

Deconstructing matrix essay



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Present essay develops deconstruction of popular Hollywood trilogy The Matrix, directed by Wachowski brothers in 1999. Deconstruction technique was first conceptually introduced by Derrida and consequently has evolved in many theories, relating to postmodernist thought. Deconstruction of the first part of The Matrix trilogy will be, however, based on cultural theories of Baudrillard and Nietzsche.

The choice of Nietzsche's philosophy is not paradoxical, because it had a profound influence on deconstruction and post-structuralism in general and his famous *On the Genealogy of Morality* may be regarded as the genuine practice of deconstruction applied to Christianity, communist movement and Western civilization. Matrix as the object of deconstruction Deconstruction may be characterized as the practice of philosophical and cultural critique, which seeks to expose stable metaphysical structures and oppositions (such as good and evil, divine and earthly etc.), which are hidden in the discursive system of a cultural product, be it a literary work, a movie or a scientific text (Derrida 10).

In this view, we will use critical cultural concepts developed by Baudrillard and Nietzsche to show basic ideological oppositions and structures, on which The Matrix is based. The Matrix is a cultural product par excellence with embedded ideological meanings and relations between signifier and signified. Moreover, its blockbuster status is premised on simplification of the inherent cultural and philosophical content in favor of immediate commercial success.

Therefore, Matrix represents juxtaposition of cultural and economic structures, which directly refers to Baudrillard's theory of sign and meaning. Let us examine this closely applying Baudrillard's theory. Baudrillard cultural theory and The Matrix One of the essential oppositions on which The Matrix is based, is the opposition between real and symbolic worlds. Real world represents total despair, where human beings are produced mechanically in cocoons just to become slaves of machines. The civilization and culture are ruined and the dense smog covers the sky.

This ugly world appears in the first part of the movie and is contrasted with visionary/symbolic world, where civilization celebrates its prosperity, where people do their daily routine; institutions operate to produce money, services and jobs. As the plot develops, Morpheus tells us that the truth about the reality is known only to few people, who struggle with forces, which control Matrix (symbolic world) – the rest of the people are unaware about their real conditions (the name 'Morpheus' is evidently postulates this eternal sleep of the majority).

A famous episode, where Morpheus offers two pills to Neo, one of which gives him consciousness of the real contradictions between ideology and reality, obviously postulates another crucial opposition: between conscious and unconscious. Zizek, a renowned Slovenian philosopher, noticed that these two worlds in Matrix represent Lacan's concepts of real and symbolic, which form unconsciousness drives (Zizek 2). However, it is evident that the abovementioned discursive oppositions, which form the nexus of Matrix plot, are vulnerable to deconstruction.

Baudrillard's theory of cultural self-referentiality and simulacrum are especially helpful in this respect. Baudrillard argues that all signs (language, discourse etc.) in modern civilization are characterized by self-referentially, that is why they have no external referent (real world) and constitute symbolic representation of its alleged existence. That is not to say, that the real world does not exist, but that simulation of reality results in its transformation into hyperreality, exemplified by media products of modern civilization: television, Disney Land etc (Baudrillard 1988 35-39).

Baudrillard's paradoxical claim that Gulf War ' did not take place' and that it was " the continuation of the absence of politics by other means", hence, should be interpreted not as intellectual challenge, but as vivid application of his simulacrum concept (Baudrillard 200414-16). Baudrillard's concepts, described above directly refer to The Matrix and originally its creators drew heavily on his works. However, Baudrillard's concepts deconstruct The Matrix oppositions, rather than strengthen them.

First of all, it is evident that the opposition between real and symbolic in The Matrix is false, because it constitutes metaphysical dichotomy between ideology and reality, basis and superstructure, which are the cornerstones of conscious revolutionary activity, described in The Matrix. Matrix is not symbolical reality/ideology, but hyperreality, which has no point of references except itself. This simulacrum is not opposed to the reality, but embraces it as one of its signs.

Hence, it is evident that the oppositions between reality and ideology, or conscious and unconscious constitute basic prejudices of subject-centered

vision of social transformation, developed in revolutionary theories, such as Marxism. These false oppositions create tangible contradictions in The Matrix as a narrative. As we remember, Agent Smith was almighty while he was in Matrix, however, could not penetrate into reality. Or, remember the boy in the scene, when Oracle tells Neo that he is the One, who could bend spoon, or literally manipulate symbolic meanings.

Moreover, enormous powers, demonstrated by Neo and his friends in simulated world, prove that symbolic reality is more real than original reality, that said, it constitutes hyperreality, according to Baudrillard (Baudrillard 1995 34-37). Nietzsche and The Matrix. Matrix includes not only real/symbolic opposition, but opposition between good and evil, which is so characteristic of Hollywood movies featuring 'good and bad guys'.

However, it should be noted that philosophical appeal of the film, which goes beyond its commercial facade, has to do with more complex and deep opposition between oppressors and oppressed and between moral and immoral - themes, which were specifically addressed by Nietzsche in his works Beyond Good and Evil and On the Genealogy of Morality. First of all, it is evident that the struggle of Morpheus, Neo and others for the liberation of human kind is dressed in Christian clothes.

This is best exemplified by Neo, playing the role of the Messiah (the One), who is chosen to save the world from Evil and Morpheus reflections, in which he constantly points to Moral issues, such as his tete-a-tete conversations with Neo, in which he explains their mission. As we know, Nietzsche deconstructed Christianity and its morality as the religion of defective and

inferior people, suffering from 'ressentiment' or envy of those, who are stronger and smarter (Nietzsche 2002).

In the First Treatise of his Genealogy Nietzsche develops philological analysis of good/evil opposition, coming to the conclusion that 'good' originally meant everything which is life-asserting and powerful and always related to noblemen and rulers. In contrast, 'bad' always related to inferior and slavish (Nietzsche 1998 9-15). Nietzsche's historical reconstruction of the genealogy of morality allows us deconstruct its representation in The Matrix.

Following Nietzsche thought, it may be said that Neo and his friends substitute real morality of power and life for 'slave morality' of inferior, who try to assert their own 'will to power'. Hence, Neo's revolution is 'slave revolt in morality', which is contaminated with Judean and Christian hatred to powerful (Nietzsche 1998a 17). Another object of deconstruction is Morpheus' discourse, which is intrinsically dialectical, since it debunks real contradictions between false and true, real and imaginary, conscious and unconscious, seeking to overcome them in new just reality.

Morpheus' firm belief in Neo's mission, exemplified the scene when Neo is almost dead, Oracle, and, eventually, Trinity's love, bringing Neo back to life - all are the same signs, postulating dialectical faith in historical/theological providence. This kind of dialectics was deconstructed by Nietzsche in application to Socrates. Nietzsche argued that Socrates used dialectics as a tool for defending interests of the plebs and humiliating the dignity of the noble.

Hence, dialectics is a sign of ' bad consciousness' and eternal envy of noble, rich and strong (Nietzsche 1998b 10-16). Conclusion The Matrix analysis was based on the deconstruction of several oppositions, which constitute the structure of its narrative: real/symbolic, conscious/unconscious, good/evil, oppressors/oppressed. Applying Baudrillard's concepts of simulacrum and self-referentiality and Nietzsche's account on genealogy of morality and Christianity, we have showed that the discursive structure of the movie is unstable and ideological.