Analysis of 'Matrix Trilogy' using the 'Orwellian Concept'

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Abstract
        The Matrix Trilogy is a science fiction, cyberpunk story, and bears close resemblance to many theoretical ideologies. This paper looks to analyse the Matrix Trilogy using the key concepts given by George Orwell in his book '1984'. The 'Orwellian Concept', as George Orwell's theory is known, provides 5 important parameters by means of which the Matrix Trilogy can be analysed. These 5 parameters are the core components of the Orwellian concept. The paper seeks to apply these concepts to the Matrix Trilogy in order to find if the films fundamentally reflect these concepts. The paper also seeks to use this analysis to understand the common prediction that both the Orwellian concept and the Matrix Trilogy make, with regard to evolving media technologies, namely surveillance.

Keywords – *Surveillance, dystopian future, Matrix Trilogy, Orwell*

I. INTRODUCTION

        In the year 1949 when George Orwell wrote the book '1984' the world shuddered at the thought of a surveillance system so powerful that it could overtake all forms of individual freedom.

        This ideology of George Orwell came to be called the 'Orwellian concept'. It can be defined as 'an idea, situation or societal condition that is being destructive to the good of a society that is free. It connotes an attitude and a policy of control by propaganda, surveillance, misinformation, denial of truth, and manipulation of the past to control individual freedom' (Orwell, 1949).

        The relevance of this philosophy grew with the rise of modern technological innovations. The Matrix Trilogy – Matrix, Matrix Reloaded and, Matrix Revolution; created by Andy and Larry Wachowski, is a franchise of films set in a fictional universe. This franchise represents a cyberpunk story that bears close resemblance to many theoretical ideologies - including those of biblical and artificial intelligence.

        However an area of the Matrix trilogy that remains unexplored is the close association between the Matrix and the Owellian concept. The Orwellian concept finds great application in this series, for both focuses largely on the influence of the powerful agency of 'surveillance'.

        The famous line 'Big brother is watching you' defines the essence of the Matrix Trilogy, and therefore provides opportunity for analysis of the franchise through this ideological perspective.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

        The Matrix trilogy has earned credentials not only for its success as a film but also for its importance for its academic contributions to literature, philosophy, sociology and many other fields of study.

        One of the striking themes that find repetition in the work of scholars is the philosophical concept of Neo the protagonist as 'the one'. This theme bears great resemblance to aspects from the Bible.

        The Matrix bears great religious symbolism from the Bible (Felding, 2003). It shows Neo as the messiah sent to save mankind. The name Neo itself stands as an anagram for 'the one' and 'new'.

        'The new' can refer to anything revolutionary and the cyberpunk movement speaks of computers and alternate reality as one that 'precocious, imaginative, and journeys through fictional landscapes fully as complex as the hacker's'. (Starrs, Huntsinger and Lynn, 1995)

        There is also a high level of symbolic representation seen in these concepts.

        The religious approach has been however contradicted by the work of psychoanalytical theorist (Dahms). The Matrix trilogy shows a very strong sociological basis. It draws upon the theories of alienation given by Marx.

Marx had identified human alienation as occurring on four levels: as alienation from nature, alienation from oneself, alienation from species- being, and alienation from other human beings. All these four forms of alienation are seen to take place in the Matrix trilogy.

        The psychoanalytical theory therefore does not support the religious theorists who believe Matrix to be a representation of theological concepts from the bible and other religious texts. They explain Matrix as being an explanation to the social phenomenon of alienation and detachment from self.

        Many view Matrix as synonymous to the concepts of unconscious and imagination – both Freudian concepts (Blazer and Alex, 2007).

        However this paper also brings out another important interpretation to the central theme of the Matrix trilogy- the role of the films as an important contributor to the education and drive for knowledge.

According to the authors the highway chase scenes can be viewed as the chase for the key of meaning. Neo's drive to gain access to the matrix is similar to man's search for truth and meaning and the symbolic quest for final, transcendent meaning.

Cinematic education elaborates on this view and adds that the trilogy incorporates philosophical themes in the plot – reality, existence, knowledge, belief, free will, determinism, and cultural critique – and thereby makes these themes approachable and palatable for a wider audience (Meinhold). This acts as a source of education for the audience towards such concepts and ideologies.

By incorporating races of people in the trilogy, racial discrimination is reduced (Nakamura). More importantly "The machine in its worst incarnation, the sinister face of technology run amok, the hegemonic, cyber-spatial, cold regime that has reduced all humans to slaves, is shown to us in the film as being distinctively and conventionally white and male, in contrast to the warm living multi-rascality and gender-bending of the rebels".These various aspects act as a source of audience education morally and philosophically.

There are two important theories that have been popularised by the Matrix trilogy. One is the concept of cyberpunk literature.

Cyberpunk is a postmodern science fiction genre noted for its focus on high tech and low life. It features advanced science, such as information technology and cybernetics, coupled with a degree of breakdown or radical change in the social order.

"The connections between the Matrix depicted in this film, and the Internet as it exists today, all have a common root in cyberpunk fiction, specifically William Gibson's novels, from which both the terms "cyberspace" and "matrix" originated", (Nakamura) These movies defined the perimeter of the philosophy of cyberpunk.

"The literature of cyberpunk science fiction is profoundly dystopian, while preserving an almost absolute faith in the ability of individuals, acting alone, to outwit and avoid any universalizing culture" (Starrs, Huntsinger and Lynn, 1995).

Another important concept is the theory of solipsism (Meinhold). "It is the theory according to which one can not definitely know if other minds – besides one's own – really exist, since it could be argued that everything that we perceive – including other individuals – is not real, but a projection of our own mind."

In 1998 Wachowski called the "Matrix" – a "neural interactive simulation" "Human beings are no longer born; we are grown." This statement defines not only the theory but also the central ideology behind the Matrix (Blazer and Alex, 2007).

The paper describes the concept of Simulacra and Simulation, which is most known for its discussion of symbols, signs, and how they relate to contemporaneity (simultaneous existences). The concept given by Jean Baudrillard claims that our current society has replaced all reality and meaning with symbols and signs, and that human experience is of a simulation of reality.

Thus the theory of solipsism finds wide application in the academic study of the matrix trilogy.

The study of the Matrix trilogy can therefore be seen to travel through the various ideologies of philosophy, psychology, sociology and the new evolving areas of cyberpunk literature and racial theories.

It has not only provided evidence for existing concepts but has also provided the basis to generate new ones.

III. OBJECTIVE

To study the Matrix trilogy, using the key concepts given by George Orwell, in his 'Orwellian concept' of surveillance and societal control.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The method of study is qualitative in nature. The Matrix, Matrix Reloaded and Matrix Revolution were analysed using pre-conceived parameters. These parameters were formed on the basis of selection of the 5 key concepts of George Orwell. The 5 concepts served as the basis for segregation and analysis of instances from the 3 movies. A conclusion was reached on the basis of the extent of similarities between the movies and the concepts.

V. ANALYSIS

A. Thought Police and Big Brother

George Orwell used the concept of 'Thought Police' and 'Big Brother' as external surveillance and control systems. Through the use of psychological and omnipresence this system is used to ensure that individuals do not challenge authority or disturb the status quo of society in any way.

The line 'Big Brother is watching you' only goes to show the extent of this particular surveillance system.

The matrix trilogy through its progress shows several instances of correlation with the Orwellian concept of thought police and Big Brother.

The matrix as a whole is a system of thought policing and machines capture humans in an artificial world. This artificial world is both simulated and controlled.

Further in the Matrix the red pill and blue pill as thought control agents – one to know and one to forget

There are several characters that take on the role of thought police or Big Brother:

The architect (the father) is the key character who is the symbol of thought police. The architect of the matrix has complete control over ever human.

This architect created the Matrix to control the minds of humans who inhabited it.

The three agents are seen to be attempting to capture Neo to prevent him from finding out about the matrix. They act as representations of control agents. It is seen that all people who have attempted to get close to it have been suppressed similarly. The extent of thought control is seen with Cypher, when he promised by the agents the bribe of erasing all memories of the Matrix from his mind.

Another important instance is the ability of the agents can take on any body in the matrix through metamorphosis.

The oracle though not directly, exerts an indirect control over the minds for it is her prediction that decided that neo will be the one, and thereby pushed him towards reaching his potential. The Architect reveals that the Oracle is "a program designed to investigate the human psyche"; thus, allowing the Matrix to become more accustomed for the majority of the human population to accept.

The Orwellian concept of 'Thought police' and 'Big Brother' therefore finds great parallel in the Matrix Trilogy.

B. Invasion of Personal Privacy, Either Directly Physically or Indirectly By Surveillance

In George Orwell's 1984 the government and existing autocratic system controls every individual. The concept of individual freedom does not exist. All activities of every individual is monitored and watched by the 'Big Brother' and nothing can be done without the approval of the government. There exists a thought police that can arrest individuals of the charges of thought crime. The surveillance system exists not to fight crime but instead to monitor individuals' every move and thought.

In the Matrix trilogy the Matrix acts a similar system. All activities of individuals within the matrix is monitored and controlled. There does not exist the concept of individual privacy or freedom.

One of the earliest instances seen in the movie is when Morpheus and Trinity watch Neo, in the beginning of the movie. For many years they have watched Neo and monitored his every move and thought. Though this invasion of privacy is for different reasons – in the case Morpheus because he wants to find 'the one' as predicted by the Oracle and Trinity because it is her love; this still continues to remain an invasion of privacy

The agents are constantly watching all the people to find out if they are getting close to the existence of the Matrix. As seen when then attempt to capture and silent Neo they do not hesitate to control and monitor privacy. The agents can also take on any human form in the Matrix (metamorphosis), irrespective of choice of the people. They can invade not only the mental privacy but also the physical privacy of the individuals.

Another powerful instance of invasion of privacy is when the agents inject a bug into Neo's stomach to monitor his every move. This bug would act as a surveillance system to prevent Neo from finding out about the Matrix.

Through the trilogy the invasion of individual privacy is seen as a common occurrence.

C. A (generally) dystopian future/world

The concept of a dystopian world is central to the Orwellian concept. It speaks of a world that is disturbing, frightening and destroyed. An opposing concept to utopia, Orwell stressed on the world being destroyed by the presence of surveillance and authoritarian control.

The matrix trilogy too constantly stresses on the existence of a dystopian world. This can be seen in several instances. Neo sees the real world for the first time when Morpheus shows it to him. It is seen as one that is destroyed and cannot be inhabited. The extent of despair and destruction is an unbelievable sight. Neo realizes the desperate need of humanity for a savior when he sees the real world.

In the real world fetuses are grown, and energy is taken from them in order to allow the machine to function. The very concept of cultivating humans for the machine to derive energy from is dystopian in nature. it shows destruction and cruelty for the sake of furthering control. The crop of humans for the purpose of survival of the Matrix is one of the more powerful representations of a dystopian world

Another instance that gain a lot of attention is the betrayal by Cypher.

Even though he is one of the few awaken individuals in the Matrix, who knows the secrets of the real world and the machine world, he succumbs to the pressure and bribery by the agents. His behavior shows the extent of dystopia where event the awakened is susceptible to destruction and corruption.

D. The use of euphemism to describe an agency, program or other concept, especially when the name denotes the opposite of what is actually occurring

Euphemism is the use of a term or expression in place of one that is offensive or unpleasant.

There are several instances in the Matrix Trilogy where the use of euphemism is seen, truly representing the Orwellian concept.

The 'Oracle' is once such instance. An Oracle is one that should be trusted, and traditionally plays the role of the truth teller. However in the Matrix she is a creation of the machine. She provides inaccurate information to Neo about being 'the one', thereby delaying his attempts at finding his true potential. The 'Oracle' thereby is seen to be the euphemism of her true nature.

An 'Architect' is one has always occupied the role of a creator. In the matrix trilogy the architect

play the role of the destroyer of individual thought and freedom. His matrix, though a creation serves the purpose of destruction. 'Morpheus' is the God of dreams in Greek mythology. In the matrix trilogy he is one of the few who is awakened. He is aware of the existence of the Matrix and is a complete contradiction to his mythological self.

One of the most important instances of euphemism used in the Matrix is 'Neo'. Neo means new. However in the Matrix Trilogy Neo is the sixth one to be born in the machine. He is not new but instead a reincarnation born for the purpose of saving humanity.

E. The encouragement of ''doublethink''

The concept of doublethink was coined by George Orwell to explain the to speak of hypocrisy that exists within the dystopian world. The population in the book 1984 is forced to accept concepts even though they are do not embrace that to be true to themselves. It is a state of cognitive dissonance whereby the inner belief is in conflict with the outward behavior.

One of the greatest examples of 'doublethink' in the Matrix Trilogy is the red and blue pill seen in the Matrix.

This powerful scene is a representation of the existence of doublethink through the trilogy. The red pill represents the painful truth of reality while the blue pill represents the blissful ignorance of illusion. The pills are given to Neo along with the explanation that while the blue will take him back to his world the red will take him ahead into the matrix. Though these pills are offered with a 'choice' this choice is simply an illusion, for the Matrix itself is a world where humans have no choice – this defies the essence of the term 'choice'.

Orwell describes 'doublethink' to be this very situation where individuals have no choice but must simply accept the state they are placed in by the authorities figures.

In the matrix trilogy Neo takes on the form on Agent Smith by means of metamorphosis in order to destroy him. Even though it becomes his only option to destroy the agent he chooses to take on the form on his enemy, an agent whose existence and thought process he is against. This is the process of 'doublethink' describes by Orwell whereby a person acts against his own beliefs as he is forced to and left with has no other option.

Another instance in the Matrix Trilogy is when the architect in 'Matrix Reloaded' places Neo in a position when he has to choose between trinity and the survival of humanity as a whole. Being 'the one' Neo is expected to choose humanity, for he has been sent for the purpose of saving humanity. Instead Neo chooses Trinity.

Neo chooses an option based on his needs as opposed to his duty. Though not in consistence with the negatively held concept of 'doublethink' this displays a decision based on conflict between inner held beliefs and outward displayed behaviour.

VI. CONCLUSION

Through an analysis of the Matrix Trilogy it can be seen that the 3 movies hold great similarities to the salient features of the Orwellian concept, given by George Orwell in his book 1984. The Orwellian concept, a widely held theory on surveillance and absolute authoritarian rule, though written in 1949, contains in its depths many modern theories on the power of media over society.

The Matrix Trilogy is a true representation of the extent of danger media mechanisms can pose to society. When analysed using the 'Big Brother' and 'Invasion of Privacy' concept given by Orwell, it can be seen that the Matrix Trilogy strongly reflects these very components.

The central concept of a 'dystopian' future, filled with a constant dissonance between individual thought and societal behavior is seen in the Matrix. This concept is also the central theme of the 'Orwellian concept'. Media mechanisms have the power to destroy the existence of privacy. The 'thought police' concept of Orwell echoes this feature through the Matrix trilogy.

By application of the key concepts by Orwell to the Matrix Trilogy it can be seen that the films contain in it a depth of philosophical insights, and together they predict a dystopian world overtaken by evolving media technologies.

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