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Visaulity, Genre, and Narrative in *The Matrix*

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中文摘要

　　駭客任務三部曲是關於人類反抗科技霸權的故事，片中充滿了顛覆的政治性意涵。但這三部電影本身卻又是當代好萊塢最先進科技的結晶。同時，駭客任務三部曲中人類與科技的關係並非傳統二元對立的關係，因此，本文試圖分析駭客任務三部曲中人類與科技的關係以及其背後的政治性訊息。本文首先從駭客任務三部曲中的視覺效果出發，指出本片如何使用先進電腦科技呈現各種從流行文化拼貼而來的元素。再進一步分析駭客任務三部曲作為九零年代末期的賽博朋客(cyberpunk)作品，除了繼承傳統美國賽博朋客，同時也融入日本賽博朋客元素，展現出一種新賽博朋客的共存特質。這個共存特質也可在駭客任務三部曲的敘事結構中發現。本文發現駭客任務三部曲的敘事結構與古典西部片非常類似。兩者都藉由一個擁有雙重特質的英雄來解決衝突的意識型態。在駭客任務三部曲中，除了人類與科技的衝突之外，人性與資本主義的衝突也藉由尼歐這個具有雙重特質的英雄居中協調而達成平衡。因此，本文認為駭客任務三部曲的意識型態傾向並非揚棄科技或顛覆現有體制，而是在資本主義體制下操弄科技以獲得樂趣。

關鍵字：駭客任務，視覺效果，賽博朋客，西部片，資本主義。

Abstract

The Matrix trilogy is about mankind's revolutions against the hegemony of technology.   Subversive political messages against technology and current capitalist system are abundant in the trilogy.   However, the trilogy itself is the very product of the most advanced technology of Hollywood cinema, a giant capitalist system. Therefore, the complex relationship between humanity and technology along with the political messages are the aims of this thesis. Starting with the visuality in the trilogy, this thesis demonstrates how the pastiches of popular culture elements are achieved by advanced technology.   And *The Matrix* trilogy as a cyberpunk work in the late nineties fuses traditional American cyberpunk with Japanese cyberpunk.   This notion of fusion is also demonstrated in the narrative structure of the trilogy.   Given the narrative structure of a classical Western, the trilogy relies on a composite hero, who has qualities from the opposite sides, to solve the ideological conflicts.   Besides the conflicts between mankind and technology, the conflicts between humanity and capitalism are also solved by Neo the composite hero.   Therefore, *The Matrix* trilogy provides no escape from the matrix of technology and capitalism.

Keywords: *The Matrix*; visuality; cyberpunk; western; capitalism.

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Premiered on 31st March, 1999, *The Matrix* was an instant success for the Warner

Brothers.   The opening week gross in the U. S. was 27,788,331 U. S. dollars.   In the

following few months, *The Matrix* went on to earn an astonishing gross of

456,300,000 U. S. dollars world-wide, making it No. 45 in box-office of all time.

Nevertheless, the long-waited sequel, *The Matrix Reloaded*, which was released on

May 7th 2003, surpassed the first installment with the gross of 735,600,000 U. S.

dollars, and was No. 18 in all-time box-office.   The final installment of the Matrix

trilogy, *The Matrix Revolutions*, which was premiered at exactly on 2 p. m. GMT

November 5th 2003 in over fifty countries, eventually earned 424,000,000 U. S.

dollars and made it No. 57 on the chart of all-time box-office.[1]   What is more, the

fervor for the green-coded screen was also here in Taiwan; the three Matrix films

respectively earned, 95,000,000, 81,000,000 and 64,000,000 NT dollars[2]; they were

all on the list of Taiwan's top ten box-office movies of each year.

The directors, Andy and Larry Wachowski, who only had only written *Assassins*

(1995) and directed *Bound* (1996), were relatively unknown while the first Matrix

was released.   Yet, with the huge commercial success and film critics' favorable

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[1] These box office figures all comes from The Internet Movie Database. "All-time Worldwide Box Office" 12 June. 2008. <http://www.imdb.com/boxoffice/alltimegross?region=world-wide>
[2] These are Taipei box office figures, acquired from TPBO 台北票房情報網. 12 June. 2008 http://www.taipeibo.com/#top

feedbacks about *The Matrix*, the Wachowski brothers became two of Hollywood big

shots; they ranked No. 27 in *Premiere*'s 2003 annual Power 100 List.   Despite of the

success that the trilogy brought them, the brothers insisted that "they would not have

to do press junkets or interviews of any kind and they would not have to be

photographed for promotional purposes [for the two Matrix sequels] for "they want

the films to speak for themselves."[3]

Indeed, the Matrix trilogy does have much to say.   Since the premiere of The

Matrix in 1999, film critics, audiences, professors, and philosophers have been

discussing the meaning of the films.   The religious, mythological, technological, and

political metaphors and implications that abundantly float in the trilogy, which,

according to the Wachowski brothers, are to "make intellectual action movies."[4] The

result is, along with the huge commercial success, dozens of professor-written books

discussing the philosophies behind the films, numerous articles analyzing the films,

and, of course, countless websites and blogs dedicated to Neo and Trinity.   One of

the most obvious academic ingredients is the notion of the hyperreal in Jean

Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation.* English professor Dino Felluga argues that in

the trilogy the Matrix world is the third order of simulacra that masks the absent of a

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[3] See "Andy Wachowski-Biography." The Internet Movie Database. 23 October. 2007
< http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0905152/bio>
[4] See Agger, Michael. "FILM; And the Oscar for Best Scholar…" The New York Times. 5 May. 2006.
< http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A02EFD8113FF93BA25756C0A9659C8B63>

basic reality.[5]   On the other hand, Professor Andrew Gordon argues that although the

matrix follows the notion of the forth order of simulacra, the films are over optimistic

for they provide a solution to the problem of simulation while Baudrillard believes

there is none.[6] Baudrillard himself also regards the trilogy as a misreading of his

work because of the clear distinction between the real and the unreal, which he

believes is impossible.[7]   He states the new problem of simulation is mistaken with

the classic problem of the illusion, such as Plato's cave.   Also, since the matrix world

is a modern city, the films make commentaries on the way each member of the

audience is itself a coppertop manipulated by and feed the capital. Slavoj Zizek points

out the matrix is not about the future but about the present day America in the

oppressive all enveloping virtual capitalism.[8]   In this view, Chad Barnett argues that

The Matrix revives the cyberpunk genre with a radical message of revolt against the

capitalist system.[9]   However, scholar of cultural studies Lisa Nakamura points out

that even though the trilogy appears to be politically radical, it is racially stereotyped.

Non-Caucasians are merely sidekicks waiting to be saved, while the decisive battles

take place between white men, implying the advantage of white men in the real

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[5] See "The Matrix: Paradigm of Post-Modernism or Intellectual Poseur? (Part I)."
[6] See "The Matrix: Paradigm of Post-Modernism or Intellectual Poseur? (Part II)."
[7] See Aude Lancelin's interview "Interview with Jean Baudrillard." Trans. Gary Genosko and Adam
    Bryx. Le Nouvel Observateur. 5 May 2005
[8] See "Welcome to the Desert of the Real!" <http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/1588/>
[9] See "Reviving Cyberpunk: (Re)Constructing the Subject and Mapping Cyberspace in the
Wachowski Brothers' Film The Matrix."

world.[10]   Despite Keanu Reeves's multiracial background, as Nakamura points out,

many audiences regard him as white when he puts on the trendy outfits in the trilogy.

Film scholar Peter Feng also argues that the racial issues are rendered invisible by

Keanu Reeves and the employment of kung fu.[11]   Sharing similar point of view,

scholar Claudia Springer states the racial stereotypes in the trilogy and its

appropriations of the cool elements in contemporary popular culture as its marketing

strategy.

However, what are the elements that make the trilogy so popular and influential?

In this thesis I will analyze *The Matrix* trilogy in its visuality, genre elements, and

narrative structure.

In chapter 1, I will look into the visual effects that tremendously popularize the

trilogy. As one of the major visual effects, the costumes not only distinguish the

trilogy from contemporary sci-fi films but also carry an independent meaning: the

fetishistic nature of the Zion warriors.   Besides, the trilogy pastiches many famous

elements from classic Hollywood films and American popular culture and presents

them with Hollywood's advanced computer graphic engineering.   Along with

pastiches from America itself, Japanese animations influence *The Matrix*, too.   Also,

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[10] See "Race in the construct and the Construction of Race: The Consensual Hallucination" of
Multiculturalism in the Fictions of Cyberspace" in her book: Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity
on the Internet
[11] See his "False Double Consciousness: Race, Virtual Reality and the Assimilation of Hong Kong
Action Cinema in *The Matrix*."

kung fu from Hong Kong cinema is heavily employed and digitalized, making the

trilogy a spectacular of bodies as well as technology.   And elements from video

games thrill the audiences by the visual feast.   All in all, the trilogy satisfies the

audiences with dazzling visual effects achieved by the state of the art computer

technology.   Moreover, while the Matrix world is a vivid representation of the real

world that the audiences dwell in, the high-tech manipulation of real world in *The*

Matrix indicates the very penetration of technology into the reality.   In other words,

the visual effects in *The Matrix* trilogy are more than sensual richness; they reflect a

contemporary condition about technology and human lives.

The anxiety about technology was fulfilled in the 1980's cyberpunk genre, which

The Matrix trilogy revives and revises.   In chapter 2, I will demonstrate two classic

cyberpunk works *Blade Runner* and *Neuromancer*'s influences on the trilogy along

with the cyberpunk visual style affected by the 1950s film noir.   But the American

anxiety about technology and the Orients in cyberpunk is revised when *The Matrix*

fuses elements from *Ghost in the Shell*, a Japanese cyberpunk animation.   In the

1980s Japanese technological and economical powers threaten the Western, while

technology as Japan's national identity has always been a long and painful history.

But in *The Matrix*, the conflicts between the Orients and the Western are absent.

Instead of the hostility toward technology and the Orients in 1980s cyberpunk, the

elements from *Ghost in the Shell* in *The Matrix* are not merely a homage to Japanese animation but to suggest a universally digitalized world where computer technology surpasses humanity.   Therefore, as new cyberpunk films, the trilogy is not as naïve as 1980s cyberpunk that believes in humanity's triumph over technology.   Rather, it suggests that in the world dominated by technology, an individual's survival relies on his / her faith and ability in technology.

The importance of one's ability is emphasized in the narrative structure of classical western films.   In chapter 3, I will demonstrate the similarity in narrative structures between *The Matrix* trilogy and a classical western film, *Shane*.   In classical western narrative structure, the hero is the solution to the conflicts between social value and capitalist urges.   The hero uses his ability, required by competitive capital market, to protect the society that he cherishes for social values from the villains who maximize their self-interests.   The classical western narrative structure in the trilogy suggests the importance of one's ability in technology.   Nevertheless, considering the essence of the Matrix system as cultural industry, the Matrix system is indeed a capitalist system. And the Zion warriors are not meant to emancipate mankind from the Matrix / market because their fetishistic attitude toward outfits reveals their false belief in the real. Therefore, the trilogy as new cyberpunk that strengthens one's belief in technology is not about how to escape from the dominating

Matrix / market.

CHAPTER 1   Visuality

The *Matrix* trilogy is abundant in pop culture elements, such as fashion,

Hollywood movies, Japanese anime, Hong Kong Kung Fu, and computer technology.

These elements not only satisfy the audience with amazing visual impacts but also

contribute greatly to box office.   Audiences of different classes or genders can fulfill

their individual needs in the trilogy.   In other words, the visual effects in the trilogy,

besides necessarily being spectacular for a sci-fi movie, are a manifestation of

postmodern aesthetics: pastiche cross cultural elements.

I.   Costume

The Matrix's emphasis on chic costume is rare in any kind of movie. The

characters in dystopian Sci-fi movies, such as the classic *Blade Runner* (1982) or

contemporary *eXistenZ* (1999) and *Dark City(1998)*, traditionally dress in shabby

clothes.   This use of chic costume reverses the stereotype dull-looking rebels in sci-fi

movies, and makes them cool hackers.   In the opening act of *The Matrix*, when

Trinity flies through air like a bullet, most audiences are definitely stunned by the

visual effect.   Not only the flight itself is astonishing, but also Trinity's outfit was

fascinating.   She wears black PVC jumpsuit which covers and tied all her body; yet,

the shinning surface of the jumpsuit reflected lights and thus made Trinity's silhouette

a beautiful curve.   From this moment on, the audiences discover that costumes are

important visual elements in *The Matrix*.　Beside Trinity's shinning PVC suit, Neo's

black trench coat and military boots by Airwalk along with Morpheus' pillar-less

sunglasses by the Blinde are also memorable costumes in the first installment.　Since

then, costumes have become one of the key features of *The Matrix* Trilogy.

　　Nevertheless, as the trilogy's costume designer Kym Barrett points out in an

interview, *"…the style of the movie is very 'comic book', it's very sharp.　The boys

have certain shapes that work within their storytelling frame, and iconoclastic

silhouettes that give you a certain subconscious feeling about what's happening

quickly."[12]*　In other words, the outfits are indications of the characters' function.

For example, Neo's trench coat with cleric collar in *Reloaded* and *Revolutions* implies

his Jesus-like figure and destiny.　Trinity's black suit represents her potency to kill in

the Matrix world.　And Agent Smith's black business suit indicates his status as the

guardian of the Matrix system.　The costume in The Matrix is so important that the

costume almost equals the character.　When the audience sees or thinks of Trinity,

what occurs to them is not Carrie-Ann Moss' face and body; instead, it is black PVC

jumpsuit that stands out.　It is the same with Neo; it is his black trench coat and

sunglasses that the audience recognizes, rather than Keanu Reeves' pretty but pale and

confused face.　The result is that the costumes serve as recognitions for characters,

[12] See "Kym Barrett-Interview." The Matrix Trilogy. 15 November. 2006.
< http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com/rl_cmp/rl_interview_kym_barrett.html>

the human fleshes under the clothes are of less importance.   What matters are the suits, the trench coats and the sunglasses.

However, while the costume equals the function of the character, the costume itself is functionless.   The way that the costume refers to the function is by purely psychological imagination.   That is, Neo's messianic role is indicated by how the outfit looks rather than what it can do to help him.   Or, Trinity's black suit does not benefit her when she fights with agents; her killer potency is merely an imagination from the reflective blackness.   Thus, the costumes in the trilogy are of no practical functions; what they represent, besides the imagination of the function of the character, is a mere admiration of beauty and vanity.

The style of the costumes are noted by many for their fetishistic nature, such as Peter Rainer puts it while reviewing *Revolutions:* "fashionistas will be happy to know that Neo remains a sleek icon in basic black and Trinity's patent-leather jumpsuits are as fetishistic as ever.*"[13]*   The "fetishism" that Rainer indicates apparently refers to the sexual fetishist outfit style that often uses leather, latex or PVC as cloth.   In sexual fetishism, the objects that are the subject of sexual desire and fantasy, not the human flesh.   Imagination and psychological fixations are projected upon the objects. Barrett's argument that the costume indicates the character's function is similar.   In

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[13]   Rainer, Peter. "Science Friction" <u>New York Magazine. 7 April. 2006.</u>
<http://nymag.com/nymetro/movies/reviews/n_8702/>

this way, the function that she claims the costumes indicate is purely a fetishistic

imagination.   The function is just a psychological imagination projected upon the

costume.   Thus, the function is again has little to do with the character.   It is the

costume that carries the meaning, not the person who wears it.

That leads to an allusion to a Marxist reading of the costume: commodity

fetishism.   In Marxism, when an object enters the market as commodity, it is given

exchange value in its relation to other commodities.   The usefulness of the object,

the use value, is of less importance.   What is being worshiped is the exchange value

projected upon the object.   As Chang Hsia-hung puts it, *"what Marx criticizes in The*

Fetishism of Commodity is the fetishism of abstract exchange value: fetishizes the

invisible, non-material, transcendental to human senses.   Commodity Fetishism

makes the non-material [exchange values] as the trademark of capitalism."[14]

Thomas Anderson enters the Matrix / market and becomes Neo by putting on the

trench coat / exchange value. It is this trench coat that signifies him as The One in

relation to others waiting to be saved.   "The relation between persons is expressed as

a relation between things."[15]   That is, if Neo and Trinity's function is projected upon

their costumes, the relation between persons in the Matrix is expressed as the relations

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[14] See Chang Hsiao-hung's 在百貨公司遇見狼. P 34.   The original text is:
馬克思所批判的「商品拜物」拜的是抽象的交換價值,「將不可見者,非物質者,超越感官知覺
者拜物化。商品拜物將非物質性變成資本主義的正字標記。」
[15] See Marx's Capital Volume 1. Section 4. The Fetishism of Commodity and the Secret thereof.

between the things, the costumes.   Yet, as Chang points out the "invisibleness" of

exchange value, *The Matrix* boldly emphasizes the visual effects of the outfits /

exchange values.

Thus, the costume in the trilogy is not only a part of the visual experiences.   As

British film scholar Pamela Church Gibson points out that while she analyze the

costumes in *The Matrix* costumes have two ways to be interpreted.   One presents

"costume as complement of the plot, is part of the mise-en-scene" the other is that

"costume detached from plot and character, providing a set of meanings independent

from the film's forward movement" (115).   As a complement of the mise-scene, the

costumes serve as the quest for pure beauty and visual richness, as Gibson states that

"the use of costume in the film provides a 'spectacular' fetishism largely emptied of

sexual content and, in line with the film's strategies of quotation from the world of

contemporary fashion and style."[16]   Yet, as independent meaning, the costumes

indicate the trilogy's fetishistic nature toward commodity.   A detailed discussion will

be presented in chapter three.

II.   Hollywood Pastiches

One of the great pleasures for the experienced audience while viewing *The*

Matrix trilogy is to pick up the pieces of classic movies and American pop culture.

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[16] See her " Fashion, Fetish and Spetacle: The Matrix Dresses Up-and-Down" p115.

That is, the trilogy uses many elements from other famous Hollywood movies and

pop culture.   Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is referenced many

times in the first installment, such as "follow the white rabbit," and "see how deep the

rabbit hole goes." Morpheus even directly talks to bewildered Neo, saying "You take

the red pill - you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes."

Also in the same installment, Cypher's "it means buckle your seatbelt, Dorothy, 'cause

Kansas is going bye-bye" is from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939).   Also, the duel between

Neo and Smith in the subway station resembles to a classic western gunfight, which is

a reference to *High Noon* (1952) according to Vanessa Sibbald.[17]

Besides, the allusions to classic sci-fi movies are also plenty.   For example, the

APU (Armed Personnel Unit) in *Revolutions* resembles to the mechanical robot that

Ripley drives to fight against the dark drooling monster in *Aliens* (1986).   In the first

installment when Neo sells illegal software to his friends, the disc is identical to those

memory discs in *Strange Days* (1995)*;* they are MiniDiscs invented by Sony in 1991.

Nevertheless, to the audience of *Star Wars,* the mechanical design in *The Matrix*

trilogy will also be familiar.   Take Morpheus' Nebuchadnezzar for instance, the

bumpy skin and shuttle shape are quite similar to Han Solo's Millennium Falcon in

Star Wars. In fact, as Vanessa Sibbald points out, "when the Nebuchadnezzar hides

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[17] See her "The Matrix: Film History 101" available online at
<http://media.www.nineronline.com/media/storage/paper971/news/2003/05/08/Entertainment/the-Matrix.Film.History.101-2005452.shtml>

from the Sentinels underneath a tunnel, it echoes a similar scene in 1977's "Star Wars"

when the Millennium Falcon hides from fighters behind an asteroid."

The most obvious example of ingredients from other movies is Neo's flight in

Reloaded. When he is trapped in the mountainside and desperately wants to save

Morpheus, Trinity and the Keymaker, he springs up from the ground and certainly

flies like Superman. In another scene, when he is asked how Neo is, Link literally

replies "He is doing his Superman thing!" Yet, near the ending of *Reloaded*, when

Neo flies in ultra supersonic speed to rescue Trinity, the flight resembles what

Superman did in *Superman: The Movie* (1978). They both fly fast to revive the one

they love. Neo flies to catch falling Trinity and to resurrect her against his dooming

prophetical dream; Superman flies so fast around the world that he turns back time

and also resurrects his beloved Lois Lane from death.

However, although there are plenty of references to other Hollywood classic

sci-fi movies, there is no indication of paying homage in the trilogy. All the

references are fragments from other movies. Take the APU for example, the original

mechanical robot in *Aliens* is significant because of its phallic image. Ripley as a

female warrior has to "erect" with the aid of the machine to fight against the monster.

In *Revolutions*, on the contrary, the APUs are driven by male soldiers against flying

machines. Moreover, while Ripley fights with the monster only with mechanical

arms, the soldiers in *Revolutions* use machine guns to shoot down the machine squids.

One fight contains implication of a female warrior's erection; the other, on the

contrary, is simply shooting.   Or in Neo's case, while he flies like Superman to save

Trinity, he in fact risks all human beings on earth, unlike Superman who saves Lois

Lane and the whole planet.   In *Superman: The Movie,* while saving Lane, Superman

turns back the time to resurrect Lane; at the same time, he also un-does the harm that

the bad guys do to earth.   When Neo faces the choice between whole human being

and Trinity in Architect's room, he chooses Trinity and literally puts all human beings

in danger of extinction.   Although Neo and Superman both save the ones they love,

the motives and results are quite different.   Therefore, these allusions are not to pay

homage to the classics.   The allusions are merely transplants of visual elements from

the classic Hollywood Sci-fi movies that have nothing to do with the original ideas or

ideology. In other words, they are pastiches.   The Wachowski brothers' purpose is to

strengthen the visual richness and the box office as well.   It is a sign of declining

creativity in the sci-fi genre.   In fact, according to the box office record of past 20

years, there is an obvious decline of Sci-fi movies of original stories.   The best

selling Sci-fi movies, such as *Men in Black* I &II (1997, 2002), *X-Men* (2000), and

Star Wars prologue series (1999, 2002, and 2005), are adapted from popular comics or

sequels to successful predecessors.

III. Japanese Anime

Fortunately, the directors' integration of Hollywood and Japanese anime brings

freshness to the Sci-fi genre.   The final climax of the trilogy, the fight between Neo

and Smith, echoes to the fights sequences in *Dragon Ball Z* by Akira Toriyama, a very

popular and famous Japanese manga and anime series in both Asian and American

market.   In *Dragon Ball Z*, whenever there is a battle between good and evil, the

heroes and villains will fly into the air and fight against each other with bare hands;

the power of the characters are so huge that they often destroy buildings nearby.

That is exactly what happens in the end of *Revolutions*, the duelists fly in the air with

high speed and smash each other by punches and kicks causing building collapses.

Many audiences regard this fight as *Dragon Ball Z* flesh and bone version, even the

coming movie adaption of *Dragon Ball Z* is promised to have fight scenes as similar

as to those in *Revolutions*.[18]

Besides *Dragon ball Z*, Sibbald also points out that "the scene in which Neo

meets the gifted children in the Oracle's apartment is an homage to the similar scene

at the end of *Akira* and after destroying Agent Smith, Neo takes a deep breath that

seems to buckle the fabric of reality.   This is directly from *Akira.*"   Yet, the anime

movie that influences the trilogy is probably *Ghost in the Shell* (1995).   It is noted

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[18] The film is scheduled to release in summer 2009.   The fight scene is designed by 87eleven, the
same stunt team worked on The Matrix trilogy.   Director James Wong also states the fight will be as
similar as the last fight scene in *Revolutions*.   See
<http://hubpages.com/hub/Dragonball-Z-movie-2009>.

that the Wachowski brothers intended to do a live version of *Ghost in the Shell*.

Several scenes in the first installment are almost identical to some in *Ghost in the Shell*.   A detailed comparison will be discussed later in chapter two.

What the Wachowski brothers successfully achieve is the integration of Japanese anime into an American film and context.   The movie's newness comes largely from exotic elements.   Beside Japanese anime, Hong Kong kung fu fighting style has also influences the trilogy.

IV. Kung fu

Kung fu action movies have always been one of the great traditions of Hong Kong cinema industry.   In the 1960s to 1980s, there was Bruce Lee, whose popularity not only privileged Hong Kong and Asia, but was also shared by American audiences.   In 1973, *Enter the Dragon*, Bruce Lee's posthumous work, earned 25,000,000 U. S dollar in America and 90,000,000 U.S. dollars worldwide.   And Lee's unique fighting style, namely the "Jeet Kune Do," was so famous that the style itself became a representative of Oriental martial art in Hollywood cinema. [19] Lee's role as a kung fu hero was followed by another Hong Kong action hero, Jackie Chen, whose *The Big Brawl* (1980) was produced in America by the same team as *Enter the Dragon,* though he did not really make it into the mainstream Hollywood

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[19] According to Wang Nien-Ying, " after winning both local and international popularity, Bruce Lee not only brought about the boom of kung fu genre in the 1970s Hong Kong film industry but also established his cross-cultural status as a signifier of Chinese kung fu to the world audiences" (7).

until *Rush Hour* in 1998.   Just about the same time, Jet Li entered Hollywood in

Lethal Weapon 4 (1998), co-starring with Mel Gibson.   And the next year, fight

choreographer Yuen Woo-ping's groundbreaking work, *The Matrix*, was released.

Despite that Hollywood has been somehow familiar with Hong Kong kung fu

movies, real kung fu was not employed by Hollywood directors until the late 90s.

Before that, Hollywood action movies were mostly about big muscles, gunfire and

blue-screen explosions.   As film critic Richard Corliss points out that "in Hollywood

special effects define the action film."[20]   And *The Matrix* is the perhaps first movie

that successfully combines Hong Kong kung fu with Hollywood action.   What Yuen

Woo-ping does in *The Matrix* trilogy is literally train these movie stars with martial

arts, and make them act and fight personally with each other before the lenses.   Thus,

in *The Matrix Reloaded*, we see Keanu Reeves himself as Neo dresses in chic black

coat and fights against Seraph (Collin Chou, a kung fu master from Taiwan) in a very

Jet Li way with Chinese drums score.   Another scene in *Reloaded,* when Neo fights

against Merovingian's vampires and werewolves, the style of one against many with

the clever use of weapons and environment is obviously influenced by Jackie Chen's

dancing-like tense fighting style.   And certainly the audience will recognize the

patent gesture and yell of Bruce Lee along with the pose of Jet Li's most famous role,

---

[20] Corliss, Richard. "Jackie Chan!" *Time*. 13 February. 1995. p.82.

Wong Fei-hung, when Neo fights Morpheus in the training construct in the first

installment.

Since the release of *The Matrix* in 1999, fight sequences in Hollywood films

have been changed by the use of kung fu.   Because of the success of *The Matrix*,

later Yuen Woo-ping choreographs Hollywood and international big budget movies:

Couching Tiger and Hidden Dragon (2000), *Kill Bill1* (2003)*, Kill Bill 2* (2004)*,*

Kung-fu (2004)*, and Danny the Dog* (2005).   Hong Kong kung fu becomes an

important element of fight sequences, and some Hollywood movies, though without

Hong Kong kung fu team, are trying to demonstrate martial arts.   *Equilibrium* (2002)

is one of the movies influenced by *The Matrix* trilogy.   It tells a story in the near

future when the human society is under a fascist regime that forbids human emotions;

and the hero is trying to liberate human beings.   Besides the similar story, the fight

sequences in *Equilibrium* are obviously influenced by *The Matrix*.   The martial art in

the film is called Gun-kata (Japanese for "form") which is basically kung fu moves

plus pistols as extensional weapon.   Kurt Wimmer confessed unwillingly in an

interview when being asked about the inspiration of the fight scenes and the

comparison to *The Matrix*:

> No, I don't even remotely agree with *The Matrix* comparisons.   In my
>
> opinion, they are made by action philistines who cannot distinguish between

bullet-time and the lack of it, between wire-fu and the absence of it,

between slow-motion and the lack of it.   It is a dull mathematics to simply

say, science fiction plus action equals *The Matrix*.   Regarding which action

films inspire me, well. . .   ironically, *The Matrix*…"[21]

Yet, the distinguishing feature of kung fu in *The Matrix* Trilogy is the integration

of martial art and modern technology, i.e. the computer graphic engineering.   One

particular example is "the Burly Brawl" in *Reloaded*, in which Neo fights against

more than one hundred Agent Smiths in a park.   The fight choreography itself is

mostly traditional kung fu: a man fights with his bare hands and a stick; but the

cinematography is advanced.   With the help of computer technology, the movement

of the camera, unlike medium shot in traditional kung fu movies, ranges from

bird-view shots, to extreme close up of the facial expression, and to a dizzying

rotating 360 degree shot around the fight.   Another example is the final duel between

Neo and Smith in *Revolutions*, these two arch- rivals fight violently with each other

not only on the ground but also in the air.   These two scenes demonstrate how

Hollywood computer technology changed Hong Kong Kung fu from two dimensional

to three dimensional.   A traditional Hong Kong kung fu movie will usually present

the fight sequence in medium shot in which the two duelists stand at the opposite

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[21] See Snider, John. "Interview: Kurt Wimmer (Writer/Director: Equilibrium). SciFiDimensions.com.
< http://www.scifidimensions.com/May03/kurtwimmer.htm>

sides of the screen and fight.   But with the aid of Hollywood's advanced computer

technology, the camera now can use unlimited angles to achieve the maximum visual

effect.   As a result, the duelists are liberated from gravity and now can fight the

enemy in all kinds of environment.   That is, space is no longer a constraint.

Moreover, with the aid of computer technology, not only space is altered; time is

given different character as well.   Time is capable of being manipulated.   Take the

famous "bullet time" for instance, in essence it is similar to a traditional kung fu

sequence that a character moves so fast that he or she dodges flying daggers with ease.

But advanced technology renders the dodge of bullets a spatial and chronological

spectacle.   When Neo bends over and the camera pans around him, what the

audience sees is not only a spatial spectacular, i.e. the panorama shot around Neo, but

a chronological distortion.   When the bullets fly by, they do not pass by Neo in the

normal speed which is invisible to human eyes.   Instead, the flying bullets are

slowed down for the audiences to see better with the 360 degrees movement of the

camera.   Space and time are simultaneously manipulated in this scene.   Computer

technology not only "cubical-izes" traditional kung fu fighting, but also manipulates

time as well.

V.   Game

The major action scenes of each installment resemble the game genres.

Specifically speaking, the lobby shooting scene in *The Matrix* comes from a FPS

game (First Person Shooting), the highway chase scene in *Reloaded* as a RCG

(Racing Game), and the defense of Zion in *Revolutions* as a STG (Shooting Game).

In *The Matrix*, the lobby scene is famous for its Dolby 5. 1 digital surrounding sound,

which helps *The Matrix* DVD become the best selling DVD of all time in 2000.[22]

The shooting itself resembles to the major PC game genre, FPS.   Take the hottest

FPS at that time, *Counter Strike*, for example, the player has to eliminate all the

enemies under sever gunfire in a close environment.   In order to do so, the player

must learn to move precisely to avoid the attack and take cover behind walls, pillars,

boxes, or anything available when necessary.   The most important skill and the most

significant feature in playing FPS is that the player must carry all kinds of weapons

and use them skillfully and efficiently.   What Neo and Trinity demonstrate in the

lobby is an updated version of FPS.   They carry a lot of guns to the location, and in

order to accomplish the mission, they use their weapons very skillfully and literally

move to avoid enemies' gunfire.   In *Reloaded*, the twenty-minute long highway

chase is the most memorable scene, the audiences will certain get excited by the speed

that Trinity rides against heavy traffic on the highway with the Keymaker on a Ducati

975 super motorbike.   The thrill of speed that scene brings is also what RCG aims

---

[22] Even though in 1999 DVD players were not as common as it is now, *The Matrix* was the first film sold three million copies of DVDs, making it the best selling DVD of all time in 2000.   And it also won four Oscars: Best Editing, Best Sound Effects Editing, Best Visual Effects and Best Sound.   See <http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com/rl_cmp/rl_press_August_01_00.html>

for.   A famous racing and action game named *Grand Theft Auto* is similar to the

scene.   In this game, the player's role is a gangster who has to "acquire" all kinds of

vehicles in order to accomplish missions and avoid police pursuit.   Again, what

Morpheus and Trinity do parallels the game; they acquire a Cadillac CTS in order to

shake off the white ghost twins; later Trinity takes a motorcycle to escape from

Agents.   Besides, when she rides in the narrow space between cars on the highway,

the movement reminds young audience of a NBA Lakers player, Kobe Bryant's TV

commercial for his own Adidas basketball shoes in 1999.   In that commercial, Kobe

Bryant also rides a motorcycle with high speed on freeway.   When facing heavy

traffic, he also thrills the audiences by riding slickly through the narrow space

between cars. [23]   And the Burly Brawl in *Reloaded* scene is also often compared to a

contemporary PlayStation2 videogame *Dynasty Warriors* (2000) produced and

published by Koei, a Japanese software company.   In the game, the warriors have all

kinds of unique moves to blow enemies away; that is exactly what Neo does to his

ever- multiplying enemies.   As to the defense of Zion in *Revolutions*, the shower of

APU pullets and squid attacks are the features of shooting games.   Even when

Morpheus and Link fly back to Zion, their counterattack to the following squids is

also like a shooting game.   A shot on Link's machinegun's screen when he aims at

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[23] To see this commercial at http://tw.youtube.com/watch?v=rNkTKsoMOLI 13 June. 2008

the squids reveals that the essential of the scene: it looks exactly like an arcade

shooting game console.

Left: A character in Dynasty Warrior blows enemies away. Right: Neo blows Smiths

away in the Burly Brawl.

Indeed, the trilogy is like a game, as journalist Ted Antony states that "*The*

Matrix plays more like a video game than a movie."[24]   In the first installment,

Nebuchadnezzar itself is a giant machine on which there are numerous computers for

simulation and hacking.   Neo's experience on board is like being in an arcade game

center.   We see him play the simulation games of "the fight with Morpheus."   In

this scene we see Neo as the player and Morpheus as the boss of the game.   As the

common procedure of gaming, the player Neo at the beginning is defeated by the

more powerful boss Morpheus.   But after continuous practices, the player will finally

surpass the boss.   Nevertheless, in the final stage when Neo is running for life from

the Agents in the streets and apartments, the process is also like a contemporary

---

[24] Antony, Ted, "At the Movies: The Matrix," Associate Press, March 30, 1999.

horror/thriller game on PlayStation: Biohazard 3, produced by Capcom, also a

Japanese company.   The player is also running for life in the streets and buildings

from zombies, which are also creatures with human appearance but without human

hearts.   In *Biohazard 3*, the player has to open all kinds of door in order to escape

from the zombie city, and sometimes the boss waits behind the door.   If the player is

not ready or not experienced enough, the outcome will usually be a sudden death of

the player.   It is the same with Neo; he opens the door, he meets the boss Agent

Smith, not ready yet, and suddenly dies.   Fortunately, it is a game. In *Biohazard 3*,

the player can always restart again.   In the Matrix game, Neo also restarts again, it is

Trinity who kisses Neo.   That is, she pushes the "restart" button, or, as in arcade

games, she inserts the coins, and Neo resurrects from death.   This time Neo knows

the trick and thus defeats Agent Smith.   And as the tradition of videogame, the robot

boss must explode after being defeated.   Agent Smith, the sentinel computer

program does explode after being defeated.

The abundant game elements in The Matrix trilogy indicate a fact that game

industry and movie industry are cooperating much closer nowadays.   The mutual

adoptions between movies and game industry become common nowadays.   From

1999 to present day, there are at least fourteen movies in the annual top ten of box

office being adapted to games: *Toy Story 2 (1999)*, *The Matrix*(1999), *Tarzan* (1999),

Harry Potter (1999), *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* (1999), *Lord of the Rings*: *The*

Two Towers (2001), *Ice Age (2002)*, *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch,*

and The Wardrobe (2005), and *King Kong* (2005).   On the other hand, video games

are being adapted to movies as well, to name a few, such as *Final Fantasy: The Spirits*

Within (2001), *Lara* Croft: *Tomb Raider* (2001), *Resident Evil*[25] (2004), *Doom (2002)*,

DOA: Dead or Alive (2006), and *Silent Hill (2006)*.   Together, game and movie

industry provide a huge ranges of entrainment products.   Playing video games is no

longer children's activity.   The average age of game player in North America is 28

years old, 27 in Europe.   And the age of recreational mini games surprisingly ranges

from 35 to 54.   The numbers of female players are also increasing rapidly as well.[26]

These figures indicate the game market is growing.   In fact, the one of the biggest

game software companies in the world, Electronic Arts, spends 10,000,000 U. S.

dollars on developing a major game.   The budget is like a medium Hollywood

production.   Moreover, according to Electronic Arts' plan, Steven Spielberg will

design three original games for EA.   Their goal is to integrate film techniques into

video games.[27]   This event indicates the integration between game and movie is

indeed changing the movie industry and game industry.   And with this integration,

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[25] Capcom's *Biohazard* was renamed to *Resident Evil* in America due to copyright issues. It movie
adaption was perhaps the most successful among the game movies. The two sequels, *Apocalypse* (2004)
and *Extinction* (2007) were also very popular.
[26] See 蔡燿駿. "挑戰好萊塢的玩樂新勢力", e 天下, 1 December. 2005.
[27] Ibid.

the audiences of *The Matrix* trilogy are encompassed by products of game and movie

industry.   Besides the trilogy itself, there are three games: *The Matrix Online*, *The*

Matrix: Path of Neo, and *Enter The Matrix*.

But the most significant effect that these game elements achieve is not the

dazzling visual feast; rather, that real life is a game. The Matrix city is similar to a real

city in audiences' world, and in that city, playing games is a part of life. If the goal of

a contemporary video game is to assimilate game and film, the Matrix city, as a

representation of real life, is the assimilation of game and real life. That is, as

technology advances, games are more and more realistic; and the Matrix is the

representation of the ultimate game that simulates reality. The simulation of reality by

advanced technology is a common theme in cyberpunk. In the next chapter, I will

discuss the cyberpunk elements in *The Matrix* trilogy and how it alters these elements

to response to contemporary technology dominion.

Chapter 2   Genre

Science fictions are not about science.   They are about disaster, which is one of the

oldest subjects of art…   Thus, the science fiction film … concerned with the

aesthetics of destruction, with the peculiar beauties to be found in wreaking havoc,

making a mess.

Susan Sontag[28]

The Matrix trilogy, as science fiction films, deal with the disastrous future world

where computer technology is the ultimate dominating power.   Also, the human

struggle under the regime of computer locates the trilogy in the cyberpunk tradition of

science fiction.   But at the same time, the trilogy alters American cyberpunk

traditions and fuses with Japanese cyberpunk elements.   The result is a global scale

response to the technology-emerging present world.   In this chapter I will discuss the

traditional American cyberpunk elements in the films as well as the altered cyberpunk

elements with Japanese features which mark the trilogy as a contemporary response to

modern computer technology.

I.   What is cyberpunk?

Cyberpunk emerged in America in the mid-1980s exemplified notably by Ridley

Scott's film Blade Runner (1982) and William Gibson's novel Neuromancer (1984).

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[28] Sontag, Susan. Imagination of Disaster. The Commentary. October 1965: 44-45.

As a subgenre of science fiction, cyberpunk works often deal with the tension

between humanity and technology. The "cyber" part of cyberpunk stands for the

emergence of technology as a threat in the 80s. As Andrew M. Butler, the editor of

Vector, the journal of British Science Fiction Association, points out, a common

theme in many cyberpunk works is "the power of computer to simulate environment"

(14). And cyberspace is often the simulation world that challenges the natural status

of human existence. Yet, technology in cyberpunk not only signifies humanity's

subjectivity crisis but also indicates the westerner's anxiety about the economic

hegemony of Japan in the 80s. By their refined electronic devices and cars, the

Japanese "seemed to be conquering the West by economics" (Butler 8). Therefore,

the zaibatsu-dominated cyberpunk world, though advanced in technology, is often

depicted as chaotic as well as multi-racial.

On the other hand, as film scholar Jason Bukatman argues, cyberpunk is "a

hybrid of science fiction and urban crime narrative." The "punk" part originates

from 1950s' urban crime narratives, such as Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe

novels and Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade novel series, or the movie adaption of

these mean street life stories, films noirs. The heroes in these stories are hard-boiled

detectives baffled by the cases offered by mysterious rich men and the relationship

with beautiful but dangerous femmes fatales. In the anarchic streets populated by

gangsters, drug-dealers, and frauds, the streetwise heroes struggle to discover the truth, which eventually proved far more complicated than he had expected.

Cyberpunk as a combination of science fictions (cyber) and noir narratives (punk), is where low life meets high tech.   The protagonist often comes from lowers origins and ventures to the chaotic world where the truth he seeks is often manipulated by technology.   In other words, cyberpunk inherits the old distrust an individual holds against the society from the 1950's film noir and reflects the new anxiety of the 80s toward technology and Japan.

II.   Two Classic Cyberpunk Works

One of the pioneer works of cyberpunk, the 1982 film *Blade Runner* is based on Philip K. Dick's novel "*Do Androids Dream of Electronic Sheep?*"   In Los Angeles in 2019, a gigantic genetic-engineering company, Tyrell, produces humanoids called "replicants" to be slaves.   They have superior strength, equal intelligence, and identical appearance to human beings, but are only given a lifespan of four years to prevent them from developing emotions and thoughts.   Yet, replicants are "more human than human," as Tyrell states.   They revolt against human masters and are declared illegal; a specialized police force called "Blade Runner" is formed to pursue and kill the replicants.

The protagonist, Deckard, a semi-retired blade runner, is forced to return to work

because some replicants come back to Los Angeles for unknown reasons.   In the

chaotic and rainy maze city Deckard follows minute clues in search of the replicants.

He meets Tyrell in person and his young assistant Rachel for more clues but only

discovers that Rachel is a replicant who believes herself as human for she is implanted

with memories of Tyrell's niece.   Later, Rachel finds out her identity and leaves

Tyrell for Deckard and falls in love with him.   Then, in a crowded market place

Deckard pursues Zhora, a beautiful female replicant assassin, and kills her.   Leon,

the replicant with superhuman strength, who witnesses the death of his friend, beats

Deckard almost to death.   It is Rachel that shoots Leon and saves Deckard's life.

Across the town, the other female replicant, Pris, uses her innocent yet seductive

appearances to get close to Tyrell's friend Sebastian.   Then, she and Roy, the

intelligent and strong leader of the replicants, manage to meet Tyrell with Sebastian's

help.   Only until this moment is their purpose revealed: they want to extend their

short lifespan.   But Tyrell denies the possibility due to limitation of technology.

Roy kills him and Sebastian.   Later, Deckard discovers Pris in Sebastian's apartment

and kills her.   Roy returns at the same time, angered by the death of Pris.   He

pursues after Deckard in the dark shabby apartment.   Eventually, injured Deckard

hangs from a beam on the rainy roof.   Just when he is about to fall, Roy seizes

Deckard's arm and drags him onto the roof.   Roy's lifespan is about to end.   Calmly

he sits down and dies in front of Deckard, leaving him reflecting on the meaning of

humanity.   At the end, Deckard flees with Rachel from the hostile city.

The characters in *Blade Runner* bear resemblances to those in films noirs.

Deckard is like a classic antihero private-eye, cynical, divorced, detached, and yet

resourceful,   involved in events beyond his expectation in a dystopian world.   His

status as an outsider is altered when he meets Rachel, the narrow-waist, fur-dressing,

heavy-smoking, and cold beauty; she is a femme fatale lookalike.   The other female

replicants Zhora and Pris are beautiful and deadly like femme fatale as well.

In film noir and cyberpunk works, memories often become a problem that

creates personal identity crisis.   In the 1944 film noir *Murder, My Sweet*, the story

begins with Marlowe does not know what happened during his blackout and is

accused of murder.   In *Blade Runner*, the implanted memories of Rachel are her

identity and identity crisis at the same time.   Cyberpunk novel author Bruce

Sterling[29] points out that one of the most central themes of cyberpunk is "mind

invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligences,

neurochemistry-techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature

itself."   A replicant she is, Rachel's implant memories makes her more human.

---

[29] Sterling is one of the founders of the cyberpunk movement, along with William Gibson.   He also
co-writes a steampunk novel *The different Engine* with William Gibson in 1994.

Deckard's involvement with her not only consolidates the tension between replicants

and human but also challenges his status as a human.   Rachel's humanity proves the

similarity between humans and replicants.   In contrast to Rachel's human emotions,

Deckard's detachment from society makes him look like a replicant.   A continuous

debate around the film is that if Deckard a replicant or human.   Either way, the

debate shows Deckard's uncertain status as human.

The scientific disaster in *Blade Runner* is two-folded.   Superior technology

produces human being and challenges human subjectivity.   Technology advances on

its own accord, without considering human emotion or morality.   Replicants are so

similar to human beings that they have to be banned for they disturb the status quo of

human being.   Yet, the technology that produces replicants gives no concern about

them.   If technology is their mother, it is a mother that is not a mother.   With

technology dooming humanity, the world is therefore dystopian, similar to the ones in

films noirs.

The aesthetics of distorted urban environment inherited from film noir is one of

the acknowledgeable features of a cyberpunk film.   Although it is technology that

dominates cyberpunk, the outlaw-populated dark streets with glittering neon lights

from film noir remain.   American Scholar Mike Davis points out that in the film a

"stunningly Chandleresque Los Angeles of the third millennium"[30] is depicted.

Moreover, in cyberpunk works such as *Blade Runner* and *Neuromancer* the society is

sinister and Oriental at the same time.   Instead of gambling house or pubs, black

market store that sells artificial organs, sushi stands, and electronic stores with neon

signboard written in Katakana or Chinese now are abounding in the cityscape.   The

inhabitants become technology-driven hackers, cyborgs, drug and implants dealers,

black market merchants, and non-American foreigners.   As Butler notes, while

addressing to the cyberpunk ideology, "there is a mistrust of the Japanese, and behind

that a racist fear of an undifferentiated Asian horde" (15).

Neuromancer, winner of three major science-fiction awards, the Nebula Award,

the Philip K. Dick Award, and Hugo Award, is "the archetypal cyberpunk work." [31]

The noir tradition is visible in the characters, story, and urban environment.   The

protagonist, Case, once a top-notched hacker, strays in the streets of Night City, a

anarchic area in a Japanese port city, as street hustler for his nervous system which

enables him to access the Internet was destroyed due to past events.   The cyberspace

in the future world is accessed through electrodes attaching to the forehead.   He

strives to survive and earn money to regain his ability in black clinics but in vain.

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[30]   Quoted in Joe Nazare's Marlowe in Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk (Re-)Vision of Chandler. P.384.

[31]   Person, Lawrence." Notes Towards A Postcyberpunk Manifesto." <u>Slashdot: News for Nerds, Stuff that Matters</u>. <http://slashdot.org/features/99/10/08/2123255.shtml>

One day a beautiful but dangerous female cyborg killer, Molly, appears and recruits

him to her team.   The patron is a mysterious rich man named Armitage, whose

purpose is unknown to Molly and Case.   Armitage has Case cured to execute his

order: various hack missions and thefts.   As the story progresses, Case and Molly

develop a close personal relationship while Armitage's mental status gradually

becomes unstable.   Finally Molly and Case discover that he is controlled by an

artificial intelligence, Wintermute whose objective is to unite with another AI,

Neuromancer, controlled by the Tessier Ashpool family in a space station named

Freeside.   At the final stage of the mission, when Case tries to hack into

Neuromancer, he is trapped in the virtual reality created by Neuromancer where he

and his dead girlfriend live a peaceful life.   Eventually Case escapes from the virtual

reality and Molly, who is captured by a ninja bodyguard of the family named Hideo,

convinces the present leader of the family, Lady 3Jane Marie-France Tessier Ashpool

to release them and unite Neuromancer with Wintermute.   The mission is therefore

completed.   And Wintermute tells Case that it is the Internet itself; it is everywhere.

Case also is like a classic noir hero, involved in events beyond his

comprehension in an anarchic world.   In the mean street ruled by yakuza, Case

strives for money to buy drugs, until he is hired by a mysterious rich man to a mission

that makes him involved with thefts, crimes, deadly females, murders, and

complicated facts.　According to Joe Nazare, Raymond Chandler's influences on

Gibson are obvious, "Gibson's female characters perhaps form more standard

parallels with the Chandleresque" (388).　He points out the father-killing and

child-like 3Jane resembles to Carmen who kills her sister's husband in the film noir

The Big Sleep (1946).　And Molly is the femme fatale.　Dressed in all black with

implanted mirror sunglasses, she uses her artificial fingernails as knives to kill anyone

standing in her way.

　Besides, in *Neuromancer* Gibson portrays a noir underworld similar to the one in

Blade Runner.[32] The famous opening sentence conveys a noir-ish milieu with: "The

sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel"(Gibson 1) Yet,

the dead TV channel simile also brings forward the dystopian atmosphere of the

technology dominating future world.　Night City is described as a play ground for

technology itself.

　　There were countless theories explaining why Chiba city tolerated the

　　Ninsei enclave [Night City], but Case tended toward the idea that the

　　Yakuza might be preserving the place as a kind of historical park, a

---

[32] When Gibson saw Blade Runner before the completion of *Neuromancer*, he was stunned by the similarity between the film and his novel.　He confessed in the *Detail* magazine interview that "About ten minutes into Blade Runner, I reeled out of the theater in complete despair over its visual brilliance and its similarity to the "look" of Neuromancer, my [then] largely unwritten first novel.　Not only had I been beaten to the semiotic punch, but this damned movie looked better than the images in my head! With time, as I got over that, I started to take a certain delight in the way the film began to affect the way the world looked.　Club fashions, at first, then rock videos, finally even architecture.　Amazing! A science fiction movie affecting reality!" "The Blade Runner FAQ." BRmovie.com. <http://www.brmovie.com/FAQs/BR_FAQ_BR_Influence.htm>

reminder of humble origins.   But he also saw a certain sense in the notion

that burgeoning technologies require outlaw zones, that Night City wasn't

there for its inhabitants, but as a deliberately unsupervised playground for

technology itself (ibid.11).

And the play ground for technology is devoid of morality or emotion.   It is a harsh

urban jungle where everyone has to strive for living.

Night City was like a deranged experiment in social Darwinism, design by a

bored researcher who kept one thumb permanently on the fast-forward

button.   Stop hustling and you sank without a trace, but move a little too

swiftly and you'll break the fragile surface tension of the black market;

either way, you were gone, with nothing left of you but some vague

memory in the mind of a fixture like Ratz, though heart or lungs or kidneys

might survive in the service of some stranger with New Yen for the clinic

tanks (ibid.7).

Besides, the society is sinister and Oriental at the same time, echoing to the Los

Angeles in *Blade Runner*.   Night City in *Neuromancer* is a Japanese port town

inhabited by outlaws from China and Japan.   And "Power, in Case's world, meant

corporate power.   The zaibatsus, the multinationals that shaped the course of human

history, had transcended old barriers.   Viewed as organisms, they had attained a kind

of immortality" (ibid. 203).   The computer equipment appears in the story is always

from Japan and the Orient, implying the decline of western technology.   Case's

equipment includes an Ono-Sendai Cyberspace 7, a Hosaka computer, a Sony monitor,

and a Hitachi adaptor.   The virus he uses to break down *Neuromancer* is a Chinese

military virus called Kuang.   Again, the fear of the orient noted by Butler is

represented in the dystopian world, and the power of Japan is implied by the

omnipresent electronic devices.

Based on the noir characters, story, and urban environment, Gibson develops

themes like artificial intelligence, bio implants, and the cyberspace.   The disaster is

also the problem of the real; for example, the human status is challenged by replicants

in *Blade Runner*.   In *Neuromancer*, Armitage's possession by AI Wintermute

indicates technology's power to manipulate human beings.   Also, when Case is

trapped in the peaceful virtual world created by *Neuromancer*, it is a demonstration of

computer technology's power to simulate environment and decoy human beings.   All

in all, *Neuromancer* demonstrates an anxiety towards the emerging power of

technology in the 80s.

III. Cyberpunk Elements in *The Matrix*

Knowing the basic elements in the two fundamental cyberpunk works, now it is

possible to analyze the cyberpunk elements in *The Matrix* trilogy and the alterations

the trilogy makes.   There are many similarities between *Neuromancer* and *The Matrix* trilogy in their representations of computer technology.   The heroes are both hackers who join mysterious missions.   Neo is recruited by Morpheus to find out what the Matrix really is and to save mankind, Case by Armitage to complete missions for unknown objectives.   Agent Smith literally possesses Bane to fulfill his wish of freedom from the Matrix.   Wintermute possesses Armitage for freedom from its master, Lady 3Jane Marie-France Tessier Ashpool, to become an independent super AI on the net.   And the heroes are accompanied by deadly dark-dressing heroines.   Trinity is Neo's lover and guardian.   She kills for no-one but Neo.   The heroine in *Neuromancer* is Molly, a femme fatale whose job is to remove obstacles by her killer potency.[33]   What is more, a classic femme fatale is also presented in *The Matrix* as well.   When Morpheus introduces Neo to the rules of the Matrix world, a luscious blonde in red dress catches Neo's attention.   He hears Morpheus but pays no attention, just staring at the woman in red.   And "[h]e is thus tricked by this cipher of a woman literally wearing the Western color of warning and morbidity, dressed and

---

[33] She is introduced as following: She wore mirrored glasses.   Her clothes were black, the heels of black boots deep in the temperfoam…He realized that the glasses were surgically inset, sealing her sockets.   The silver lenses seemed to grow from smooth pale skin above her cheekbones, framed by dark hair in a rough shag.   The fingers curled around the Fletcher were slender, white, tipped with polished burgundy.   The nails looked artificial.   (Gibson 24)

coiffure in a classic 1950s aesthetic *"*[34] (Gillis 78).   British scholar Sarah Street also

notes that the woman in the red dress is a "classic representation of the feminine as a

trap, as dangerous yet seductive."

The most significant feature of *Neuromancer* is probably the representation of

computer technology and the Internet, which in many aspects influence *The Matrix*

trilogy.   First, the Internet world, or cyberspace[35], coined by Gibson, is called the

matrix in both *Neuromancer* and *The Matrix* trilogy.   And the access to cyberspace is

through bodily connection to computer in these two works.   In *Neuromancer*, the

Internet users have to use electrodes attaching to the foreheads by which the users can

see the virtual reality of cyberspace.

> "He [Case] settled the black terry sweatband across his forehead, careful not
>
> to disturb the flat Sendai dermatrodes.   …
>
> He closed his eyes.
>
> Found the ridged face of the power stud.
>
> And in the bloodlit dark behind his eyes, silver phosphenes boiling in from
>
> the edge of space, hypnagogic images jerking past like film compiled from
>
> random frames.   Symbols, figures, faces, a blurred, fragmented manadala
>
> of visual information" (ibid. 52).

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[34] See Stacy Gillis, "Cyber Noir: Cyberspace, (Post)Feminism and The Femme Fatale."   P. 78
[35] The term "cyberspace" coined by Gibson appears in his previous work "Burning Chrome" in 1982.
The term gains popularity due to the success of *Neuromancer*.

On the other hand, in *The Matrix*, giant steel needles are inserted into the hackers'

hindbrain while they are entering the Matrix.   Although both Case and Neo have to

physically connect to computers to enter the cyberspace, the interfaces are quite

different.   The significance of such differentiation will be discussed later.

The gigantic cyberspaces in both works are represented as an immense virtual

city.   The Matrix is the virtual city that entire human race is permanently connected

to and believes to be real.   The idea of a hallucinating virtual city is demonstrated in

Neuromancer too:

> The matrix has its roots in primitive arcade games, said the voice-over, in
>
> early graphic programs and military experimentation with cranial jacks.
>
> On the Sony, a two-dimensional space war faded behind a forest of
>
> mathematically generated ferns, demonstrating the special possibilities of
>
> logarithmic spirals; cold blue military footage burned through, lab animals
>
> wired into test systems, helmets feeding into fire controls circuits of tanks
>
> and war planes.   Cyberspace.   A consensual hallucination experienced
>
> daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation by children being
>
> taught mathematical concepts…A graphic representation of data abstracted
>
> from the banks of every computer in the human system.   Unthinkable
>
> complexity.   Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters

and constellation of data.   Like city lights, receding… (Ibid. 51)

And the success of missions relies on the hero's ability to see through the world created by computers, that is, to decode cyberspace.   In the first installment of *The Matrix* trilogy, the world Neo sees after his resurrection is constructed by blinking green codes.   It is the climax of *The Matrix* for it symbolizes Neo's becoming The One.   The world is no longer a virtual-physical reality but programs constructed by numerous codes.

Similarly, when Case is trapped inside the virtual world that Neuromancer creates, the world is as real as the Matrix world.   But when he cracks down the defense system by virus, the world is no longer real.

> And here things could be counted, each one.   He knew the number of grains of sand in the construct of the beach (a number coded in a mathematical system that existed nowhere outside the mind that was Neuromancer).   He knew the number of yellow food packets in the canisters in the bunker (four hundred and seven)   (ibid. 258).

Case sees the world beyond its physical appearance, just like what Neo is capable of. And it is also the crucial moment of Case's mission.   Case's being able to see the codes means Neuromancer's ICE (Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics) is deactivated.   Wintermute now can merge with defenseless Neuromancer and become

a superintelligence.   The mission is thus complete.

The visual style of cyberpunk inherited film noir recreates the sense of anxiety about technology.   In the first installment of *The Matrix* trilogy, the noir visual style is often used to generate an atmosphere of doomed future and uncertainty.   It is relatively unknown that before the success of *The Matrix*, the Wachowski brothers' first Hollywood feature film *Bound* is very noir-ish.   Released in 1996, *Bound* is a modern lesbian romance, murder, and thriller story about a female ex-convict, Corky (Gina Gershon) and her new lover Violet (Jennifer Tilly) who try to steal million dollars from Violet's gangster boyfriend Caesar (Joe Pantoliano, who also plays Cypher in *The Matrix*).   It is a mixture of suspense, intensive lesbian sexuality, gangster violence and bloody crime schemes, very much a modern noir.   Like this début film, *The Matrix* is also heavily influenced by film noir in its visual style.[36]

Although film noir is notorious for being hard to define, "visual style is the consistent thread that unites the very diverse films that together comprise this phenomenon" (Place and Peterson 65).[37]   The very first scene of *The Matrix* can served as a seminal example of its noir style when we examine its lighting and

---

[36] As Todd Wardrope points out: *"Thematically, every Wachowski film to this date is a reinterpretation and morphing of film noir genre with a stew of other influences.   In Bound, the tough guy renegade becomes a tough lesbian renegade.   This is film noir as a mutated sexual text, with 90's alternative icon Susie Bright serving as a sexual technical consultant."* "The Matrix." <u>Duallens.com</u>. 28 April 2007 <www.duallens.com/reviews/thematrix/>

[37] See Janey Place and Lowell Peterson, "Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir."
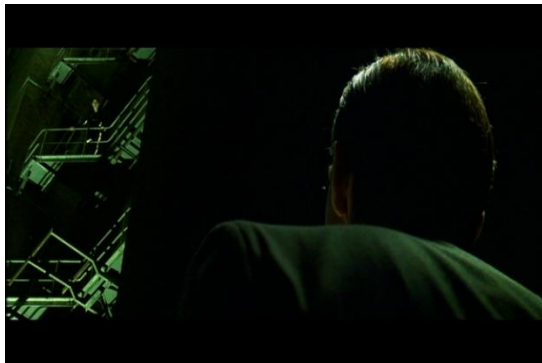
mise-en-scene.   The lighting style of a film noir often emphasizes high contrast

between dark and light.   As the first shot on Trinity demonstrates, the room is in

complete pitch black, and the beams of flash lights on Trinity create a double contrast:

the dark room is in contrast to the lights as is Trinity's black jumpsuit and shadow.   It

is similar to a shot from a classic film noir *Out of the Past* (1947).   Also, the shot

from *Blade Runner* when Deckard is alone in his apartment, the light projects from

outside forms a sharp contrast to the dark room, implying his alienation from the

society.   Such lighting style strengthens the mystery around the character and the

uncertainty of the story.   As Place and Peterson point out, "…the low-key noir style

opposes light and dark, hiding faces, rooms, urban landscapes-and by extension,

motivations and true character-in shadow and darkness which carry connotations of

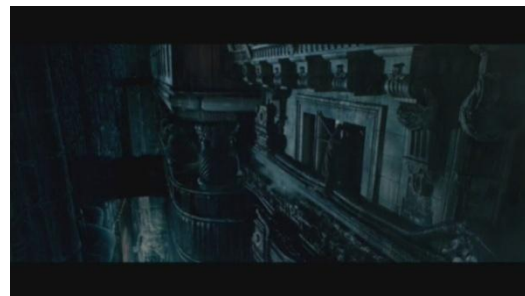the mysterious and the unknown" (ibid. 66).
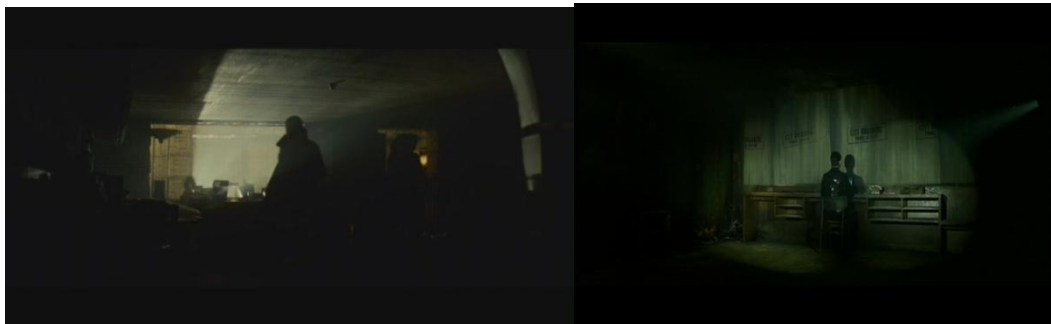
Up-right: Deckard in his dark room with penetrating light.   Up-left: Trinity in the

darkroom with policeman's flashlight pointing at her.   Down-left: Bailey's dark

silhouette and his huge shadow seem to absorb the person he is questioning.

Left: The contrast in size between Smith and Trinity makes her almost invisible.

Right: Deckard on the roof.   He is also invisible in the huge structure encompassing

him.

Like lighting is styled, mise-en-scene is often distorted in film noir.   Often

compositional balance is deliberately broken to increase tension.   In the deep focus

shot in which Agent Smith looks at Trinity at the fire escape, the contrast of

characters' sizes generate tension between the two characters.   The huge Agent

Smith represents the omnipotent power of technology in contrast to the weak human

strength represented by almost invisible Trinity.   Similar compositional unbalance is

found in the scene when Deckard tries to escape from Roy on the roof in *Blade*

Runner.   The extreme deep focus shot renders Deckard almost invisible, also

implying his weakness.

Besides, oblique and vertical line which is "preferred to horizontal" [38] in the left

screen of the Smith and Trinity shot generates dynamic tension.   The giant Smith

seems to encompass the whole frame with the blackness around him, which gives the

audience a sense of movement.   Also, in the Deckard shot, the tilted line of the

building seems to draw Deckard downward.   That is, the oblique line makes the

tension unstable and foretells further actions.

Left: The door frame separates the hero from the heroine in Out of the Past.

Right: Deckard's uncertainty is shown in the Venetian shadow.

And putting characters in frames, such as doors, windows or shadows, is also

[38] Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir." p.57 He points out that oblique lines "splinter the screen, making it restless and unstable."

common in film noir's mise-en-scene. The frames separate characters from each

other and generate the sense of isolation and alienation. As Janey and Peterson point

out: "claustrophobic framing devices such as doors, windows, stairways, metal bed

frames, or simply shadows separate the character from other character, from his world,

or from his own emotions" (ibid. 68). In the shot from *Out of the Past*, the door

frame separates the hero from the heroine, signifying his suspicion about her.

When Deckard is framed by the Venetian blind, his uncertainty about the replicants

and himself is implied by the shadow on him.

IV. **Alternations on Cyberpunk Elements in *The Matrix***

The Matrix shares many elements with cyberpunk works, but it also alters some of

these elements in order to demonstrate the wide-spread technology of present world.

In the films computer technology literally penetrates human beings through its

interfaces. Reality, which in *Neuromancer* is separated from cyberspace, is besieged

and defined by technology. Under such circumstances, the faith in technology

becomes the way to survive. As new cyberpunk films of the 90s, the trilogy reflects

the contemporary situation that technology has become an inseparable part of

humanity.

Technology's dominion over humanity can be seen in the representation of

cyberspace and computer interfaces. In *The Matrix*, the idea that cyberspace as a

city from *Neuromancer* is manifested to demonstrate the dominant power of

technology.   Cyberspace in *Neuromancer* is depicted as a giant city, but it is still

distinguished from the reality.   However, cyberspace in *The Matrix* is literally a city

that most human beings believe to be reality.   The essence of the Matrix world is a

giant multi-user interactive program which the Matrix computer generated as a city

where all human beings login online simultaneously and permanently and believe to

be the real life.   The metaphor of cyberspace as "consensual hallucination" indeed

comes true when the matrix of cyberspace replaced reality without the notice of the

inhabitants.

And the interfaces required to access the Internet also indicates the growing

interference of technology with humanity.   Case uses electrodes attaching to his

forehead while Neo has to use huge steel needle that penetrates his hindbrain in order

to login the Matrix.   The major difference between these two login methods is the

degree of the computer's intervention of human body.   Namely, it is merely a gentle

touch of computer that Case suffers when entering cyberspace, while Neo is

penetrated violently by a huge needle connected to the computer.   It indicates the

dominion of technology is even more powerful and widespread than it was in the 80s.

In *The Matrix*, repressive technology power is present anywhere, anytime, and

"anyone".   The threat of technology is depicted by the agents.   They are

everywhere, and most importantly, they are everyone.   The agent's possession of the

common people is presented as like a psychic experience.   The people possessed

quiver and become someone else.   But it is not a real ghost or divine god that

descends into the bodies.   Sentient programs that patrol and protect the Matrix are

the ghost and god.   And everyone is a possession-ready object while the norm of life

is the Matrix, the computer-generated dream world built to keep human beings under

control and to change all human beings into a batteries.

To fight the enslaving technology, it requires not pure flesh but faith and superior

ability in the realm of technology, the cyberspace.   That is, since technology has

penetrated real life, flesh means little.   What matters is one's faith in technology that

it can change everything and the ability to manipulate technology.   That's why in

first installment Neo is taught to believe his ability to fly over the building.   And

Neo's revolutions have to take place in the Matrix where the only possibility to alter

the nature of technology lies.   In this aspect, the trilogy is about how humanity

should live in the age of technology.   Therefore, it is a truce between Zion and the

Matrix that ends the trilogy, rather than a triumph of humanity over technology.

This attitude toward technology is significantly different from that of the

cyberpunk of the 80s.   The main theme in cyberpunk works is the human struggle

against the dominating technology.   *The Matrix* trilogy may seem to follow the same

idea, but in fact, as the truce reveals, the lesson to learn from *The Matrix* is no longer

along the line of humanity verses technology.   It is how humanity should cope with

technology, not how humanity could triumph over technology.   As a cyberpunk

writer since the 80s, Sterling argues in *Cyberpunk in the Nineties* that the dichotomy

spirit of cyberpunk in the 80s is out of fashion.[39]   Since technology has become an

inseparable element of life, the bonds between human and technology are no longer

Faustian.   Technology and humanity co-exist, rather than combat.   The final truce

between human and machine in Revolutions is a result of such notion.

V.   *Ghost in the Shell* and *The Matrix*

Along with the alternation on the traditional American cyberpunk elements, *The*

Matrix trilogy also fuses the Japanese notion about technology, which makes the

trilogy a global response to the advancing technology.

The Matrix trilogy as American films, is also heavily influenced by a Japanese

film, *Ghost in the Shell*, directed by Mamuro Oshii in 1995.[40] Adapted from

Masamune Shirow's manga with the same title, the film is set in Tokyo of the near

---

[39] Sterling makes an interesting metaphor that "[t]he idea that under these circumstances, Human Nature is somehow destined to prevail against the Great Machine is simply silly; it seems weirdly beside the point.   It's as if a rodent philosopher in a lab-cage, about to have his brain bored and wired for the edification of Big Science, were to piously declare that in the end Rodent Nature must triumph." The power of technology is overwhelming now.   And it is impossible to human beings to triumph over such great force.

[40] The directors and the producer Joe Silver admit that the originally wanted to do Ghost in the Shell "for real." The Matrix DVD interview.

future, when the boundaries between computer, technology, AI, and humanity begin to fade.   The story is about a cyborg cop, Mokoto Kusanagi, who chases after a mysterious hacker called the Puppet Master in real world and cyberspace.   The Puppet Mater is able to possess human beings.   And eventually it is revealed that the Puppet Master is an AI developed on the cyberspace.   At the end, Kusanagi gives up her body and merges with the Puppet Master to become an AI on the cyberspace.

The topic of this well-acclaimed cyberpunk animation is also about what it means to be human.   The Puppet Master is a highly advanced artificial intelligence that senses its own existence, similar to the personified computer programs in *The Matrix* trilogy, such as Satti and her parents.   But visual influences of *Ghost in the Shell* are abundant in the first installment.   One of the visual features of the trilogy, the green digits, for example, can be found in the beginning of *Ghost in the Shell*. Although the ones in *Ghost in the Shell* are mainly numbers and letters, those in *The Matrix* are in fact horizontally-flipped katakana. The digits in both films lead the audience to digital worlds constructed by computers.   However, the Japanese film uses alphabets while the American film uses katakana, implying the entrance of different world orders.   The former enters the western world and the latter into a Japanese one.

Left: The green numbers and alphabet in the beginning of *Ghost in the Shell*.

Right: Digit rain from *The Matrix*.   These are horizontal flipped katakana.

In both films, the protagonists are born to the world in similar ways.   In the beginning of *Ghost in the Shell*, the building processes of Kusanagi's body are shown in detail.   Her mechanical body is formed in various kinds of liquids, some of them are clear as water, some are white slime.   In Neo's case, he is also born in a capsule full of slime, and like Kusanagi, is also totally naked.   Nevertheless, Kusanagi is born in pure and clean slime while Neo in dirty crimson fluid with black tubes all over his body.   The contrast in the attitude toward technology is obvious.   Kusanagi's body as technology's embodiment is perfect and beautiful.   Neo's pale and paralyzed body represents technology's enslaving power.

Kusanagi's birth.   She is born in clean slime and liquid.
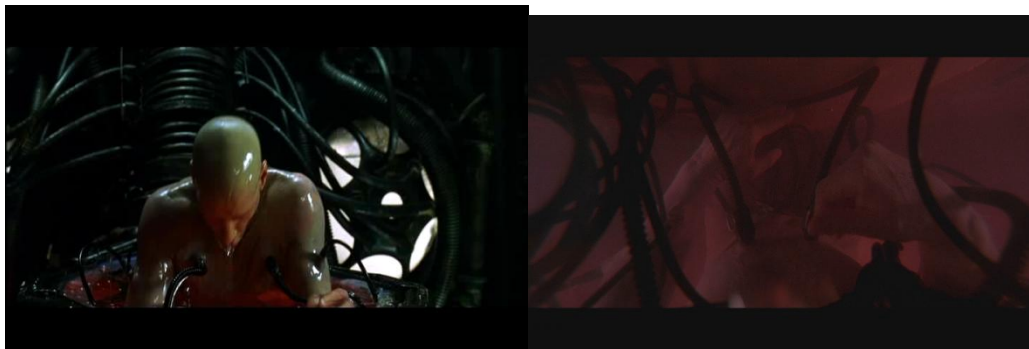
Neo's birth to the real world.   He is in crisome slime with tentacles-like tubes

surrounding him.

In the world of *Ghost in the Shell*, human bodies being implanted with computers

or artificial organs are very common.   Persons with such modifications can

communicate with computer network directly through the ports behind their necks.

It is quite similar in the Matrix world.   Those hackers who were born in the Matrix

capsule also have a port behind their neck; and through this port, they are able to log

online and hack into the Matrix network.   But the size of the port and the connection

device are different.   The ports on Kusanagi's neck are small, and the wires are thin.

On the contrary, the port on Neo's head is large, and it is a giant needle that connects

him to the computer.   The painless connection to computer indicates Kusanagi's

mastery of technology, and the steel needle is technology's violation of Neo's body.

Left: The communication ports on Kusanagi's neck.

Right: The port on Neo's hindbrain and the huge needle that connects to the

Matrix.

Yet, the most obvious similarity is that when Batou (Kusanagi's partner) chases a

suspect in a crowded marketplace, he accidentally shoots a watermelon.   In *The*

Matrix, when Neo is being chased by agents, he also runs into a crowded marketplace;

and quiet amusingly, an agent also accidentally shoots a watermelon.   The exploding

watermelon has a close-up shot, and so does the one in *Ghost in the Shell*.

The two exploding watermelons.   Left from *The Matrix*.   Right From *Ghost in the Shell.*

Left: the market chase from *The Matrix*.   Right: the Chinese market chase from *Ghost in the Shell*.

In his article about *Ghost in the Shell* in a globalization perspective, Liao Yung-Chau indicates that "the appropriation of landscape of Asian streets is a convention in sci-fi works.   From Gibson's *Neuromancer*, to Scott's *Blade Runner*, and Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*, sci-fi works are fascinated by the chaotic, hallucinatory, treacherous, and danger atmosphere of Asian streets" (167).   Oshii admits that he is influenced by Kubrick's *2001: a Space Odyssey* and Scott's *Blade Runner* in the creation of *Ghost in the Shell*.   In *Blade Runner*, Los Angeles is bursting with

Japanese culture.   Similarly, Tokyo in *Ghost in the Shell* is presented as every bit an

Oriental space.   But it is not Japanese culture but Chinese (specifically speaking,

Hong Kong) city landscape that gives Tokyo its Oriental flavor.   Liao points out that

"*Ghost in the Shell* uses the Asian streets from the Ridleyville.   However, those

Japanese elements suddenly disappear after translation from *Blade Runner*.   What

replaces those Japanese elements is declined, shabby, and backward Asian market

scene filled with Chinese signboards" (ibid. 167).   According to Liao, this scene

implies that Japan, as a country, is superior to other Asian countries in the way that

Kusanagi, as a major of Ministry of Interior, outplays the suspect.   She is a Japanese

officer with the most advanced cybernetic body; the suspect is just a small thin

brain-washed Asian victim who needs the help of Japanese power.   That is, if an

American fear about Japanese power is manifested in the messy Oriental marketplace

in *Blade Runner*, *Ghost in the Shell*'s Chinese marketplace signifies Japan's superior

status among the Asian countries by its advanced technology.

Yet, Japan's national identity with technology is not a harmonious relationship.

The transplantation of western technology into Japanese identity has been a radical

but painful process especially since the WWII.   In late 19th century Japan was the

most powerful country in Asia after Meiji Restoration.   It was technologically and

economically superior to other Asian countries.   Japan was almost invincible in wars

and invasions until WWII when its invasion of the pan-Pacific area was terminated by

technologically superior America in the way of atomic bombing.   Therefore, Japan

established a rather radical belief in technology as a weapon to triumph over the

western countries.   As Sato Kumiko points out,

> These stories about Japanese bodies transformed into half-machine
>
> amalgams are deeply contextualized in Japan's postwar social
>
> condition…yet these narratives already seek identity in the cybernetic
>
> subject mad of human flesh and metal parts, as later popularized in the
>
> 1970s superheroes (e.g., Kikaidar, Masked Rider, and other transformers)
>
> toward recent cyberpunk flims like Tsukamoto Shinya's Tetsuo, the Iron
>
> Man and Otomo Katsushiro's Akira, both in 1998.   The cybernetic
>
> mentality that conditions these postwar fantastic narratives is in fact a rather
>
> active and almost self-torturing acceptance of machine parts into the human
>
> flesh, which drive the Japanese identity toward postwar survival and victory
>
> over the leading nations by means of radical incorporation of technology
>
> (345).[41]

However, the idea of technology as national identity is absent in *The Matrix*.

Technology is not the basis of self identification but a menace to humanity globally.

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[41] See Sato's *How Information Technology Has (not) Changed Feminism and Japanism: Cyberpunk in the Japanese Context* for a detailed analysis of Japan identification with technology.

The market scene in *The Matrix* is translated from *Ghost in the Shell*, rather than

Blade Runner.   As an American cyberpunk film, *The Matrix* pays tribute to a

Japanese cyberpunk film; this combination of American and Japanese cyberpunk is

perhaps not only a historical coincidence but a reasonable synchronization.[42]

Because the belief in technology has been a worldwide common sense and

phenomenon, presenting a cyberpunk motif without regional differences is now

possible.   The market in *The Matrix* is neither an absolute western nor eastern; it is a

mixture of both.   Moreover, a major difference between the market scenes in *The*

Matrix , *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Blade Runner* is that, except the cultural settings, the

chasers become the chased.   In *The Matrix*, it is Neo as the outlaw being chased by

FBI agent lookalikes.   If Kusanagi's cybernetic body represents the technological

superiority of Japan in Asian context, the morphing of the agents is the omnipresent

technology in a contemporary global context.[43]

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[42]   After the publication of *Neuromancer* and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, which defined cyberpunk in Japanese context, Japanese science fictions also tried to write the nation through cyberpunk. According to Tatsumi Takayuki, that was a 'historical coincidence' (or kisezushita shinkuro 'unexpected synchronization') of Japanese subject and cyborg identity.   Sato explains that the historical coincidence *"signifies that Japanese culture in reality had already outpaced the imagination of American cyberpunk, and thus the Japanese identity formed in contemporary Japan coincidentally corresponded with the Harawayan model of cyborg identity invented through cyberpunk"* (Sato 346).

[43]   In *The Animatrix*, a global scale of such synchronization is manifested in the nine animation films and seven directors coming from Japan and America.   These films deliver other sides of the Matrix world.   Shinichiro Watanabe's *A Detective Story* is a very noir-ish film about a private eye looking for Trinity in a city of 1950s' New York.   *Beyond*, for example, written and directed by Koji

In other words, *The Matrix* presents a digitalized version of life that modern audience is familiar with.   *Neuromancer* and *Ghost in the Shell*'s notion of digitalization is fulfilled in the Matrix world.   Information is downloaded directly from the Internet, rather than acquired by reading.   Personality can also be created like an avatar in an online game, such as Second Life.[44] Moreover, when reality becomes digital, it is malleable and controllable.   The famous bullet time is such an example.   Traditionally, films aim for invisible editing; that is, the goal is to assure a smooth narrative process that the audience will not notice the editing trace. However, the bullet time functions according to the opposite notion.   The slow-motion and 360 degree camera movement break the smooth narrative process. The jerkiness is a deliberate style design to imitate gaming experiences.   The bullet time is like pushing pause in a game that the enemy stops and the player can see more clearly.   The Burly Brawl manipulates time and view angle to create the jerkiness as well.   That is, the adventures in the Matrix world are like playing games.   And unlike *Tron* (1982), in which the hero enters the computer to play games, in *The Matrix* the real world of the audience is the game designed to the finest detail.

Morimoto, is about several children's adventure in a haunted house, which is in fact a glitch of the Matrix, in Tokyo.

[44] Second Life is a giant online game that is very popular in the America.   Players can communicate, do business, or play on it.   It is very similar to real world.   Also, The Matrix has it own online game, rightfully namely Matrix Online

Therefore, the trilogy ends without the destruction of the Matrix not only because

technology is already essential nowadays but also to provide its audience the unique

pleasure of vicariously experiencing the power of controlling reality.

    The Matrix trilogy as new cyberpunk films succeeds to the cyberpunk of the 80s

works in its characters, story, and visual style.   Yet, the alterations on theses elements

and the fusion with *Ghost in the Shell* validate that technology is experienced as a

global phenomenon is impossible to escape from.   In the next chapter, I will analyze

the narrative structure of the trilogy as a classical western film that demonstrates in a

digitalized world how an individual's method of survival relies on his ability with

technology.

Chapter 3.   Narrative

The Matrix trilogy has similar narrative structure of what Will Wright calls

"classical western films" in his *Six Guns and Society*.   A typical classical western

film plot can be summarized as a mysterious lone gunner wonders to a small town

where good townsmen are oppressed by strong bad guys who only care about

personal interests.   The hero then intervenes to kill the bad guys.   It is not difficult

to see that the weak society in this scenario represents social values, such as family,

love, and friendship.   And the selfish bad guys are the power of capitalist market

economy that only seeks maximum personal profits.   As "the prototype of all

Westerns" [45] classical western films demonstrate the conflict between social values

and capitalist self-profit urges.   As Robert Ray forcefully contends in his *A Certain*

Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980, the conflict is an ideological one

between social values and capitalist values.   There were two opposite values

respectively represented by two types of heroes in the many Hollywood films: the

official hero and the outlaw hero.   As he points out, the former was often associated

with community, social responsibility, family values, and civilization, while the latter

with freedom, self-determination, and nature.   Since that "the national ideology

clearly preferred the outlaw" (ibid. 66), a film with such narrative structure often

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[45] According to Wright, "The classical Western is the prototype of all Westerns, the one people think of when they say, 'All westerns are alike.' It is the story of the lone stranger who rides into a troubled town and cleans it up, winning the respect of the townsfolk and the love of the schoolmarm"(32).

depicted an outlaw hero tempered by a society and reluctantly fought for causes demanded by the society to solve the ideological conflicts.

I.   The Classical Western Narrative Structure

One of the classical Westerns is *Shane* (1953) by George Stevens.   The hero Shane is a lone rider who wanders to a little town where evil ranchers are exploiting powerless homesteaders.   Shane settles down and makes friends with the Starrets, the homesteader family he meets and helps in the beginning of the film.   However, when the situation intensifies, the ranchers send out a gunner, Wilson, whom Shane recognizes as a fast draw.   Shane avoids fighting Wilson, which makes the weak homesteaders helpless, so they decide to leave the town.   But Starret decides to kill the ranchers by himself.   Shane learns about the news and intervenes.   He stops Starret from going to the ranchers' saloon by knocking him down in a fight.   Then, Shane fights the evil ranchers and Wilson.   He shoots and kills all the villains on his own, but he is also wounded.   The story ends with Shane riding into the dark mountains while Starret's son shouting "come back."

According to Wright, most classical western films share similar narrative structures that he calls "the classical plot." The narrative structure includes sixteen basic plot elements, which *Shane* illustrates perfectly, while *The Matrix* trilogy as a whole also fit in nicely.   The sixteen basic plots are as follows:

1. The hero enters a social group.

   Shane wanders to the small town.

2. The hero is unknown to the society.

   The Starrets do not know Shane.

3. The hero is revealed to have an exceptional ability.

   Shane's revolver implies that he is a gunfighter.

4. The society recognizes a difference between themselves and the hero; the

   hero is given a special status.

   Starret's son idolizes Shane because Shane seems to be a gunfighter.

5. The society does not completely accept the hero.

   Despite his son idolizes Shane, Starret is not sure about Shane's ability.

6. There is a conflict of interests between the villains and the society.

   The selfish ranchers are forcing the homesteaders to leave.

7. The villains are stronger than the society; the society is weak.

   The evil ranchers are powerful with their guns, in contrast to the weak

   homesteaders.

8. There is a strong friendship or respect between the hero and a villain.

    Shane recognizes Wilson as a fast-draw.

9. The villains threaten the society.

Shane and Starret are harassed by the ranchers in town.

10. The hero avoids involvement in the conflict.

    Knowing Wilson as a fast-draw, Shane does not want to fight him.

11. The villains endanger a friend of the hero.

    The ranchers try to trap and kill Starret.

12. The hero fights the villains.

    Shane fights with the ranchers.

13. The hero defeats the villains.

    Shane kills the evil ranchers and Wilson.

14. The society is safe.

    The little town is in peace

15. The society accepts the hero.

    Starret's son wants Shane to stay.

16. The hero losses or gives up his special status (or dies) (Wright 143).
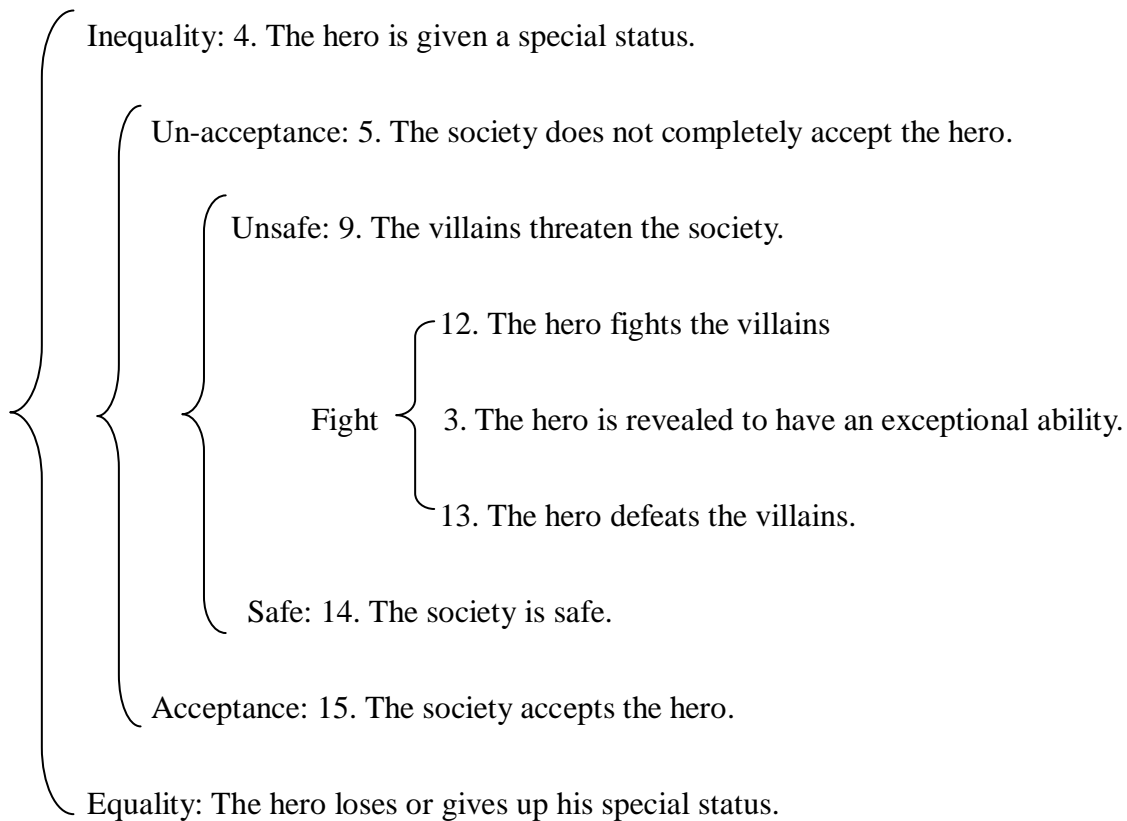
    Shane leaves the town.

Just like *Shane*, *The Matrix* trilogy also contains the sixteen basic plots within its

sci-fi frame and can be argued to be a classical western.   *The Matrix*'s narrative

structure is similar to the classical plots.   Neo enters the society of the real world on

the Nebuchadnezzar.   Then he is revealed as The One.   The training section proves

his ability.   Still, his special status is s not accepted by everyone.   Cypher betrays

Neo and others, making Morpheus hostage of the Agents.   Because Morpheus

sacrifices himself for Neo, Neo decides to rescue his comrade.   Eventually Neo

defeats the Agents and proves that he is The One.   *The Matrix* fits in the classical

plot nicely except the lack of plot 8 and 16.   But these two missing plots are fulfilled

in the sequels.   Plot 8 is fulfilled by Neo and Smith's relationship as the opposites to

each other.   And Neo's death in the end of the trilogy apparently echoes plot 16.

Besides, the two sequels as a whole also follow the classical plots.   Wright

divides the plots into five sequences: Outside, Status, Fight, Safe, Acceptance, and

Equality.   Plot 1 and 5 are Outside; 2, 3, and 4 are Status. These two sequences start

the narrative structure and are to indicate the hero's status as outsider because of his

ability.   Fight, Safe, Acceptance, and Equality respectively have two parts that

parallel in the structure.   Plot 3, 12, 13 are Fight. Plot 9 and 14 are Safe. Plot 5 and

15 are Acceptance.   And plot 4 and 16 are Equality.   As a result, in my opinion, the

classic western narrative structure can be further divided into such process:

Inequality => Un-acceptance => Unsafe => Fight => Safe => Acceptance =>

Equality.

Inequality: 4. The hero is given a special status.

Un-acceptance: 5. The society does not completely accept the hero.

Unsafe: 9. The villains threaten the society.

12. The hero fights the villains

Fight 3. The hero is revealed to have an exceptional ability.

13. The hero defeats the villains.

Safe: 14. The society is safe.

Acceptance: 15. The society accepts the hero.

Equality: The hero loses or gives up his special status.

When Neo enters Zion, he is regarded as The One by some while some others doubt it. It is Inequality and Un-acceptance sequences. Then the machine squids and Smith threaten Zion. It is the Unsafe sequence. Neo fights and defeats Smith. Then Zion is safe. Zion people now accept Neo is the savior. And Neo loses his special status because of his death. It is the final sequence: Equality. As a result, the trilogy as a whole can fit in the classic western narrative structure.

Wright reads the classical western narrative structure in a Marxist way that the conflicts between the society and villains are the conflicts an individual experiences between social values and the competitiveness that capitalism requires. He explains

that prior to the emergence of market economy, which first took place in Europe in the

19th century, an individual's social situation depended upon his interaction within the

social structures.   Political, religious, and family values, for instance, were the values

that dominated the economy and the bourgeois society before the market economy.

The emergence of market economy "demanded and enforced an institutional

separation of society into economic and political spheres" (132).   Yet, the market

economy is a self-regulating mechanism which aims for maximum production and

personal profits.   This capitalist structure dethrones the authority of traditional social

values and replaces them by the notion of just exchange.   The market economy

changed social relations to production relations.   And under such circumstance, a

person is seen as an independent individual whose labor is the merchandise he / she

sells.   One has to compete with everyone in the economy system in order to survive.

"The individual was no longer seen as seeking social standing in accordance with

values derived from social interaction, but was seen as an autonomous being whose

primary motivations were individual and economic: satisfaction of hunger, desire of

possessions, rampant self-interest" (ibid. 132).   The dilemma is apparent.   The

capitalism pursuit for maximum individual profits contradicts the traditional social

values of a bourgeois society.   An individual is regulated by bourgeois social values;

meanwhile, his survival relies on the competitive characteristics demanded by

capitalism.

In *Shane* and *The Matrix* trilogy, the bourgeois social values are represented by the homesteader society and Zion, which treasure friendship, loyalty, and love. Zion, the last human city, is full of primitive human values, such as emotion, family, religion, friendship, and love. The rave dance scene in *Reloaded*, for example, is a celebration of humanity. It depicts the passion and bodily interactions of human beings. The portrait of Link's family life in *Revolutions* is certainly a reassurance of family values. The relationship between captain Lock and the kid is, again, a mixture of comradeship, friendship, father-son relationship. And of course, the tender relationship between Trinity and Neo is a proof of love as well. Also, Zion apparently represents the outlaw values for they long for freedom from the Matrix and the nature of humanity. The sense of community, as Ray points out, was often linked to the outlaw heroes in films since the late 1960s, such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), and *Easy Rider* (1969). Although in Classic Hollywood films, the outlaw hero was often a loner, in these Left films of the late 1960s, the outlaw heroes "came in groups" (Ray 314). But these groups still represented the outlaw values such as freedom from restraints and a dislike of institution, like that Zion opposes against the dominating Matrix.

The villains represent the self-profit force encouraged by capitalism. They are

strong and independent from the society.   In *Shane*, the villains are evil ranchers who

occupy homesteaders' land.   They are selfish; what they want is their own maximum

profits.   They are the symbols of the pursuit of maximum personal profits in the

market economy.   That is why the villains are associated with institutions of

economy – saloon, business, and ranches.   Although the villains often are associated

with institutions of economy, they are not part of the bourgeois society.   They do not

have the social values that the bourgeois society emphasizes.   In *The Matrix*, the

villains, the Agents, unmistakably dressed in something like the uniform suit of

capitalist white-collar elites, are the guardians of the capitalist system.   The Matrix

world is depicted as a giant modern city, which Smith tells Morpheus that the system

is built according to the climax of human's civilization: a highly-developed capitalist

city in AD 1999.   If Zion represents nature and freedom, the Matrix city occupied by

Smith is the opposite: civilization and constraint.   It is a stone-cold capitalist city full

of grey skyscrapers.   In the first installment, Neo is scolded by his superior,

Rhineheart, for being late.   Dressed almost identical to the Agents, Rhineheart cares

not about Neo's reasons of being late but the importance of punctuality for the

company's function.   Personal relation is absent in the Matrix world.   Profit for the

company is the point.   To protect such capitalist system from the Zionists' liberation,

the Agents patrol the capitalist city.   Smith, as Neo's archenemy, is not only the

opposite of Neo the savior, but also the extreme force of individualized self-profit urges.   Smith is the "unbridled market self-interest" (Wright 140) in the classical western narrative.   After Smith is released from the Matrix, there is no authority to rule Smith's aggression.   He is one and everyone; by assimilating everyone into himself in the Matrix, his individual wistfulness becomes the society per se.

The hero is to solve the dilemma between social values and capitalism on his own.   That is, the solution relies on an ideal individual who cherishes social values and being able to compete in the capitalist market at the same time.   The lone hero has to be an outsider of the society because the bourgeois society cherishing social values can only produce weak people.   The hero is strong for he relies only on himself.   But at the same time, the hero *"has need of the social values of friendship and loyalty, and these values require that he become involved with society.   It is necessary if he is to become fully human"* (Wright 146).   Lonely but strong Shane enters the little town and makes friends with the Starrets.   When his friends are attacked, Shane fights the villains for friendship.   As a Classic Hollywood film, the narrative structure of *Shane* is about Shane's transformation from an outsider to a member of the society.   In other words, he becomes an outlaw hero with official values.   And in the end of the story, Starret's son's wish for Shane to stay indicates the society's acceptance of Shane for he is the ideal American individual.   Likewise,

Neo boards the Nebuchadnezzar and is revealed to have an exceptional ability in the

early stage of the story.   He is strong, but he remains as an outsider and is uncertain

about his role until the captivity of Morpheus.   Then, Neo acts to rescue Morpheus,

indicating his need for the social value of friendship.   Later in *Reloaded*, when

facing the two choices offered by the Architect, Neo chooses to save Trinity without

hesitation, indicating his need for love, another social value.   Being autonomously

strong and equipped with social values, Neo is the ideal individual, or as what he is

called in the trilogy, The One.   Therefore, he is able to defeat the Agents and

eventually stops the war between Zion and the Matrix singlehandedly.   In the end,

Neo as an ideal individual is accepted and idolized by the Zion society.

That is, as a solution to this dilemma, the hero is the intermediate, or as Ray put

it, "the composite hero" (64).   Born in the Matrix, Neo is a human being and a

product of civilization at the same time.   His body is a site where technology

penetrates human flesh.   As a result, his body has two appearances.   In Zion, Neo is

gentle, soft, shabby, and vulnerable, while in the Matrix, he looks hard, strong, and

fashionable.   He longs for friendship from the Zionists and love from Trinity,

indicated by his choices to rescue Morpheus in *The Matrix* and to save Trinity in

Reloaded.   As an outlaw hero, Neo literally fights for "the underground" (Zion).

But meanwhile, it is the ability as the ultimate hacker to the Matrix that enables him

to fight and succeed.   In *The Matrix*, Neo demonstrates his ability to alter the Matrix.

In *Reloaded* and *Revolutions*, the range of his ability extends from the Matrix to the

real world.   Literally he becomes the composite hero who is the best of both worlds.

In contrast to Neo as a composite hero, Smith is single-facet.   He is not a human

being but a maddened computer program that only desires to the ultimate destruction.

He has no emotion, no humanity, and even no tangible bodies.   In *The Matrix*, by the

ability to possessing anyone at anytime, he is the intangible and indestructible evil

ghost.   In the sequels, he becomes the vicious god possessing every single person in

the Matrix.   If an official hero represents the law, collective action and civilization,

Smith is the extreme of these values for he now is the law of the civilization where

there is only one man.

　　More importantly, by the composite hero who eliminates the villains that restores

the peace, the classical western narrative demonstrates what Ray calls "the

reconciliatory pattern" (58).   The narrative structure in essence provides a

reconciliation of the ideological conflicts.   The problems the hero encounters,

although look like personal issues in appearance, are in fact a projection of the

conflicts between outlaw values and official values in the real world.   By the

composite hero who has two sets of values, the conflicts are solved without

over-emphasizing one set of values.   The result is, in the end of the trilogy, Neo as

the composite hero fights for Trinity and Zion, the outlaw values; at the same time, he

also fights Smith for the stability of the Matrix, i.e. the official values in capitalism.

And he eventually stops the war by maintaining a balance between the two.   The

classical western narrative structure is not a great refusal of capitalism.   As Wright

states, "both the villains and the settlers (or their equivalents) [in the trilogy, the

Matrix and Zion] want to establish a market society.   The villains represent the

individualistic aspect of it, necessary but vicious and cruel, while the settlers represent

the social aspect, decent and kind if helpless and unsuccessful" (141).   Like Shane

who is the intermediate between the two forces, Neo simultaneously possesses the

two values and reconciles the conflicts.   As Ray points out, the hero's personal

ability and needs for social values indicate the duplicity "involved the mythology's

pattern of obscuring the necessity for choosing between contrasting [outlaw and

official] values" (66).   As a result, the end of the war is a truce between Zion and the

Matrix, signifying the reconciliation between the outlaw values and the official

values.

However, the reconciliatory pattern demonstrated by the composite hero and the

truce, functions as a displacement of political dilemma in the real world[46] where the

outlaw values and the official values are constantly in conflicts.   That is, by Neo's

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[46] According to Ray, "Like the contrasting heroes' epitomization of basic American dichotomies, the reluctant hero story provided a locus for displacement" in the nation's unsolved political anxieties. P65.

eliminating Smith the extreme capitalist urge, the trilogy satisfies the audiences with a

beautiful illusion where the outlaw values and the official values can co-exist.

II.   The Matrix as Capitalism

However, in reality, the audiences know that capitalism and social values are still

in conflicts with each other.   That is why the vivid representation of the Matrix city

as a capitalist city raises many responses, such as American scholars of culture studies

Martin A. Danahay and David Rieder's *The Matrix, Marx, and the Coppertop's Life*.

As they observe,

> In The Matrix, this "reality is overtly dramatized by the scene of a naked
>
> and vulnerable humanity, floating quiescently in high-rises of coffin-like
>
> cubicles, plugged in to the power plant.   Presumably, the power plant is
>
> reminiscent of a corporate building, all of its workers neatly staked in
>
> cubicles, one floor on top of the next. This would make the human race in
>
> The Matrix a class of workers, the agents, the guardians of capital.   The
>
> shot of the power plant help illustrate Morpheus's definition of a
>
> "coppertop" as someone who is "so hopeless dependent on the system," as
>
> Morpheus puts it, that he is unable to break free of its exploitative
>
> dimensions" (221).

The essence of The Matrix is a modern capitalist city, which reminds the audience the

real city they dwell in, functions in accordance to the logic of cultural industry in

Adorno and Horkheimer's term. They argue that the popular culture produced by

corporations is standardized commodities to manipulate the mass audience. Popular

culture as entertainment is easy to consume and hence makes the audience forget

about the real situation that they are passively consuming the product of capitalism.

Besides, by consuming the products of culture industry, the audience fuels culture

industry to create more similar products. Therefore, culture industry as a capitalist

mechanism is self-sustaining. In *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass

Deception,* Adorno and Horkheimer point out the enslaving nature of the media:

> All the other films and products of the entertainment industry which they
>
> [the audience] have seen have taught them what to expect; they react
>
> automatically.   The might of industry society is lodged in men's minds.
>
> The entertainments manufacturers know that their products will be
>
> consumed with alertness even when the customer is distraught, for each of
>
> them is a model of the huge economic machinery which has always
>
> sustained the masses, whether at work or at leisure – which is akin to work.
>
> From every sound film and every broadcast programme the social effect can
>
> be inferred which is exclusive to none but is shared by all alike.   The
>
> culture industry as a whole has moulded men as a type unfailingly

reproduced in every product (34).

The masses are seen as a generality of consumers who are but to choose from the products that the culture industry creates for them. These products manufactured by huge companies educate and enslave the audiences to consume more similar products they create. When the audiences relax and enjoy these cultural products in their leisure time, they are in fact still work. These cultural products "[occupied] men's senses from the time they leave the factory in the evening to the time they clock in again the next morning with matters that bears the impress of the labour process they themselves have to sustain throughout the day" (38). In other words, by consuming the product, the audiences fuel the cultural industries to create more similar products.

That is, the mass is regarded as a mechanism controlled by the information that the mass media diffuse, and the purpose of this manipulation is to ensure the circle of production and consumption in capitalism. The Matrix functions in the same mechanism. Like the omnipresent mass media of the real world, the Matrix is also everywhere; every bit of information a person receives is a product of the Matrix. That world is a created illusion, a false belief of evil purpose by which the human race is surrounded unconsciously. Those inhabitants in the Matrix think that they are living their lives as individuals with free will; however, the fact is they are all prisoners and slaves of the Matrix. No matter how happy one's virtual life is, one is

always under the control and surveillance of the dominating Matrix.   When the mass

media position the audience as tool for production and consumption, as Adorno and

Horkheimer state, the Matrix also uses its "audience" as the tool of production and

consumption, exampled by the same scene mentioned above.   Numerous people are

caged in artificial fetuses serving as batteries for the Matrix.   They produce

electricity for the Matrix and at the same time they also consume the fluid of

dissolved corpses.   The role of human beings are now reduced to just a machine of

production and consumption.   And the very purpose of the human farm is to

maintain the function of the Matrix.

Given the essence of the Matrix as (cultural) capitalism that exploits mankind

both at work and at leisure, the narrative of the trilogy is about the conflicts between

humanity and capitalism again.   Capitalism is the ideology that hides behind the

Matrix, in which the consumption and production is no longer for the people

themselves but for the Matrix's sake. These enslaved human beings are the exploited

proletarians; they can do nothing but produce to keep alive, and the Matrix as the

capitalist enjoys and consumes the benefits from the laborers.   In contrast to the

Matrix world, Zion is a traditional society where people live in a collective way, as if

in a people's commune.   They share the space, the property, the food, and the fate

together.   In order to fight against the Matrix, the crews on Nebuchadnezzar literally

live in a protestant way – with shabby clothes, disgusting food, tiny rooms to live, and

belief in The One.   They only long for the emancipation of human race from the

Matrix, i.e., capitalism.

III. No Escape from The Matrix

But as the classical western narrative structure suggests, the hero who solves the

conflicts between Zion and the Matrix possesses both qualities from society and

capitalism.   And as the reconciliatory pattern proves, Neo is not to emancipate

human race from capitalism represented by the Matrix. Rather, by using his

exceptional abilities, Neo demonstrates paradoxically how to survive, or to put it more

accurately, to enjoy the capitalist system.

The inevitable reconciliation is suggested by the hero and his comrades'

assimilation of elements from the Matrix, or capitalism in their false idea about reality,

the game-like nature of the war, and the Zionists' trendy outfits.   The importance of

reality is emphasized by the Zionists, but the reality they dedicate to is in fact another

illusion.   In the first installment, one stark contrast between reality and illusion is the

steak Cypher enjoys when he meets Smith in the Matrix and the rice porridge other

crews eat on the Nebuchadnezzar.   Cypher chooses the juicy steak even though it is

not real while other crews endure the porridge, which is real but tasteless.   It

indicates their unshakable belief that even though illusion might be more attractive,

the dull reality is better.   However, in the same installment, the reality admired by

the warriors of anti-illusion is displayed by the very use of illusions.   In order to

show Neo the truth, Morpheus and Neo are connected to the computer-generated

simulation called "the construct," in which they can load anything they need.   In

other words, this construct is of the same type of illusion as the Matrix.   But it is

within this illusion that Morpheus shows the truth about reality to Neo.   The way

Morpheus shows the truth of reality is not letting Neo see the outside world; instead,

only on a TV does he demonstrate the condition of reality.   Through the use of the

construct, Morpheus shows Neo the truth he claims. His truth is not reality itself but

the representation of reality.   Morpheus' reality is nothing but a series of images

projected on the TV screen in a computer-generated environment.   Compared to the

reality, if there is any, Morpheus' reality is twice removed from what it refers to.   But

in this scene, the representation of reality within an illusion now is regarded as the

reality.   The truth of reality that Morpheus claims is constructed only in a TV within

an illusion. The ambiguous demonstration shows that the essence of Morpheus' reality

is based on illusions.   Besides, initially when Morpheus offers Neo the choice

between reality and illusion, the decisive tools are two pills, blue for illusion and red

for reality.   No matter what Neo chooses, the outcome would depend on a pill, which

is very much a form of drug.   One can argue that the awakened consciousness of

Neo is just the aftereffect of the dope.   What is more, in order to revolt against the

Matrix, the warriors depend on the penetration of giant steel needles, which is the

same mechanism that the Matrix employs to manipulate all mankind.   The injections

of needles are not to further awake consciousness in the warriors; instead, they put the

warriors into sleep, dreaming about the revolution.   While the warriors take pills to

enter reality, to defend this very reality they further hypnotize themselves by taking

shots with needles.   Both methods, taking pills and taking shots, bear strong

resemblances to the behaviors of a drug addict, implying the hallucinatory nature of

the reality that the Zionists believe in.

Moreover, the revolution against the Matrix itself is like games, indicating the

playfulness of the Zionists.   In chapter one, the game elements of the trilogy are

already demonstrated.   The abundant game elements in the trilogy not only attract

audiences who enjoy video games but also show the essence of the trilogy as a giant

on-line role playing game, or MMORPG, massive multiplayer online role playing

game, a game genre that is probably the most popular right now with titles like

"World of Warcraft."   In a MMORPG, a player logins the game by using an avatar,

the incarnation of the player.   He or she can interact with other players' avatars, join

union in the game, or complete missions with other players. What happens in the

trilogy is quite similar to a MMORPG.   The Zionists login the Matrix game server

(which is indeed a giant interactive program for the human race) to play the revolution game.   In a real world online game, the avatar as the projection of the player is often different from the player; for example, an emaciated player can be the most powerful avatar in the game. And the Zionists play the Matrix game in the same fashion. The avatars in the Matrix game, though with the same body, talk, act, and look quite different from the real Zionists.   When Morpheus meets Neo for the first time in the Matrix, he intentionally gives Neo lectures about Neo's confusions.   Then he offers two pills for Neo to choose, mysteriously saying "I'll show you how deep the rabbit hole goes."   His attitude is of pure performance.   In contrast to that attitude, after Neo is rescued from the human farm, Morpheus greets him with "welcome to the real world" most tenderly and warmly.

Besides, the Zionists' fashionable outfits reveal their fetishism of commodities. Marx points out that when an object enters the market and becomes a commodity, it is given an exchange value which exists in relation to other commodities. Commodity fetishism is the worship of the invisible exchange values that signify social relation. Again, as Chang Hsiao-Hung puts it, "the fetishism of commodity is the fetishism of abstract exchange value" (68), which Marx states as "a relation between persons expressed as a relation between things" (125).   In the trilogy, these fashionable outfits have no use value except the basic functions as covering the bodies; on the

other hand, they functions as the indication of relationship between the characters.

When Neo enters the Matrix, he puts on the cleric coat; that is, he is given an

exchange value that signifies him as the savior. In chapter one, I point out that the

outfit equals the character. It is not the person that stakes out the character but the

outfit. What the saviors treasure is not the use value of the outfit, but the exchange

value that represents social status. The essence of the humanity is no longer

important; what counts is the social recognition and social status the outfit brings.

During the promotion of *Reloaded*, a series of posters containing only the outfits of

the characters are officially released. In these posters, the faces are cut out, leaving

the outfits as the emphasis. They indicate the fetishist nature of the trilogy.

The trendy outfits of Neo, Trinity, Morpheus, and Persephone.

Given the classical western narrative structure along with the false idea about

reality, the game-like nature of the revolution, and the trendy outfits, now we can

safely say that the Zionists are not to emancipate human race from the Matrix. As

the reconciliatory pattern proves, they are the ideal individuals in contemporary

capitalist world, who as composite heroes, possess both qualities of the outlaw values and the official values.   Thus, the finale of the trilogy is a truce between human and machine because the revolutionists are never able to break up with the Matrix that represents capitalism.   With the truce, the trilogy provides the audiences a peaceful status which is impossible in contemporary capitalist world.   That is, if the Zionists fight a fight destined to fail because they are so similar to their enemy, the Matrix, the audiences witness the inevitable reconciliation for the films are products of capitalism per se.   In other words, when the audiences buy tickets to see the films, they are entering the very the same Matrix that the Zionists try to emancipate mankind from.
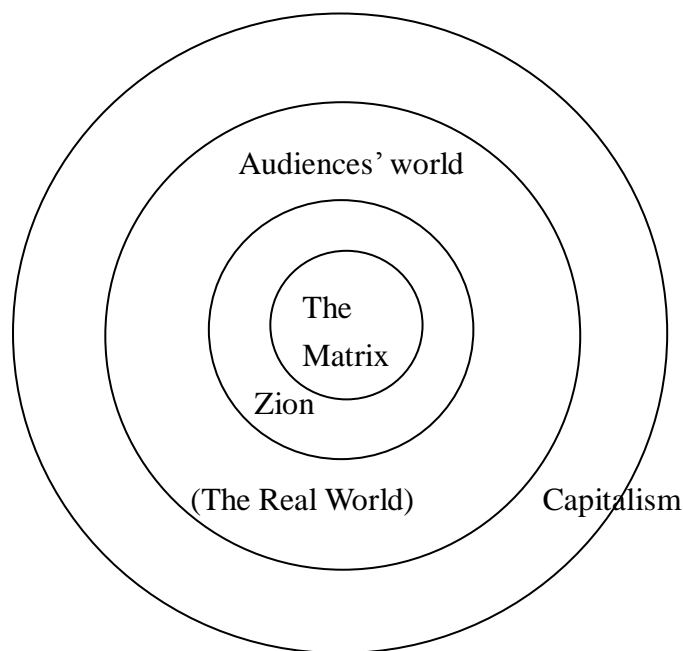
As a result, there are four concentric circles in the trilogy: the Matrix world, the Zion world, the audience's world (the real world), and capitalism that spheres all. From the Matrix world at the centre, the power relationship is ascending.   Zionists

regard the Matrix as an illusion while the audiences are aware of the essence of the

Matrix and Zion is a story inside films.   But just when the audiences consciously

realize the essence of the trilogy as films, they are in deed enjoying products created

by capitalists, in here, the Warner Brothers.   Therefore, even when the films seem to

convey messages for rage against the machine, it is hardly an escape from the Matrix.

And we should never ignore the fact that the film itself is a product of capitalism.

Only a multinational corporation like the Warner Brothers, can afford such a big

production of the trilogy.   While Neo sacrifices himself to liberate human being from

the Matrix, the Warner Brothers and Wachowski brothers present us a grander Matrix

of commodities, which includes *The Animatirx*, *Enter the Matrix*, *The Matrix: Path of

Neo, Matrix Online*, *The Matrix Comic books*, and *The Ultimate Matrix* DVD

collection. And in *Matrix Online*, the player's role is, surprisingly, to choose between

Zionist and the Agents; and the latest event (in May 2006) in the game world is "Hunt

down Morpheus."   If the trilogy is a serious manifesto about liberation, it would not

present the game with choices between Zion and Matrix.   The event of hunting down

Morpheus simply indicates the playfulness of *The Matrix* that all of these films and

games induce the audience to purchase more products from the company.   Maybe we

should not be too surprised that the Matrix is in fact the Market.   Although *The

Matrix* tells a story of redemption, we should not forget, as professor of politics,

Ronnie D. Lipschutz points out "*The Matrix* is a story of such a stark utopia. It is also

our story. We are all born in the matrix of capitalism, as it were, and escape is

impossible" (134).

Conclusion

As film scholar Claudia Springer points out that *The Matrix* trilogy "plays cool" as marketing strategy,[47] the trilogy is hardly a promotion of revolt against the Matrix because of the Zionists' assimilation of coolness from the Matrix. As one of the outstanding visual effects in the trilogy, the costumes transform shabby Zionists to fashionable warriors, but at the same time, they challenge the authenticity of the warriors for they (un)consciously put on gorgeous outfits opposite to the real shabby clothes. If the Matrix is the false belief that enslaves mankind, the emancipators are assimilated by this falseness as well. Also, the pastiches of Hollywood films and Japanese animes reveal the void underneath the coolness. There is no threads of thoughts that unite these pastiches; instead, they are fragments from various kinds of films put together for maximum visual richness. Kung fu sequences and game elements both strengthen the visual quality of the trilogy; however, when anxiety toward technology is represented by the Matrix, the Zionists ironically overdose technology within and without the Matrix, implying the penetration of technology into humanity.

The trilogy inherits characters, story, and visual style from 1980's cyberpunk works. It revives the anxiety toward technology and heightens it by reinforcing the

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[47] See her "Playing it Cool in *The Matrix*" for the details about how the trilogy plays cool.

penetration of technology into humanity.　However, the attitude shifts from the naïve

belief in humanity over technology in 1980s cyberpunk to a more subtle notion of

co-existing between humanity and technology.　By employing elements of *Ghost in*

the Shell, the trilogy indicates the status quo at the turn of the century when

technology is the inevitable and essential ingredient of life.

　　This reconciliation attitude is revealed in the trilogy's narrative structure as well.

Given the narrative structure of a classical Western, the trilogy is about the conflicts

between the humane Zion values and self-oriented capitalist values.　The composite

hero and reconciliatory ending of such narrative structure suggest that the ideal

surviving method of an individual nowadays is to manage a balance between the two

values.　Yet, this ideological peace only exists in the films.　In the real world as we

live, the two values are still in conflicts.　If the Matrix system is the representation of

capitalism in the form of culture industry, brainwashing mankind with false

consciousness of freedom, in reality the trilogy itself is the very product of culture

industry that attracts audiences into the cool worlds of Zion and the Matrix.　Even if

the conflicts are solved in the films, Zion, the Matrix, and the audiences are still

encompassed by the omnipresent capitalism.　Therefore, *The Matrix* trilogy provides

no escape from the mobius Matrix.

　　However, from this point of view, this thesis denies the possibilities of the

audiences' subversive readings of the trilogy.　This is a defect in sharp contrast to the

large number of parodies and satires of the trilogy.　The appropriations of the trilogy

form a diversity of various kinds of works, such as films, home-made videos, and

comics.　It would be a contribution if this thesis incorporates these appropriations.

But due to my limited knowledge and ability, there is no dedication to the audiences'

responses to the trilogy in this thesis.　If possible, readers could supplement my

insufficient understanding of *The Matrix* trilogy by look into the appropriations of the

trilogy.

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