

UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA IN LITERATURE AND CINEMA

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Abstract

Science fiction in literature and cinematography has been usually perceived as a genre which either exposes the dangers of growing technology and its effects on mankind, usually in an apocalyptic setting, or which foresees an expansion of humankind into the Universe and possible encounters with other forms of life. The former usually carries a dystopian, while the latter both dystopian and, although rarely, utopian views of the future. In the article *Deconstructing The Matrix*, particular attention will be paid to one film of this genre, *The Matrix*, directed by Andy and Larry Wachlowski in 1999. The purpose of this work is to demonstrate that a perspective of the conventional perception of the genre as mostly entertaining is a limited one, and to provide arguments for multiple interpretations of the work. The work will be analyzed by applying a methodology of deconstructive analysis and will be focused in more detail into binary oppositions of the main themes presented in the film. Finally, by deconstructing the visual and linguistic material, it will be suggested how and where the inconsistencies, misstatements or contradictions open up the material for further questioning. The visual and linguistic elements which are present and also absent from the core text and the subtexts will be consequently examined and compared.

Key Terms: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia, Literature, Cinema

EDEBİYAT VE SİNEMADA ÜTOPYA VE DİSTOPYA

Öz

Sinemacılıkta ve edebiyatta bilim kurgu genellikle kıyamet sahneleriyle ya gelişen teknolojinin insanlar üzerine zararlı etkisini ya da yaşamın muhtemel başkalaşmış şekilleriyle insanoğlunun evrendeki zamanlığını öngören bir tür olarak algılanmaktadır. Teknolojinin zararlı etkisi genellikle anti-ütöpik; zamanlaşma hem anti-ütöpik hem de ütöpik görüşleri oluşturmaktadır. *Matrix'in Yapısökümü* başlıklı makale, 1999 yılında Andy ve Larry Wachlowski'nin yönetmenliğini yaptığı *Matrix* filmi bu tür filme özellikle vurgu yapar. Bu filmin hedefi geleneksel bilim kurgu anlayışının sadece eğlendirmek gibi kısıtlı amaç için değil; aynı zamanda birçok yorumu da ihtiva etmesinde yatmaktadır. Bu çalışmada yapı sökücü metod

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uygulanarak filmde gösterilen ana temaların ikili zıtlıklarına odaklanılacaktır. Görsel ve dilsel malzeme yapısökücülüğe uğratarak, tutarsızlıklar, yanlış ifadeler ve çelişkiler başka bir tartışmanın konusu olarak ortaya konacaktır. Sonuç olarak, ana metinlerde ve alt metinlerde var olan ve aynı zamanda var olmayan görsel ve dilsel unsurlar incelenecek ve karşılaştırılacaktır.

Anahtar Kavramlar: Bilimkurgu, Ütopya, Anti-ütopya, Edebiyat, Sinema

Deconstructing *The Matrix*

Science fiction in literature and cinematography has been usually perceived as a genre which either exposes the dangers of growing technology and its effects on mankind, usually in an apocalyptic setting, or which foresees an expansion of humankind into the Universe and possible encounters with other forms of life. The former usually carries a dystopian, while the latter both dystopian and, although rarely, utopian views of the future. Famous works in literature include *War of the Worlds* by H.G.Wells, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess, or *Sentinel* by Isaac Asimov, to name only a few which have been successfully adapted for cinema, and directed by cult directors such as Ridley Scott, Stanley Kubrick, or Françoise Truffaut (*501 Must-See Movies* 2004). In this article, particular attention will be paid to one of the popular examples of the genre, *The Matrix*, directed by Andy and Larry Wachlowski in 1999. The purpose of this work is to demonstrate that a perspective of the conventional perception of the genre as mostly entertaining is a limited one, and to provide arguments for multiple interpretations of the work. The work will be analyzed by applying a methodology of deconstructive analysis and will be focused in more detail on binary oppositions of the main themes, such as: machine-man; spiritual-physical; good-evil; simulation-real; human-inhuman; us-others. It will be demonstrated that the meaning is not simply an either/or situation, but a series of possibilities, which will be unfolded during the analysis by addressing the privileged and less privileged elements. Finally, by deconstructing the visual and linguistic material, it will be suggested how and where the inconsistencies, misstatements or contradictions open up the material for further questioning. The visual and linguistic elements which are present and also absent from the core text and the subtexts will be consequently examined and compared.

Common Themes In The Science-Fiction Genre And Relationships With Dystopian And Utopian Views Of The Future

Recurrent threads of a dystopian view of the future in the science-fiction genre include the notions of human race surviving a world war; a totalitarian elite controlling masses through technology and constant surveillance; machines taking control over man; a loss of individual freedom; a reduction of human communication; an alienation from society; a complete loss or degradation of spiritual or ethical values; and the death of civilization. A utopian picture, on the other hand, usually refers to meeting a civilization presently unknown to us which assists us in technological advancement, or, adversely, due to the threat imposed by those aliens, this encounter serves as a catalyst which unites and strengthens mankind on Earth or on another planet. The science-fiction genre has immensely affected popular culture and its influences can be seen in cyberpunk literature, predominantly dystopian (writers such as Gibson, Sterling, Shirley); in cyberpunk music, which is in essence rebellious, aggressive, and an nihilistic (bands like Laibach, Ministry, Rammstein); in futuristic art, often creating depressing mood and imagery, with de-centred focus or form, or utilising monochromatic compositions; and also in fashion, promoting bondage wear, tight leather or paramilitary clothing, or a particular style of accessories such as sunglasses, mobile phones, or jewellery as shown in movies, or worn by cyberpunk musicians.¹

Dystopian science-fiction, also known as the terminal genre,² uses this mass popularity to elaborate on issues which are profoundly political and critical of contemporary society, envisaging the consequences of an unrestrained, accelerated technical advancement at the expense of limiting freedom of individuals. The positive side of it, however, lies in the unleashed imagination of its creators, writers, movie-makers, philosophers, and the utopian standpoint is that by warning mankind in the present time, such foreseen disasters could be prevented or alleviated in the future. Nevertheless, since most cinematography of this genre started as Hollywood productions, most of the values and norms arise from the American background,

¹ Karen Collins, “*Dead Channel Surfing: The Commonalities Between Cyberpunk Literature and Industrial Music*”, *Popular Music*, Vol.24, No.2, Literature and Music, (May, 2005) pp. 165-178. JSTOR, on 14/3/2013. <http://jstor.org>

² William Fisher, “*Of Living Machines and Living-Machines, Blade Runner and the Terminal Genre*”, *New Literary History*, Vol. 20, No.1, Critical Reconsiderations, (Autumn, 1988) pp. 187-198. JSTOR, on 14/3/2013. <http://jstor.org>

carrying with it their “values and traditions of free enterprise, expansionism and domination”³.

A common theme in most dystopian science-fiction films is the rise of an archetypal hero, which can be easily translated as a modern myth because the myth, according to C.G.Jung, is part of our collective unconsciousness⁴. Due to the monopoly of corporate capitalism, represented by media conglomerates and multinational corporations’ power and wealth, the masses are controlled by means of technology, which as a result creates the need for a resistance, which is usually led by an outsider-hero, commonly assisted by a group of supporters, therefore creating a niche in the alienated civil society with eroded values, liberties, and rights, to emanate a collective social formation which will be more just, more human, more powerful. By demonizing the constructed enemy in the form of a machine, or an alien, the masses are coerced to believe that the repressive apparatus by the real controller of power is thus justifiable.⁵ In such dystopian setting, the hero-outsider, an underdog, or a disempowered marginal character, becomes the leading force in the fight against the system, or the state, or other pronounced elements of power, thus bringing a hope for change for the whole community, and by this heroic sacrifice creates a utopian backdrop for future actions.

The common theme of the power of technology as a means of social control and, concurrently, the cause of human alienation, a symbol of growing dehumanization, is maintained through media manipulation and through the idea of the reversed roles between the creator (man) and the created (machine). However, a positive outlook of this possible imbalance in the relationship is that technology can also be liberating by enabling humans to go to further distances, change forms, shapes, or modes of communication. In conclusion, science fiction literature and cinematography provide both dystopian and utopian aspects of the future by mirroring the contemporary occurrences in the political, technological, or social areas. Readers or viewers of the science-fiction genre can easily associate with feelings of grief, anxiety, terror, pain, depression, persecution or helplessness depicted in literature or movies, which are part of our collective fear from the future, arising from contemporary global

³ Fisher, William, “*Of Living Machines and Living-Machines. Blade Runner and the Terminal Genre*”, *New Literary History*, Vol. 20, No.1, Critical Reconsiderations, (Autumn, 1988) pp. 187-198. JSTOR, on 14/3/2013. <http://jstor.org>, p. 97.

⁴ Stein, Murray, “*Jung’s Map of the Soul: An Introduction*”, Translated into Serbian by Žanet Prinčević de Villablanca as *Jungova mapa duše, Uvod*, Laguna, 2007.

⁵ McNamara, Kevin R. “‘*Blade Runner’s’ Post-Individual Worldspace*”, *Contemporary Literature*, Vol.38, No.3, (Autumn, 1997) pp. 422-446. JSTOR, on 14/03/2013, <http://jstor.org>.

problems such as environmental issues, international terrorism, bio-engineering, financial control (national debts or individual loss of financial security), loss of national identities due to globalization, and inability to keep up with the rapid advancement of technology.

Finally, the mass popularity of the science fiction genre in cinematography lies in its visual appeal, and in the employment of special effects in particular. For making the unreal believable, this genre is especially popular with adolescents and young adults. Film-making production includes a lot of technical challenges, and the visual narrative told through the film medium provides a unified experience of images and sounds. By utilizing of various technical devices, film communicates not only the textual information, but also ideologies, feelings and ideas. “The film liberates the text”.⁶ Technologically-savvy directors, editors, sound editors, and producers have been awarded the most prestigious film awards for their pioneering works as well as master-pieces in cinematography, including Academy Awards for Best Editing – *Lost Horizon* (1937); *A Clockwork Orange* (1971); *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* (1977); *The Matrix* (1999); for Special Effects – *War of the Worlds* (1953); *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968); *Alien* (1979); *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982); *Back to the Future* (1985); *Aliens* (1986); or for Best Cinematography – *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). The visual is usually given precedence to the narrative and acting in this genre, however, “one would need ice for blood not to be touched by [the film’s] innocent charm and infectious sense of wonder” (501 Must-See Movies, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, 346). This is one of the reasons why film or literary critics often underestimate the artistic worth of the science-fiction genre and its interrelatedness with other socio-political, philosophical, educational, or ethical key concepts which create grounds for a series of possible interpretations and understanding of the visual as well as literary connotations. Furthermore, the use of special effects and the “futuristic” agenda are often misunderstood as being unreal, at least for the present time, which reduces the impact of the movies’ critical representation of the contemporary world on the mature population. Therefore, a common perception by most adults is that such movies are only for an entertainment purpose and for the young viewers who can believe in such constructs. As Baccolini asserts, “Science fiction has the potential, through estrangement and cognitive mapping, to move its reader [and film viewer] to see the differences of an elsewhere

⁶ James Monaco, “How To Read A Film” / Film e-book, p. 13.

and thus think critically about [their] own world and possibly act on and change the world”.⁷

The Matrix Decoded And Encoded

Deconstruction analysis, as suggested by its founder Jacques Derrida, is a strategy to find pathways to meanings through more critical reading and interpretation of the given text, in either a written, aural, or visual mode. “It also provides a means of discovering premises and ideologies that lurk unacknowledged in the language we use”.⁸ This critical analysis builds on the premises that there is not only one, central truth, and that there is no ultimate reality that can provide only one possible meaning, but that there are endless references from one sign to another which in their interrelatedness provide multiple views and multiple interpretations of these signs. The difference between the signs, as well as the postponed meanings deferring from them, can serve as the basis for our understanding and evaluation of the literary or cinematographic work.⁹ In deconstructing *The Matrix*, my aim is to support the validity of this theory and to suggest different viewpoints in defining binary oppositions and their functions, as well as supplementation of the opposing views. As Derrida suggested, “each of the two terms adds something to the other and takes place of the other. [...] Supplementation exists in all aspects of human life and behavior”.¹⁰ A similar concept of supplementation in the form of compensation has been previously outlined by C.G.Jung and S. Freud in their psychoanalytical approach to analyzing human consciousness and sub-consciousness.

Different codes and cultural systems that operate under the framework of the cultural phenomena use linguistic models and therefore film can be described as a “language”. Every language reflects the values, beliefs and assumptions of the culture it represents, so “members of different cultures, in some cases, may misunderstand and

⁷ Raffaella Baccolini, “*The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction*”, PMLA, Vol. 119, No. 3, Special Topic: Science Fiction and Literary Studies: The NextMillennium (May, 2004), pp. 518-521. JSTOR, on 11/03/2013, <http://jstor.org>, p. 520.

⁸ Ann B Dobie, “*Theory Into Practice – An Introduction to Literary Criticism*” Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009, p. 159.

⁹ Charles E. Bressler, “*Literary Criticism – An Introduction to Theory and Practice, Fourth Edition*”, Pearson Education, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 2007.

¹⁰ Charles E. Bressler, “*Literary Criticism – An Introduction to Theory and Practice, Fourth Edition*”, Pearson Education, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2007, p. 159.

misinterpret each other's behaviors and cultural values".¹¹ The language of film uses different signs - words, sounds, and images - to create the experience and direct our attention to the story with all its accompanying moods, connotations, or other objectives. For this reason, film is a powerful medium to educate about and share cultural values, but also to impose values of the culture which produces it.

The Matrix directors, Wachowski brothers, claimed that they had been inspired to make the film by a famous philosophical treatise by Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, first published in French in 1981. Simulacra are copies albeit without an original, while simulation is the process of copying, or imitating, the real processes. The Wachowskis built the story on the hypothesis that reality can be simulated to such an extent that humans cannot distinguish between the real and the simulated. Participants are involved in the virtual reality, where they cannot distinguish any more between what is virtual and real. By frequent fast changing of scenes in which these two concepts of reality occur, the film viewer is engaged in constant balancing between identifying the real and unreal in the story. In the pre-production period, the actors were required to read Baudrillard's work in order to understand the concept behind it; however, the philosopher later claimed that the film misinterpreted and distorted his idea. The concept is that "the logic of simulation proceeds through a paradoxical circuit in which "the real" is lost at the very moment that it can be perfectly simulated".¹² During the deconstruction analysis, it becomes obvious that in *The Matrix*, however, people are not the simulacra due to the fact that, although they are created by machines, they are originals, not copies, because they are grown by machines for the purpose of providing a source of electricity. Also, since everybody has an implant inserted into their body which governs or programs their actions, people are not simulating life; they are living the real life, however unaware that they are being used by the machines. Therefore, their lives are not a simulation of life. Simulations in *The Matrix* refer only to computer-aided tracking, or to combat-training programs, for example, when Neo is uploaded with martial-arts programs; or when Trinity acquires the helicopter-driving skills. Therefore, the film refers to *Simulacra and Simulation* only by opening a case for discussion how symbols and signs have replaced all reality and meaning of reality by simulation, which is an imitation of the

¹¹ N. Yalcin, "Using Movies in Language Classrooms as Means of Understanding Cultural Diversity", *Epiphany*, Vol.6, No.1 (2013), p. 5.

¹² Eugene Thacher, "The Science Fiction of Technoscience: The Politics of Simulation and Challenge for New Media Art", *Leonardo*, Vol. 34, No.2, (2001) pp.155-158. JSTOR, on 14/03/2013, <http://jstor.org>, p. 155.

real-world processes, and by simulacra – copies of things which have no relationship with reality. Morpheus says to Neo: “It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth. (...) It is the construct.” Another type of this simulation is in the form of a dream. Neo cannot distinguish between the dream and the reality and Morpheus also emphasizes this fact when addressing Neo: “Have you ever had a dream that you didn’t want to wake up from?” Furthermore, in classical Greek mythology Morpheus, a son of Hypnos, was the God of Dreams, the sender of visions to mankind.¹³ Therefore, there is interrelatedness between the choice of name for one of the main protagonists in the film, and the film is a construct of reality by itself, and the world of simulation which is juxtaposed to the real in the dreams. The signified (the dream) is also the signifier (simulation of reality), and the signifier (Morpheus) is also the signified (the one to whom dreams or visions come).

The plot in *The Matrix* is a modern version of an archetypal myth: the hero’s quest for the truth and transformation. As Campbell observes in *The Power of Myth*, “myths are primarily for fundamental instructions in [the life’s] matters. Our society today is not giving us adequate mythic instructions of this kind, so young people are finding it difficult to get their act together”.¹⁴ Therefore, the narrative is based on the formula of the myth which, according to Jung, is built in our collective unconsciousness and “expresses life more precisely than does science”.¹⁵ There are two general types of heroes – those who set out on the quest responsibly and intentionally to perform the deed, as Harry Potter does in the famous heptalogy by J.K.Rowling, for example; or those who are thrown into the adventure. The second example of a hero who did not choose, but has been chosen for the quest, is Neo.

Thomas Anderson alias Neo is a young computer hacker who leaves the realm of the familiar, where he has some form of control over his life, and sets on a journey, led by his tutor and adviser, Morpheus, and the crew of the rebellious humans, the last survivors on the ship Nebuchadnezzar III, to discover the truth that humans are grown by machines to be their slaves and a free and constant source of energy. On the journey to the truth about the matrix, Neo is assisted by Trinity, a female crew member, and a small number of other staff. Having gone through the initiation ritual, Neo learns his

¹³ Samuel Willard Crompton, “*Gods and Goddesses of Classical Mythology*”, Dovetail Books, 1997.

¹⁴ Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, “*The Power of Myth*”, Anchor Books. New York. 1991, p. 175-176.

¹⁵ C.G. Jung, “*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*”, Ed. by Aniela Jaffe, Translated into English by Richard and Clara Winston, Vintage Books, 1961, p. 16.

destiny from the Oracle, and overcomes a number of obstacles set up by the matrix sentinels, then performs a courageous act of self-sacrifice when he saves Morpheus from the agents of the matrix, and finally experiences the supernormal by going through death to resurrection, to come back with a message: “I don’t know what will happen in the future. I didn’t come here to tell you how this is going to end. I came here to tell you how it’s going to begin. (...) Where we go from there is the choice. I leave it to you.” In accord with the mythical matrix, Neo’s adventure is beyond the ordinary, and on this path he undergoes a physical and psychological transformation. He learns his strengths, overcomes his naivety and immaturity to triumph as a self-assured individual, physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually equipped to accomplish the life tasks. Campbell suggests that “myths inspire the realization of the possibility of your perfection, the fullness of your strength, and the bringing of solar light into the world¹⁶.” Neo’s fights with the agents represents the battle of the human against inhuman in humans; the battle of the real against the artificial. These are utopian elements in the dystopian context, which is another example of binary oppositions revealed through the deconstruction analysis. Also, in doing these heroic acts, Neo is trying to save the world. It does not matter that the world in *The Matrix* which has remained resembles a wasteland. The notion of saving the world is two-folded: one is directed towards the film protagonists – anything alive is worth saving. That is the reason why a handful of humans on Nebuchadnezzar are fighting the Matrix – they are fighting for the world to remain alive. Another reason is directed towards the film audience: save the world by shifting things around, by changing the rules, by exposing the truth, by educating the masses. An example of this influence can be seen by actions of our modern-day “Neos” represented by individuals like Julian Assange and Wikileaks, or Hackers Anonymous, organizations dedicated to break into the databases of the top actors in the global economic or political hierarchies for the purpose to fight the “dark forces” and bring new rules and a new order. However, as much as it is important to save the world, Neo’s journey in *The Matrix* also emphasizes how important it is to save oneself, one’s sense of integrity. Unless individuals go through this spiritual and empowering transformation, they cannot become fully aware of their own capacities to change the rules imposed by society and those who rule them, nor can they learn the truth.

The Matrix is the construct, the loading program, a computer generated dream to keep people under control, or as Morpheus explains to Neo: “A digital projection of yourself – your residual image.” The real is manifested by electrical signals interpreted

¹⁶ Campbell with Moyers, “*The Power of Myth*” Anchor Books. New York. 1991, p. 183.

by one's brain based on one's senses, and the matrix is the neural simulation of this process. As long as the matrix exists, human race will not be free. Throughout history, humans have been dependent on machines to survive. The storyline reveals that some time in the 21st century, the machines took over and found that all the energy they need is generated by a human body. For that reason, human beings were no longer born, but grown by machines. When deconstructing this binary opposition, in the formulation of hierarchy of the privileged/less privileged, it appears on the surface that the machines are privileged. The deconstruction analysis offers a different interpretation; namely, since the human power is the force – the human energy, both as bio-energy as well as intellectual power – it is pervading, so it is life that is the energy and the creator, not the machines; the machines are only parasites that feed on that power.

This narrative bears also elements of a vision quest. Neo's mission resembles the story of Jason and the Argonauts from classical mythology. The Delphic Oracle encouraged Jason to search for the Golden Fleece, and on his adventure he is accompanied by a group of warriors, later known as the Argonauts, the crew of the ship Argo.¹⁷ Similarly, Neo is advised by the Oracle to pursue his mission; however, in accordance with classical mythology, the Oracle's prophecies could be misleading.¹⁸ There is a controversy in the Oracle's prophecy in the film. Initially, Morpheus is led to believe that he would meet The One, and he is adamant that it is Neo who fulfills this prophecy. The deconstruction analysis reveals this to be contrary since Neo not only rejects the idea that he is The One, but the Oracle also shows signs of uncertainty. "Sorry, kid. You got the gift, but it looks like you're waiting for something... Your next life, maybe, who knows. That's the way these things go." The Oracle foresaw that it would be up to Neo to decide whose life should be sacrificed – his or Morpheus's. However, the power that is instilled into him is through the words that are less prophetic, but more encouraging: "You'll remember, you won't believe much of this fake crap. You're in control of your own life. Remember, I promise, by the time you've done your deed, you'll feel right as rain." Therefore, on the binary opposition of the privileged/less privileged, although the Oracle seems to be the privileged one thanks to the gift of prophecy, it is up to Neo, the less privileged one, to decide on his future by making a choice. Similarly, the Oracle's prophecy that Trinity would fall in love with a dead person seems right on the surface since it is only when Neo has been killed by the Matrix agents and when Trinity kisses him that the audience learn openly

¹⁷ Arthur Cotterell, *"The Encyclopedia of Mythology"*, Anness Publishing Ltd. 2001.

¹⁸ Arthur Cotterell, *"The Encyclopedia of Mythology"*, Anness Publishing Ltd. 2001.

about her special feelings towards him. “Neo, I’m not afraid any more. Neo, the Oracle told me that I would fall in love with a dead man. The man that I’d love would be the One. So, you see, you can’t be dead! You can’t be because I love you.” When reversing the binary opposition of death/love, it is clear that Trinity had been in love with Neo much earlier than his eventual death occurred; however, through the kiss, she breathes in the spirit of life in him. Another binary opposition is in regards to the traditional male/female roles. In fairy tales, it would be the prince to kiss the princess and awaken her up. In *The Matrix*, it is the female power – the princess – who gives life back to the hero. Moreover, Trinity is the female supplementation of Neo that recreates life. According to Jung, it is the female anima, embedded in our unconscious “other” that exists in each male, and vice-versa, the male animus is the supplementation of the female in the sphere of the unconscious “other”.¹⁹ Trinity’s kiss brings life energy, manifested in electric outbursts, creating light, thundering, which on another level of juxtaposing dark/light, or evil/good, brings forward Biblical references of Christ’s teaching that love is more powerful than evil, and that after death resurrection or a new life comes. Neo’s female side is also emphasized through his initial reluctance to accept the leadership role assigned to him by Morpheus, which is in contrast to Trinity’s animus, as she is a strong-minded, significant ranking officer on the hovercraft, decisive, skilled in martial arts and a good fighter. Trinity’s name suggests also at least two interpretations from a religious point of view. In Christianity, Holy Trinity represents the unity of God, Spirit and Son. In Taoism, or other oriental philosophies, harmony is when mind, body and soul are in balance, therefore there is the binary opposition of Western and Eastern philosophies which can be reversed so that this message could be interpreted by viewers from different cultural or religious backgrounds.

Morpheus’s character offers several aspects from which it can be interpreted. In terms of the character’s name, it has already been suggested that Morpheus, as God of Dreams, implies his visionary characteristics, which is in essence contrary to reality as Morpheus blindly believes the Oracle and is certain that Neo is the One who will save the world. It is not his, but the Oracle’s vision, that determines the course of his actions. Morpheus believes in fate and accepts self-sacrifice on the account that Neo’s life is more important than his. On another level of interpreting his name, Morpheus can be seen as a combination of words *Morph* meaning “the essential, particle,

¹⁹ Murray Stein, “*Jung’s Map of the Soul: An Introduction*”, Translated into Serbian by Žanet Prinčević de Villablanca as *Jungova mapa duše, Uvod*, Laguna. 2007, p. 143-152.

essence” and *us* thus bringing in accord the notions of “our essence”, or “what makes you human”. A different aspect of Morpheus’s role is that of Neo’s tutor, or adviser. It is strange to notice that someone who teaches his disciple to be self-confident, to oppose authorities, to be a master of his intellectual powers, in fact subdues his faculties to the prophecy of the Oracle. Morpheus possesses the code to the Zion main computer framework, he is a master in martial arts techniques, he knows the secret of the matrix, he has been proclaimed by the agents as “one of the most dangerous men alive”, but still, he has more trust in Neo’s powers than in his own. Therefore, deconstruction analysis demonstrates that Morpheus’s role is that of a less privileged one compared to Neo. Furthermore, this analysis also points to another religious inference to Morpheus as a God-like figure (where Trinity can be seen as the Holy Spirit, and Neo as Son, or Christ, the Savior). Tank, a crew member operating at the computer console and who is in charge of uploading protagonists from the virtual into the real world, refers to Morpheus as “he is more than a father to me”. Trinity also says to Cypher, the protagonist who betrayed Morpheus and because of whom Morpheus gets captured by the matrix agents, that Morpheus had previously set them free. It is also obvious from Morpheus’s teaching to Neo: “I’m trying to free your mind, Neo. But I can only show you the door. You’re the one who has to walk through. (...) You have to let it all go, Neo. Fear, doubt, and disbelief. Free your mind.” God created Man and set him free, gave him freedom to think, to decide, to make choices. Morpheus is careful when he teaches Neo. He says: “We have a rule. We never free our mind until it reaches a certain age. It’s dangerous. The mind has trouble letting go. I’ve seen it before and I’m sorry.” By saying it, Morpheus opens up a door for contrasting free/fixed ideas. If people get ideas when they are immature or unprepared to process them thoroughly, these ideas become fixed, and that it is why they cannot change them easily. The contradiction that arises from Morpheus’s God-like role is in the metaphor of man against machines: man is the creator (God), the driving force, and Morpheus has the secret access code to the mainframe computer, but still he cannot escape the matrix agents, the virus within the system, whose main purpose is to destroy humans.

In the encounter of Morpheus and the main agent Smith, the deconstruction analysis shows another inconsistency with the main theme of the story – a binary opposition of man versus machine, or between human and inhuman. Morpheus is human, whereas Smith is a programmed virus which has a human form. Morpheus is the creator, and the agent is a matrix, a “fallen angel”, a replicant, someone (or better, something) who obeys the rules and the reason for his existence is to serve the system. Contrary to humans who make the rules which, as Morpheus teaches Neo, “some can be bent, some broken”, agents are not programmed to do the same. So, the virus is still

“God’s creation” (in the world of machines, man is the creator). Therefore, although being his captive, Morpheus – human, and imperfect as such, is still in the privileged position in respect to agent Smith, a perfect machine, but still an artificial object. On the surface it seems that Smith has the control of the situation, but Morpheus still holds the key to the main computer, so he is in the position of power. Moreover, another contradiction appears when Smith gets engaged in a private conversation with the bound Morpheus. He suddenly decides “to be honest” with Morpheus. He says: “I hate this place, this zoo, this prison, this reality, whatever we might call it. I can’t stand it any longer. It’s the smell, if there is such a thing (...) I must get out of here. I must get free.” Certainly, the negative connotations of the de-humanized world caused by technology are most striking, but then the machine becomes human-like, and emotions like anger, loathing, hatred come to the surface. This contradiction is a clear demonstration of machine as a signifier of power over humans, where the signified human has more power because machines are programmed to do certain things, but they lack the spirit, the will power which humans possess. Or, in terms of binary oppositions, the privileged is the original, creative force, and the less privileged is erzats, copy, unreal.

Agent Smith gives floor to another binary opposition related to the ideology. He explains to Morpheus that the first matrix was designed to be a perfect human world, where everyone would be happy. This can refer to the early 19th century ideology of utopian socialism which came as a result of the Industrial Revolution and rapid expansion of technology replacing manpower. However, Smith further explains, it could not eventuate because people “lacked the program in language to describe the perfect world. As a species, human beings define their realities through misery and suffering.” The ideology of technocratic capitalism (which is the matrix) took over because humanity did not take their chance to create the perfect world with the machines which they created to free humans from labor. That is why Smith concludes: “You had your time. The future is our world.” Another interpretation could be a juxtaposition between heaven and hell, alluding to religious connotations that man was in heaven before he committed his first sin – sought knowledge and since then has been cursed to live in the hell-like world, represented by the real world. This interpretation comes to mind due to several other religious interrelated references. As Campbell points out in *The Power of Myth*, Judo-Christian and Islamic religions teach that there is no reward without renunciation, without paying the price. In order to reach heaven and the eternity of beautiful, man must first go through hell of life in the real world. Therefore, the privileged entity in the binary opposition in this instance is hell, the present time, the imperfect against the perfect world.

Despite criticizing the matrix ideology, Neo's role as a liberator is still vague. Although he is the One, the biggest achievement in saving the world in the film is when he frees Morpheus from the agents' hands. The contradiction here is that he does not and cannot save the world; he only learns the truth and matures as a person. That is his biggest achievement as The One. On the other hand, his role can serve as a role model to the viewers, so it brings the affirmative stimulus to the audience, adolescents and young adults in particular.

Despite being a computer hacker in the "real" world, Neo still needs to be programmed by Tank to fulfill the task required from him. He cannot program an "antivirus" program to terminate the agents, but has to use conventional armaments in form of guns to fight them. The binary opposition at display here is the difference between high technology (represented by the matrix agents) and conventional weapons (guns). Although much more sophisticated, modern technology can be brutally destroyed with the physical force of objects of lesser degree of complexity.

Reversal of roles of major and minor characters can provide another viewpoint. For example, the Oracle is not the major protagonist, but her role is important in steering Morpheus, Trinity and Neo in the decision-making direction. She is pragmatic, intuitive, and has a motherly perspective towards Neo. If her function had been more pronounced, the main emphasis on the human will as opposed to fate would have been diminished.

Cypher is also one of the characters whose role is quite important, however, as an anti-hero he serves as an antagonist to the main protagonists with higher cause, namely Neo and Morpheus. His name can be associated with several things. Firstly, his nickname refers to coding and decoding, as to de-cipher means to read and interpret the meaning of the code. Secondly, etymology of the word "cipher" or "cypher" brings another meaning, that of "a number", or "a zero" (The Australian Oxford Dictionary). Therefore, in contrast to Neo, who is The One (or "the New One"), Cypher is "the Zero", or no-one, nobody. Considering the meaning of the word "number", then Cypher can be anyone, any identity, any number. He reveals his frustration to Trinity: "I'm tired, Trinity. I'm tired of this world. Tired of firing. Tired of this ship. Being called to be the God damned same." Cypher was given a choice, the same as Neo, to take a pill – the red one which will help you learn the truth, or the blue one which will make you believe whatever you want to believe. The red pill can be interpreted as the fire, zest for knowledge, curiosity, constant wondering, or as Morpheus suggested to Neo: "You stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes." The color blue of the other pill, on the other hand, implies the color of depression, sedation,

blue moods, complacency. Cypher regrets for having taken the pill of wonder and bitterly defends himself to Trinity: “You call this free? All I do is what he (ie. Morpheus) tells me what to do. If I had to choose between that and the Matrix, I’d choose the Matrix.” His feeling of a loss of identity and purpose of his mission affects his will power and he loses enthusiasm. He shows elements of egocentrism, the lack of self-determination, the lack of integrity, the lack of faith in the greater good. For that reason he betrays Morpheus to the agents, and thus from a loyal crew member becomes the traitor. From the point of view of the film-makers, this can be interpreted as concerned about the erosion of human values, of human spirit. Furthermore, Cypher expresses alienation from the society he is supposed to belong to – humans. Since he lost belief in the powers of mankind, he willingly succumbs to the more powerful side in the battle. According to Jung’s classification of psychological types, Cypher acts as an extroverted personality. Having been drawn by the objective reality, where objective claims and values play a greater role as the determining factor of his consciousness, his actions are governed by laws of the society of the matrix. On another level, however, he is opposing the authority of Morpheus. On the previously referred religious levels, the role of Cypher can be compared to that of Judas, although he betrayed his superior, the ship leader, not the One. Cypher tries to kill Neo, but a miracle occurs and he gets killed by Tank, to surprise the viewers who have been led to believe that he had been killed by Cypher in the previous scenes in the film.

A recurrent motif in the film is the phone ringing. On the first perceptible level, it can be interpreted as a need for communication, or as a mode of receiving orders, or demanding assistance. On another level, it can be viewed as a “wake-up call” to humanity. As Morpheus explains to Neo, “the Matrix is control.” It is

a computer-generated dream-world, built to keep us under control. (...) That system is our enemy. When you’re inside, when you look around, what do you see? Businessmen, teachers, lawyers, carpenters, the very minds of people we are trying to save, but until we do, these people are still a part of that system and that makes them our enemy. Most of these people are not yet ready to be unplugged. And many of them are so inert, so hopelessly dependent on the system, that they will fight to protect it.

Therefore, the “wake-up call” is not intended for Neo only, but to the audiences around the world to change the system of totalitarian control. The media, the Internet, the World Wide Web, that is the network of information systems that have control over our lives. They are needed for progress, communication, sharing of

information on one hand, but on the other, they can corrupt or misuse the same information and cause detrimental effects for individuals or society in general.

Another leitmotif is wearing sunglasses. That can be interpreted in several ways. At first, dark sunglasses provide a barrier and the protagonists cannot see the real world through them, but on the other hand, those who look at the glasses, cannot penetrate the person's gaze, eyes being a metaphor for the soul. From another perspective, the dark glasses reflect the light and the image of the viewer, so the viewers can only see the mirror of themselves in the glasses.

Finally, symbols of Zion and Nebuchadnezzar are repetitiously used in the film, Zion being the underground world where the last of the surviving humans are hiding, and Nebuchadnezzar III is the hovercraft, a commanding center for anti-matrix actions. The ship is commanded by Morpheus, who has the code for accessing the main network on Zion, and his commander-in-chief is Trinity. Religious references employed in these symbols are interesting because of several pathways leading to their interpretation. Firstly, Zion is often used as a synonym for Jerusalem. Christian references to it are in Psalm 147:2, for example, where it says: "The Lord builds up Jerusalem: he gathers the exiles of Israel." And then, in 147:12: "Extol the Lord, O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion." This can be viewed as Morpheus and the crew and the handful of surviving humans are the outcast of Israel, the world of men chosen by God. Morpheus leads these people, however, he refers to the place as "the desert", which then associates Morpheus not with God any more, but with Moses, the one who has "the word, the truth". Contradiction arising here is in the Biblical asynchronicity, since Morpheus alias Moses recognizes Neo as the Chosen One (Christ) and gives him the truth, while Moses led the Israelites from the desert in Exodus (Old Testament, 12:33) and preceded Christ a long time ago. Metaphor of the desert, however, can be interpreted as a desert caused by human race's abuse of the world resources; dehumanization emerging from hypocrisy, immorality, greed – both on individual and corporal levels). In the New Testament, however, Daughter of Zion is the bride of Christ, representing the Church as the institution. Considering that in *The Matrix* Zion is the main storage of the matrices, of crucial information, should then this underground city be connotation of humans with their genetic material, or God who has assigned such properties to mankind?

In Judaism, Zion is the Hebrew name for the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and it was the seat of the first and second Holy Temple. Jews consider it as the connection between God and humanity. Therefore, interpreted from the Judaic perspective, in *The Matrix*, the underworld of Zion is the last island of hope for humanity, whereas

Morpheus has the key to that hope. He is the go-between, the messiah. Zion also symbolizes a longing by wandering peoples for a safe homeland. Morpheus says to Neo: “This world is the desert.” It can also have a more spiritual meaning, a kind of place like a spiritual homeland, or a kind of peace of mind in one’s present life.

In Islam, the Kaaba in Mecca was also called Sahyun or Zion by Mohammed, the prophet of Islam. Islamic scholars often refer to Zion as the holy site of Mecca. (Wikipedia) By bringing these three religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – into interrelatedness with the meaning of the name of the underground world of resistance to the matrix, we come to the conclusion that there is another binary opposition here in terms of spirituality/lack of faith. Constant references to religious symbols of the Western societies imply that in order to understand the multiple meanings and references in the film, one should be quite familiar with them. The contradiction revealed here is this: if the film-makers are concerned that the contemporary society has lost the spiritual connectedness with God, or faith, and if this serves as criticism of the Western societies which are considered overly materialistic, then how are the audiences to understand the multiple meanings? The hovercraft, Nebuchadnezzar III, bears reference to Nebuchadnezzar II, the king of Babylon who destroyed Jerusalem with his army. (Old Testament, Kings 25:1) If Nebuchadnezzar the Second destroyed it, then is Nebuchadnezzar the Third to rebuild it? The binary opposition here is destruction/re-building.

Finally, the cinematographic language in *The Matrix* is a coherent visual and physical metaphor for the complex and subtle interaction between humans and the machines. By using elements of film noir, dark interiors, metallic sounds, contrasts in colors (black/white/grey) and tones (darkness/lightness), cineastes create the dramatic effect and an atmosphere of disillusion, of dystopia. Frequent use of visual metonymy, for instance dark sunglasses, computer screens for surveillance, graphic and numerical symbols representing matrices, communicates the science-fiction common thread of the threat imposed by the use of technology causing human alienation and the loss of communication. Fast change of scenes and switch between what is real and what is perceived as real, but is not, add to the film syntax and dynamics. Use of special effects – the most innovative at the time was the use of “bullet-time”, which allows the camera to move around the objects in three dimensions - and slow motion add to the film’s visual appeal. Frequent use of closeup shots which give the feeling of disorientation, and rack focus to direct the viewer’s attention from one subject and toward another in a different ground, as well as fast-rhythmic editing with accelerated montage, especially in chase scenes, or in switches between the real and the matrix world, heighten the

viewer's interest and create suspension leading to the climax when the viewer cannot distinguish any more what should be perceived real and what not. Spectacular visual effects is what the film has been especially lauded for and won the 2000 Academy Awards for Best Editing; Best Effects, Sound Effects Editing; Best Effects, Visual Effects; and Best Sound.

Conclusion

Dobie states that “if meaning is derived from what is not there – absence – and it is, in the end, undecidable, than there is no such thing as objective truth”.²⁰ Neo's mission is to learn the truth and go through the process of self-realization, however there is no stated strategy or ideology how the world can be saved. “This omission of [a “recipe for salvation”] from the film's world [is] indicative of the postmodernization of power.”²¹ Therefore, in the deconstructive decoding of *The Matrix*, it can be concluded that there is not one possibility of interpreting the truth and the metaphysics of it. In analyzing the privileged/less privileged pairs, it has been demonstrated that the reverse perspectives are also possible. The film criticizes the flaws in the modern society; nevertheless, it fails to suggest a solution because, as Morpheus declares, “the Matrix is everywhere”. Interpolation of the world of simulation within the world of real makes it difficult to differentiate one from the other. As Baudrillard asserts in *The Anorexic Ruins* (1989), people become less important as human beings and they barely represent numbers in the state's establishment. Nevertheless, they are not loaded with negative electricity, but with static electricity – meaning that even without work they are unwilling to do anything to change the status quo. Maybe it was the film-makers intention to employ *The Matrix* to stir this critical mass up to some action.

Bressler asserts that “we must never declare such a reading to be completed or finished, since the process of meaning is ongoing, never allowing us to pledge allegiance to any one view”.²² I agree with this statement, and based on the arguments presented in this paper, I believe that the science-fiction genre should not be viewed

²⁰ Ann B. Dobie, “*Theory Into Practice – An Introduction to Literary Criticism*”, Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009, p. 158.

²¹ Kevin R. McNamara, “ ‘Blade Runner's' Post-Individual Worldspace”, *Contemporary Literature*, Vol.38, No.3, (Autumn, 1997) pp. 422-446. JSTOR, on 14/03/2013, <http://jstor.org>; James Monaco, “*How To Read A Film*” / Film e-book, p. 430.

²² Charles E. Bressler, “*Literary Criticism – An Introduction to Theory and Practice, Fourth Edition*”, Pearson Education, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 2007, p. 128.

only as a set of cinematographic effects to entertain the film-goers. As any work of art, it can open multiple entrances to view it from multiple perspectives.

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