we explore ourselves from the perspective of being outside of ourselves. (p. 358)

These lines indicate that cyborg is associated with our future vision. It is working as a tool to lead us to a quest of better world and together it is also an image of human. Combining human image with technology it has helped us achieve a heightened experience. Talking about an American television show 'Westworld' that launched a cyborg season from October to December, 2016, Netolicky (2017) elaborates how cyborgs work:

In the show the 'Westworld', cyborg creatures look, feel, suffer, and behave like humans. Their artificial intelligence is made up of coded memories, scripted dialogue and loops of repeated behaviors. Their bodies were once made up of the true cyborgic combination of 'part metal, part meat'. Later, however, as technology evolved, their bodies are made up of organic matter: muscle, flesh and bone. These later cyborgs-3D printed humanoids dipped in skin on Vitruvian

Man style hoops are virtually unrecognizable as different from the humans. (p. 94)

The blend of matter and body in the cinema industry makes the working of cyborg unrecognizable as different from humans. The viewers satisfy their expectations from the heightened actions of cyborgs.

Frentz (2009) also describes about the same nature of cyborg which is “part metal”, and “part flesh” (p. 821) which blends body and matter so perfectly that the viewers enjoy the technological assistance for their utmost entertainment in the cinema because humans have now been accustomed to integrate them with technology.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) find Westworld cyborgs to represent unformed consciousness, potential consciousness, and awakening consciousness. They describe cyborgs as embryonic egg through which intensities pass again and again. They are corporeal matter, and as the season evolves, they realize that they do matter. They are full of untapped potential, yet they are imposed upon by the coders and creators who control them, much like the organism that imposes upon the body without organs’ “forms, functions, bonds, dominant, and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences” (p.159). The authors describe cyborgs as artificial objects with unimaginable power to turn things upside down. They also describe that these robot-humans are perfectly in human control.

Haraway (2006), in her *A Cyborg Manifesto* explains that the cyborg body is not an innocent body, born by and into nature. It is mechanically and unnaturally constructed. It is ‘Other’. This otherness is part of why the cyborg is “about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities” (p.121). She talks about the necessity of cyborg in terms of accepting it for women empowerment. Haraway stresses that women should not be limited to their traditional roles. They must now combine the cyborg power with femininity for strengthening the gender and identity politics. She encourages the feminists to adopt the Cyborg image to march ahead beyond the stereotypical notion of feminism. She says that Cyborg writing must not be about the fall. It must be about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tool to mark the world that marked them as other (p.176). Haraway appeals all to use Cyborg as a weapon to fight against the dominant patriarchy and all sorts of injustices. Quoting Haraway, Ferrando (2016) says:

The 'Manifesto'; criticizes traditional notions of feminism, particularly feminist focuses on identity politics, and encourages instead coalition through affinity. She uses the figure of the cyborg to urge feminists to move beyond the limitation of traditional gender, feminism, and politics; the 'Manifesto' is considered one of the milestones in the development of feminist post humanist theory. (p. 168)

Ferrando assumes that the assimilation with cyborg can lead feminist identity to a height to a new post human situation which is beyond humanism.

The above review of literature shows the critics have interpreted the cyborgs in the progressive vision. They envision a future world assisted by thinking machines that can lead humanity even to a better state than the present one. They imagine of a utopian world where human beings are endowed with heightened power to make the presently impossible tasks possible. But the present study explores another side of the world where human world would be dominated by these AI Machines in such a way that they would be unable to free themselves from these new tools. It interprets *The Matrix* as one which leads humanity to a complex post- modern absurd position which is beyond the definition of good or bad.

### ***The Matrix and the Human- Cyborg Hybridism***

The Matrix was produced by Joel Silver, written and directed by Wachoski Sisters Lana Wachoski and Lily Wachoski. The movie was released in March 31, 1999 in the United States. The total budget of the film was \$ 63 million. The film gross collection was \$465.3 million. The film bagged several Awards including Academy Awards, BAFTA and Saturn Awards. It was starred by Keanu Reeves as Neo, Laurence John Fishbourne as Morpheus, Carrie- Annie Moss as Trinity, Hugo Weaving as Agent Smith and Joe Pantoliano as Cypher in the film. The Matrix is an example of cyberpunk subgenre of Science Fiction- a combination of low life and high-technology such as AI and Cybernetics. The lead characters Neo, Morpheus and Trinity work with a heightened energy and capacity by combining human power with the genetically engineered thinking machines.

*The Matrix* has applied the technology as a strategy for the marketing of the product. According to Whittington (2012), technological theories basically engage in three principles: The Great Man theory-which assumes a man with divine inspiration, can have a decisive effect, Technological Determinism- which explains that technology determines the development and cultural values, and the third one is economics-which considers the movie making in terms of various aspects of economics (p. 528). With the introduction of human- alien hybridism and the martial arts, the film generates a complete action thriller. The immersive sound technology and animation of the film intensifies the cinematic dimension. Neo's super human ability to fight against Agent Smith adds the cinematic effect. The two opposing forces fighting in the air with the

help of high technology makes the movie new to the audiences accustomed with the traditional grounded fight events.



Keanu Reeves and Hugo Weaving fighting in *The Matrix*

(Source: *The Matrix* 1999- Photo Gallery –imdb.com)

This scene not only combines the human power with technology, it blends the Hong Kong Martial Arts to add a cinematic effect. As the audiences are accustomed to accept the cinematic portrayal of a young man becoming older within two and half hour's movie, they are similarly used to entertain fight scenes assisted with high technology. The miracle amazes them more than the usual grounded fight.



(Source: *The Matrix* 1999- Photo Gallery –imdb.com)

The above image shows a conflict between human beings and human made AI Bots. In the movie, Neo, the computer hacker, comes into contact with the underground thinking machines that claim to be the freedom fighters and explain that reality is

actually a complex computer simulation called the matrix. These artificially intelligent machines blur the truth giving viewers the impression that humanity's concept of reality is hard to distinguish from the simulated life. The underground freedom fighters claim that they continuously use humanity for energy source for themselves. They use the entire world of humans as a source of power supply when the human race is at sleep. By plugging a charger on the human neck and mind, they supply power to the intelligent power machines using human beings as their slaves. This makes the viewers question their own existence as real or unreal. They feel like they are living in the simulated life helping machines to grow and harvest them for their continuous source of energy. The underground freedom fighter tells Neo of this fact that they are hiding the truth from the humanity allowing them to live a convincing simulated life, Neo wonders if it is true. As he can't exactly answer, the intelligent machine tells that this confusion is the proof that he is stuck in the matrix.



(Source: The Matrix 1999- Photo Gallery –imdb.com)

This scene shows how the cyborgs get energy plugged in the human neck when they are detached from charging them with the solar energy. It shows they get their energy at any cost. The interesting but a terrible aspect of such AI machine is that they work fascinatingly but when they need energy, they stuck energy from human body.

### **The Cyborgs and the Direction of Humanity**

*The Matrix* began quite earlier than the real release of the film. The artificial humanoid machines were made only in the begging of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to assist human

beings in their domestic works. These machines could think and make decisions of their own. To mark this age as the age of science and technology, a robot, in the history of humankind, was given citizenship in 2017. The robot named ‘*Sophia*’ was granted the first non- human citizenship of Saudi-Arabia on 25th October 2017. After this event of first robot-citizenship, the distinction between humans and the machines has been erased. It also opened up a huge debate in the traditional society. Due to the connection of technology in human bodies, all human beings are now like cyborgs. A possible implementation of attaching electronic circuits into their body is in progress. On the other hand, transformation of robot, like *Sophia*, is becoming humanized. After these machines’ entry into human world, humans began to be more dependent on these things. After launching these machines human being’s life had become quite easier for a certain time. As everything was going normal, a shocking problem appeared in the film *Matrix* when an artificially made thinking machine murdered his own master. Then the family of the dead decided to destroy these machines. But the machine claimed that it killed its master in a self-defense and claimed for the equal right like that of human. Then the real war between humans and machines began. The machines went to an underground world named Zero One for their safety. As the humans began to destroy them using advanced weapons and by blocking the solar energy, the machines still survived. They began to get energy by plucking them in the human neck. This event shows that the humanity cannot easily get rid of the world of machines. The machines that were made with the expectation to assist humanity have ultimately become threat for human civilization. The utopian imagination at the times the machines were invented has turned into dystopia. The cyborgs that work with miraculous energy have unknowingly trapped humanity into a maze from where they are struggling to come out safe. The technology here seems to determine human fate. Stewart (2003) remarks that human beings need technology that helps them through better systems of communication and efficient transportation. However, it also pollutes our air, soil, and water and can rob our identity and privacy. Stewart warns humanity of the dangers of over dependence on machines. In spite of several comforts they have provided humanity, the machines have also looted human freedom and dismantled privacy. They have become the enticers to the humanities in such a web that humans have become addicted to machines and cannot easily renounce them.

### ***The Matrix* and Postmodernism**

*The Matrix* bears a lot of post-modern idea through its characters and plot. The movie exploits the cyborg figures to intensify the cinematic action and effect. This is a

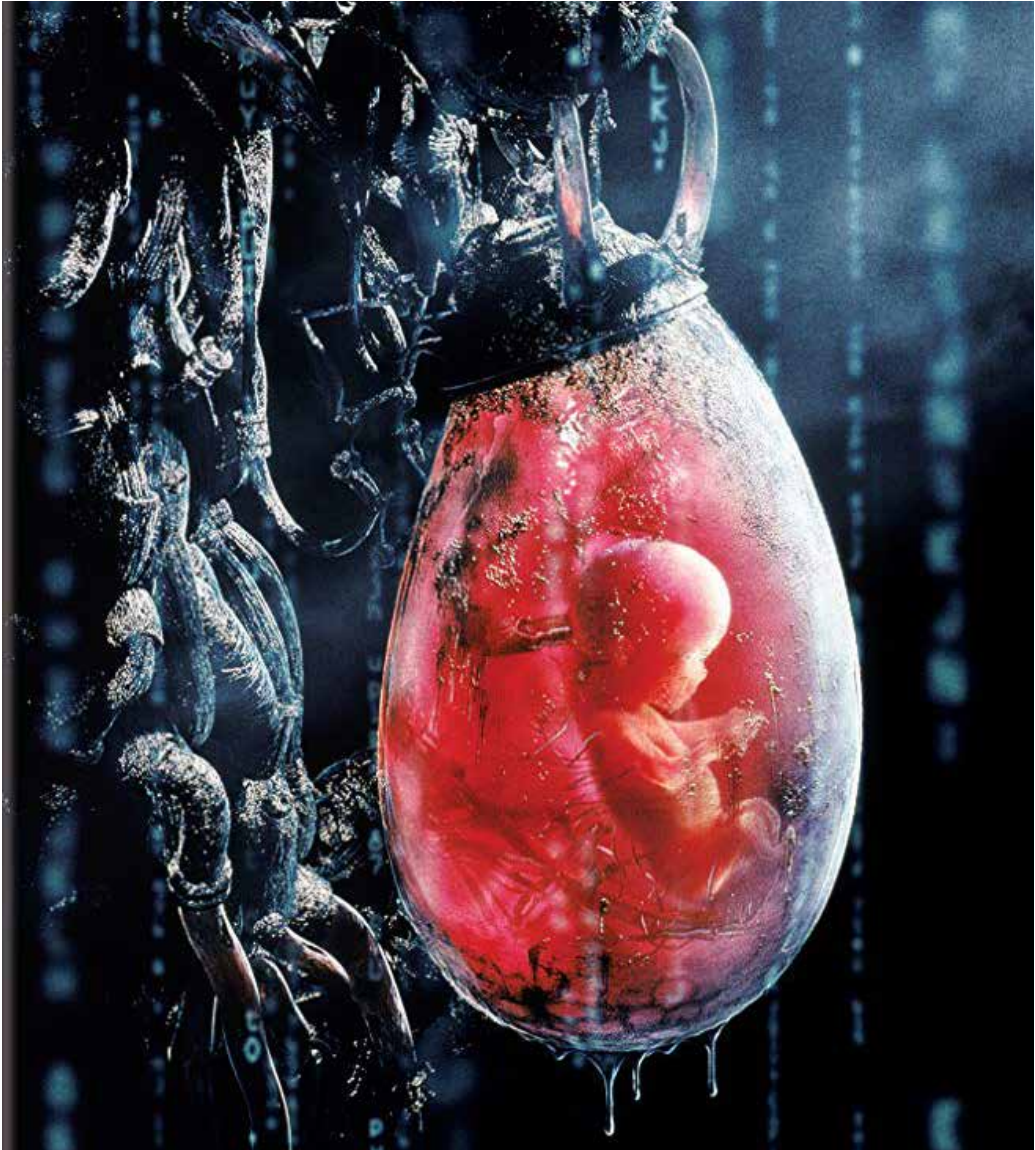


postmodern characteristic. Postmodernism thinking began with Fredrick Nietzsche's idea of truth, power, language and society. He claimed that truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and metamorphisms (pp.46-47). His reflection on truth questions the determinate meanings of words. As *The Matrix* exposes a future world where reality is like a maze created by sentient machines, it contains postmodern characteristic. It questions the established concept of reality where machines use human bodies as the source of energy. Neo, the computer programmer in the movie, revolts against machines on knowing this. He encounters the computer hacker Trinity and Morpheus who fight to free humanity from the clutches of machines. In spite of their constant struggle to resist machines, the things are grim on both sides. These are the postmodern features.

Ashley (1990) suggests that the overloaded postmodern individuals are desperately trying to maintain rootedness and integrity but they are ultimately pushed to meaninglessness (p. 38). Neo's struggle in the matrix is because he feels that his actions are not having any meaningful effects on his life. Lyotard (1984) defines postmodern condition as 'incredulity' (p. xxiv). It is a state filled with confusion, chaos, indecisiveness and absurdity. This exactly is the situation of Neo in the movie. Similarly, Johnson characterizes postmodernity as 'disillusionment with Enlightenment ideals (Johnson, 2010, as cited in Ashley, 1984). The characters and their situations in the movie exactly resemble these situations.

For Stewart (2003), the postmodern is characterized by distrust of technology and questioning of positivist Enlightenment philosophy such as the inevitability of progress. (cited in Clark, p. 6).

Machines were expected to release humanity from the burden of everyday life at the time they were invented. However, they later gain consciousness and dominate the world. The human worlds, knowing that these machines get energy from the solar power, scorch the sun to block sunlight. But the machines begin to breed human beings to harvest their energy from the human beings and they also begin to get their energy anyway from human body by plugging a charger on human neck as shown in the picture above. They begin to survive by using the human world. The consumers ultimately become the consumed as the machines get heat and electricity from the human body. The picture below shows how machines breed human body to harvest their energy by trapping the child before its birth in the absence of solar energy.



(A machine-bred human body to harvest energy by trapping the child before its birth in the absence of solar energy, Source: *The Matrix* 1999- Photo Gallery –imdb.com)

As the human beings begin to destroy the machines, it becomes a big threat to the human world itself because not only the machines but human world is also terribly affected by powerful weapons and chemicals. Humanity comes to such a state; it can get no solutions further. The machines still survive more powerfully and go on challenging the human world. This is a state of a dystopia in the movie. This is also the exact situation of the postmodern man.

In the movie when Neo meets Morpheus after escaping from the policemen and Agent Smith who try to capture him to give them information about Morpheus whom they regard a terrorist, Morpheus shows Neo the two pills : a red and a blue.



(The Red and the Blue pills that can reveal about the truth of the matrix and the former life respectively, Source: *The Matrix* 1999- Photo Gallery –imdb.com)

He tells Neo the red pill is for showing him the truth about the matrix and the blue one is for returning him for his former life. Neo swallows the red pill and wakes in a world that is filled with liquid pods in which innumerable different systems are attached to the extended electrical circuit. Neo suffers from a lifelong inactivity. This is the situation that a post-modernist finds. There is much confusion rather than clarity and the presumed reality is also questionable.

Throughout the movie Morpheus is in search of the ‘One’. He believes that Neo is the ‘One’- a most extraordinarily powerful image prophesized by the oracle to rescue the humanity from the grip of the world of machines and to bring the war to a pause. This search for the ‘One’ is also a postmodern characteristic as absurd as Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*.

In the ending scene of the movie, Neo is killed by one of the agents of Smith. He revives back like Jesus coming to the welfare of humanity through resurrection. He is expected to manage a safer world for humanity from the sickening tentacles of the machines. But the movie does not clearly show how this world is going to be. There is still uncertainty pervading the humanity. There are numbers of situations which can be explained from the lens of postmodern concepts. From these scenes of the movie, it can be said that *The Matrix* presents a dystopic world created by the war between human beings and the machines.

### ***The Matrix* as the Product of Entertainment Industry**

When we view a movie we cannot forget that together with an art form a movie is also a business product. In a capitalistic modern society, business keeps profit at its main focus. Though the commercial calculation is invisible to the public, it is always an influencing factor. *The Matrix* has embraced the modern film technology as per the expectation of the modern viewers. Like any other industrial product *The Matrix* stands as a cultural commodity to be consumed. It applies the technology as a strategy for the marketing of the product. It has concentrated on the interest of the customers beyond realism. With the introduction of alien- human hybridism and the Martial Arts, the movie has addressed its customer fancy of the future world. It has also given the customers a new taste through high tech sound effect and the animation.

### **Conclusion/ Finding**

This study comes to the conclusion that *The Matrix* is a movie that deals with a complex situation created after the tussle between humans and the machines. The human affinity with the machine has certainly facilitated them in different everyday activities. But our over dependence on them has made our lives dull and entrapped. We are nowhere in any utopia; but these thinking machines have become a threat for the human life itself. When the men took over the role of God by inventing the robotic machines to prove they are the creator, it seems to have led humanity to a wrong direction. The consequence is that we are in a dystopia as the machines began to murder their own creator. The movie shows that men have suffered worse because of their own ambitious desires. To communicate this message the movie has successfully exploited the cyborgs. They are both the demand of the time and the capitalistic cinematic market strategy to address the modern viewers. The movie has skillfully bridged the matter, i.e. the everyday reality with the mind- the super conscious brain that with the help of cyborgs can work miraculously to amaze and entertain the viewers.

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