

Michel Foucault's Docile Bodies and The Matrix Trilogy: A Close Reading Applied to the Human Pods and Growing Fields in the Films

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Abstract : The recent release of The Matrix Resurrections persuaded many film scholars that The Matrix trilogy had lost its appeal and its concepts were largely outdated. This study examines the human pods and growing fields in the trilogy. Their functionality is compared to Michel Foucault's concept of docile bodies: linking fictional and contemporary worlds. This paradigm is scrutinized through surveillance literature. The analogy brings to light common elements of hidden surveillance practices in technologies. The comparison illustrates the effects of body manipulation portrayed in the movies and their relevance with contemporary surveillance practices. Many scholars have utilized a close reading methodology in film studies (J.Bizzocchi, J.Tanenbaum, P.Larsen, S. Herbrechter, and Deacon et al.). The use of a particular lens through which media text is examined is an indispensable factor that needs to be incorporated into the methodology. The study spotlights both scenes from the trilogy depicting the human pods and growing fields. The functionality of the pods and the fields compare directly with Foucault's concept of docile bodies. By utilizing Foucault's study as a lens, the research will unearth hidden components and insights into the films. Foucault recognizes three disciplines that produce docile bodies: 1) manipulation and the interchangeability of individual bodies, 2) elimination of unnecessary movements and management of time, and 3) command system guaranteeing constant supervision and continuity protection. These disciplines can be found in the pods and growing fields. Each body occupies a single pod aiding easier manipulation and fast interchangeability. The movement of the bodies in the pods is reduced to the absolute minimum. Thus, the body is transformed into the ultimate object of control - minimum movement correlates to maximum energy generation. Supervision is exercised by wiring the body with numerous types of cables. This ultimate supervision of body activity reduces the body's purpose to mere functioning. If a body does not function as an energy source, then it's unplugged, ejected, and liquefied. The command system secures the constant supervision and continuity of the process. To Foucault, the disciplines are distinctly different from slavery because they stop short of a total takeover of the bodies. This is a clear difference from the slave system implemented in the films. Even though their system might lack sophistication, it makes up for it in the elevation of functionality. Further, surveillance literature illustrates the connection between the generation of body energy in The Matrix trilogy to the generation of individual data in contemporary society. This study found that the three disciplines producing docile bodies were present in the portrayal of the pods and fields in The Matrix trilogy. The above comparison combined with surveillance literature yields insights into analogous processes and contemporary surveillance practices. Thus, the constant generation of energy in The Matrix trilogy can be equated to the consistent data generation in contemporary society. This essay shows the relevance of the body manipulation concept in the Matrix films with contemporary surveillance practices.

Keywords : docile bodies, film trilogies, matrix movies, michel foucault, privacy loss, surveillance

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