

Terrence M. Sellers-Saidi

9/18/2009

Media Review: *The Matrix* (1999)

For as long as people have written fiction, someone has always tried to project what the future might look like. As technology develops and improves, the image of the future changes and becomes more and more unbelievable. *The Matrix* by the Wachowski brothers was one of the most imaginative films in the history of cinema. It addresses issues that have been relevant and discussed since the before the dawn of machines. The film presents these issues in a way that has been copied countless times since its creation, but will never be matched for again for true genius and creativity.

The opening topic of *The Matrix* is the hacker. The hacker of yesterday is a nerdy, unattractive kid who no one would ever consider a threat outside of the virtual world. He would be easily identified and stopped through the use of physical superiority. This type of hacker no longer exists in the world of the film. The main character Thomas Anderson is a regular desk worker. He wears a suit and tie and works an average nine-to-five job. You would trust him like any other person and never think badly of him. It turns out that Mr. Anderson is really a super cool hacker whose alias is Neo. He is attractive, goes to clubs and talks to women. Not only is he the opposite of an unattractive loser, but also he is cool and lives a double life. You cannot trust him, and you are also jealous of him. The fear of today is that the non-computer savvy people will lose their place in the world and be ousted by nerds and hackers. This is already a small truth. Many of the richest people are computer nerds who were once ridiculed by society. *The Matrix* presents a world where these people not only thrive in the world, but they control it.

The film also deals with the issue of reality. Today people insult the computer junky for his lack of physical prowess and lack of action. There is something special about going outside and running or playing a sport. In the future presented by *The Matrix* all actions are completed with the mind. The relationship between the body and mind is the only one that matters. No longer is there a gap between reality and simulation because everything is a simulation. The only world is the one in your head; that is the only reality. There is no longer exercise or true attractiveness. A person who knows the secrets and tricks can become whomever he wants. People can no longer trust their own eyes, because they are not even seeing what they think they are seeing. An extremely important concept in the film is the idea of programming people. People no longer can make decisions about what they like or which types of things they prefer. Someone just programs the idea into you and you like the food you are eating. This concept is horrifying because people will not even be able to trust themselves. The loss of one's body, and the loss of control of oneself in general, is a terrible thought that could potentially be the future of mankind.

The film is very pro-hacker culture and makes many arguments that hackers have been making since the beginning. One of the key beliefs of hacker culture is that the computer is the doorway to a fantastic world where a person can do anything he wants and be anyone he wants if he only has the knowledge and skills to do it. The entire concept of the white rabbit and the Alice in Wonderland theme is part of this doorway to a new world fantasy existence. Today, people can only construct micro-worlds where a few things work the way they want and as technology has progressed they have gained more control, but the ultimate goal is really what *The Matrix* represents: an entire world of code where people can program themselves nice clothes, fashionable haircuts, weapons, abilities, and even beautiful women. In a hacker's dream world like this, they can even give themselves special powers including dodging bullets and flying. The

computer world is so real that if you die in the Matrix, you actually die in real life as well. *The Matrix* is truly a dream come true for hackers, but for the rest of us it might actually be a nightmare.

An extremely relevant issue that is dealt with in the film and is becoming more and more troublesome every day is cyber crime. Every day people's identities are stolen, money is funneled into other people's accounts and information in general is taken and changed by cyber criminals. This is true even in *The Matrix*, but both machines and hackers alike do it. The normal people are not really safe from anyone. Arguably the hackers, who are glorified as the heroes of the story, are fighting with the ultimate goal of saving humanity from the slavery forced upon them by the machines, but they too kill many people and use their abilities to take advantage of the system and the people trying to function within it. In the future, there is no safety for the normal human being. If one power is not using you, the other one is. There will be no true safety for the common man.

The most important issue in the movie and probably the biggest fear of modern society is the ever-increasing power of the machines. Programmers sit all day trying to build better and smarter machines. Robots with artificial intelligence that can walk and talk just like any human being. The overarching dream of the hacker or computer nerd is to create a world where computers are reality because machines are formulaic and easier to understand than the odd randomness of real people. The problem is what happens when machines get too powerful and too smart? In the film, the machines become so intelligent and so powerful that they destroy the world of man and enslave them in a great computer program called the Matrix. The people are hooked up to this machine and used as power resources to energize the machines that man created and should have dominion over. It is a truly terrifying scene to see all of humanity caged

in little pods being sucked dry. The machines are so intelligent that they created a world inside the computer where people's minds are tricked into thinking they are living real lives being a normal part of society. This is truly the dream world of the hacker, but not in the way he originally imagined it. Through the machines, all of humanity's most terrible fears are played out within the film.

The first problem with the world of the computers is the regulation. The Matrix is policed by a group of programs called Agents. These beings are carbon copies of today's image of the government agent who is out to get you. The major problem with these programs is that they will police you for anything. If you have an idea that is too original, they show up and make sure you stop. If you do something out of the ordinary, they show up and stop you. The Agents are the ultimate big brother system. They make sure the world stays the same and that no one does anything to suggest to everyone that it is all just one big video game. The world of the future is one riddled with rules and regulations. There are no secrets, no privacy, and the agents can even control people's bodies. This spectacular power is shown in two separate ways. The first and more horrifying to see is its ability to manipulate the physical makeup of other people. This is shown when they take Neo into a room and have his mouth disappear. It actually seals up into flat skin on his face so that he will not even be able to scream while the agents implant machine into his body that will give his whereabouts away automatically. They then blank his mind so that he cannot even remember if the event actually happened or not. The second way they can manipulate humans is by using them to travel instantly from place to place. At random points in the film, the Agents transform from other people and take over their bodies so they can do their work. This is terrifying because it truly means that you are never safe and never in privacy because the Agents can be anyone. There can be no secrets or intimacy, because you never know

when the police are going to just pop up out of nowhere as your best friend or even your lover.

This is the true regulated society that people say the government is trying to create, a place where the people in charge know everything and have no difficulty making sure things go their way.

The machines are also extremely dangerous outside of the Matrix. They are terrible-looking flying squid-like creatures that have no problem killing people and do it in the most brutal ways when given the chance. They have super-enhanced abilities and are able to track down life like the most dangerous predator. This is scary because, even if you somehow escape from the horror that is the computer existence, you still have to deal with being hunted down like an animal by a mechanical beast.

*The Matrix* is truly a great film that expresses issues that are relevant today and is able to show them in the extreme in hopes of warning humanity of what may be coming our way. It brings up new issues that have not been created yet and it does not even make arguments that seem too farfetched from what many people have already been talking about. If you just have a little imagination and assume that people really are smart enough to create something smarter than themselves, then this film becomes completely believable. *The Matrix* is not just a movie; it is a very possible prophecy.