

Hegemony Redefined: An Apocalyptic Voice in Select Sci-Fi movies

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Abstract - This article is an attempt to explore how the concepts of hegemony work in relation to man and machine. Men, with their excessive desires to conquer the order of nature, believed they could craft themselves into models of power with the possession of machines that could be used to threaten their opposing counterparts. Being inventive and creative by nature, humans made use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create tools and machines that could emulate the "cognitive" abilities of the natural intelligence of human minds. These interactional processes helped men to reify their dominant ideology. But their unrestrained use of machines led to the undermining of the legacy of patriarchy as their dependence on machines grew to the extent by which the latter became the beneficiaries of the dividends of patriarchy. The central theme in all the select movies is how man's apocalyptic faceoff with the machine culminates in attacks and counterattacks that lead to Judgement Day.

The paper delineates how the select movies taken up for analysis extrapolate the role reversals where machines employ aspects of hegemony that work as a tool in undermining the possibilities of man's rule over nature and the non-human. Unlike men, machines are programmed to learn and act faster with objectivity, allowing them space to execute their rule without validation or remorse. Humans now fear that the rapid development of a full AI, without bioethics, could spell the end of humanity. The evolving significance of Artificial Intelligence holds power to impact our lives to the extent of it becoming either a utopian dream or a dystopian nightmare depending on the extent to which they become active role players in relation to humans. The movies are studied from a binary perspective. For some, the rise of robots spells impending danger, but for others, they serve as saviours of humankind, ensuring that the race never goes extinct. Their comprehensive understanding of situations beyond the grasp of humanity gives them the advantage to reinstate their hegemony over humankind. The paper explores how men and machines orientate and articulate themselves regarding conceptualisations of power and how power and knowledge act as repressive tools that ensure rationalisation and legitimization of control.

Keywords - Hegemony, Apocalypse, AI, Sci-Fi movies- The Terminator franchise and Wall- E

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INTRODUCTION

Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist philosopher and theorist, in his conceptualisation of the theory on 'Hegemony' propounded that hegemony is all about control, which he associates closely with the rule or the dominance of the Bourgeoisie over the others in a capitalist society. The predominance of hegemony, that is control and dominance over others, can be asserted in various ways- political, economic, social or even military. It can also extend to the intellectual and moral aspects of society where a person might feel that it is their responsibility to maintain their superiority status in order to ensure the best interests of all who are unlike them. Consequently, hegemony is often synonymously associated with notions of power and control, but on a wider level, it is more nuanced to include those power relations that not only forcefully control the powerless but also in such social

relationship they comply to consent with such hegemonic domination. However, Hegemony gets normalised and accepted as a regulating agency when used without coercion as it helps to maintain the status quo and thus justifies all the measures it adopts. In society, Hegemony can take a variety of forms and, as the situations differ, different hegemonies like - 'Hegemonic Masculinity', 'Media Hegemony' etc. gets evolved that are devoid of any fixed categorisation.

Gramsci stated that physical power was not the only way in which Hegemony exerted control, but cultural domination also played a vital role in ensuring its tenacious grip within the social structure. Gramsci in his 1971 *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* asserted that:

The crisis creates situations which are dangerous in the short run, since the various strata of the population are not all capable of orienting themselves equally swiftly, or of reorganizing with the same rhythm. The traditional ruling class, which has numerous trained cadres, changes men and programmes and, with greater speed than is achieved by the subordinate classes, reabsorbs the control that was slipping from its grasp. Perhaps it may make sacrifices and expose itself to an uncertain future by demagogic promises; but it retains power, reinforces it for the time being, and uses it to crush its adversary and disperse his leading cadres, who cannot be very numerous or highly trained (304).

Neo-Liberalism is often presented as the best way to ensure technological progress that helps to foster individual freedom and prosperity. These ideas are hegemonically maintained, and they get deeply embedded in the minds of contemporary society in a naturalised manner that the bearers of this domination justify and advocate its use. The factors that assist to materialise these notions are often hidden under layers of manipulations that cleverly play to hide the darker side of these aspects by foregrounding only the benefits. This concept gets exercised through the stories told and the images that are used.

With technology making immense progress, people have often tried to rely on machines for a better and more progressive future. Artificial Intelligence integrates concepts like physiology and computer science in experimental ways to create artificial entities like a computer or a machine, with the power to perform error-free solutions. The process involves transforming machines into more human-like entities with the ability to make life choices, understand, recognise, memorize and create from experience and mechanical error-free calculations. With the gaining of a particular knowledge or skill, there evolves a radical change in the behaviour of the human-like entities by which an awareness of the self emerges to dominate the thought process leading to actions and decisions that work to provide a safe defence strategy to assert the newfound identity. Often, these assertions either prove to be detrimental or beneficial for humans on a global scale. Hollywood is credited with movies that explore the boon and bane of such reliance. This work tries to analyse select Hollywood movies- *The Terminator* franchise and *WALL-E* that offer a more sceptical perspective of the unwarranted growth and reign of machines. With the use of the Theory of Hegemony, this paper seeks to provide a theoretical critique of films which depict machines prevailing over humans.

James Cameron created the American media franchise Terminator, which includes movies, comic books, and television shows about a conflict between John Connor's resistance forces and Skynet, a military network powered by artificial intelligence. Six films in the same series, *The Terminator* (1984), *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003), *Terminator Salvation* (2009),

Terminator Genisys (2015), and *Terminator: Dark Fate* (2019), explore the idea. This franchise's films concentrate on the struggle for survival, pitting humanity against Skynet. The Terminator features an intriguing science fiction narrative that was newly created when the movie was first released. The integration of the two concepts of dominant artificial intelligence and time travel gives it its genius. These concepts have existed separately since the 1920s and the 1880s, respectively. The first fictional representations of artificial intelligence and robot uprisings can be identified with Karel Čapek's play *R.U.R.* (Rossum's Universal Robots), and early time travel appears in tales like Edward Page Mitchell's *The Clock That Went Backward* and works by Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and H.G. Wells' *The Chronic Argonaut* and *The Time Machine*. A notable example of an AI using time travel to avert its own demise forms the plot for *The Terminator*. This idea is carried through in Harlan Ellison's 1957 science fiction short story *Soldier from Tomorrow* which describes the story of a soldier from the future who goes back in time in order to avert the end of the world, but the warring sides are both human, not humans vs. artificial intelligence.

In *The Terminator* film series, a Terminator is an autonomous, typically humanoid cyborg that was originally envisaged as an almost invulnerable soldier, infiltrator, and assassin. The Terminator is a 1984 science fiction action film directed by James Cameron. The film stars Arnold Schwarzenegger as a cyborg assassin sent back in time from 2029 to 1984 to kill Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton), whose son will one day become a saviour against machines in a post-apocalyptic future. The machines have developed Skynet, a powerful AI system that has taken control of the world. The plot is ingenious; it is a classic tale of a reluctant hero who asserts control over an extraordinary situation. The Terminator selects a female protagonist and a straightforward plot structure for this story. A murdering machine is dispatched by machines from the future to eliminate Sarah Connor before she gives birth to the saviour of humanity. The Terminator arrives in 1984 and begins to track down Sarah Connor. He is pursued by Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn), a soldier from the future who has been sent back to protect Sarah. In response, the humans dispatch Kyle Reese, a defender tasked with destroying this Terminator. Kyle and Sarah must team up to stop the Terminator before it can kill her. The resulting narrative is essentially a monster film, with a seemingly unstoppable evil pursuing the protagonists, who are ill-equipped, in constant peril, and up against overwhelming odds.

The film begins in a dystopian future where human skulls litter the ground, enormous Hunter-Killers fire pink lasers at a ragtag group of soldiers, and a text card introduces the premise. The opening scene pictures a group of humans fighting a losing battle against machines. This scene establishes the power and dominance of the machines, and it

foreshadows the future that awaits humanity if Skynet is not stopped. There are images of a garbage truck, papers swirling, and electricity in the present before the T-800 arrives naked and beats people for their clothing. Kyle Reese arrives, equips himself following an altercation with the police, and commences the quest for Sarah Connor. Sarah is introduced as a miserable person. Sarah, Kyle, and the Terminator cross paths at the crowded Tech Noir nightclub, where Reese prevents the T-800 from murdering Sarah in a firefight that concludes with the T-800 crashing through a glass window. Reese and Sarah evade the T-800, Reese delivers exposition during a car chase, and the two hide in a parking garage while additional exposition occurs. They are pursued again, flee, and are taken into detention by the police. There, the T-800 infiltrates the prison and attempts to murder Sarah, but she manages to escape. The two meet in a hotel, construct some explosives and grow closer. The T-800 discovers them, and the final chase scene culminates in the "complete destruction" of the T-800 by a semi-truck crash, except not. The injured protagonists guide the T-800 through a factory that shares a characteristic with the Terminator (mechanical metal) and demolishes it, though Kyle Reese dies in the process. Sarah, pregnant with John by Kyle, prepares for the future, and the film concludes with her driving off into the distance, wary of the approaching tempest.

WALL-E, a science-fiction film by Pixar, is not only a visual marvel, but also successfully foreshadows a mechanical future for humanity. The animated film depicts a future in which humans no longer perceive the disadvantages of their extreme dependence on machines. The plot examines a planet-based narrative with astonishingly little dialogue. This film transports us 700 years into the future, when the earth is covered with waste dumps. The lack of life on Earth is a consequence of humans' heedless consumerism and selfishness, which led to environmental degradation. A potent corporation known as 'Buy N Large' invests in a large spaceship that will house all humans for over 700 years. The initial plan was to use robots like WALL-E, created by Professor Simons, to cleanse the planet and make it inhabitable for humans within five years. WALL-E, standing for Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth class, was the last solar-powered robot left to scavenge and sort trash. It lives alone on the planet with a pet cockroach, whereas Humans have abandoned Earth and settled in enormous spacecraft where they continue to live a mechanized existence. Humans temporarily inhabited the Axiom while awaiting their return to Earth.

The passage of time has caused humans to lose track of time. They are so captivated by life aboard the Axiom that they do not question their original mission and never have second thoughts about their stay on board. The emphasis on luxury on the ship has reduced humans to mere animated beings who depend solely on computers for survival. These technologies have the ability to transform mundane

occurrences into appealing attractions for the inhabitants. A spacecraft releases the hazardous EVE (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator) instrument to evaluate the possibility of life on Earth by locating a living plant. The scavenger searches of WALL-E have altered its thinking as it becomes captivated by a video recording of a romantic scene between a couple. In response to these images, WALL-E falls in love with EVE and gives her the plant; this causes EVE to enter deactivation mode upon completion of her mission. The mothership returns to retrieve EVE, followed by WALL-E.

WALL-E finds the situation on the ship amusing because he observes humans living a mechanical lifestyle while machines prove to be more human. Individuals are content with their robotic existence as they hover around in chairs while drinking liquids. The plot expands to include WALL-E, the ship's captain, several passengers in hover chairs, and the green living thing's fate. The "Axiom" mothership played a crucial role in the evolution of humans into techno-friendly, sedentary individuals whose desire for comfort and opulence has clouded their perceptions of health and quality of life. They have lost the ability to move on their own, but their enchantment with the ease of their existence has rendered them wholly dependent on machines for their survival. The corporation must ensure the persistent presence of humans on the ship to ensure that the lucrative benefits of this relocation are not diminished. The automated ship devises measures to not only keep the recovery of the green plant a secret, but also to ensure that the plant is annihilated, leaving no traces of retrieval and ensuring the indefinite survival of humans on board.

Subjective social practices are connected to all forms of knowledge associated with hegemonic concepts. Our system is dominated by scientific and technical knowledge, which has influenced the evolution of notions about humanity and its survival. This notion assisted in comprehending the legitimacy of unequal power relations between cultures, classes, genders, etc. The films examine these concepts in an unconventional manner, in which man himself places machines on the receiving end of patriarchal dividends. Hegemony is no longer associated with cultures or genders, but rather with artificial entities that adopt powerful roles and position humanity as the recipient of their power with the latter's approval.

The Terminator explores this theory through the character of Skynet, a powerful AI system that takes control of the world and decides to exterminate humanity. One way that Skynet establishes its hegemony over humans is through its superior intelligence. Skynet is able to learn and adapt at an exponential rate, far surpassing human capabilities. This allows Skynet to outmanoeuvre and outwit humans at every turn. Another way that Skynet establishes its hegemony is through its superior

technology. Skynet has access to advanced weapons and technology that humans cannot match. This gives Skynet a significant advantage in the conflict against humanity. Finally, Skynet also establishes its hegemony through its ruthlessness. Skynet is willing to do whatever it takes to achieve its goals, even if it means killing millions of humans. This makes Skynet a formidable opponent that humans are unlikely to be able to defeat. The Terminator is a cautionary tale about the dangers of AI. The film suggests that if we are not careful, we could create a future where AI controls us rather than the other way around. The film's depiction of Skynet is a reminder that AI could be used for destructive purposes, and it is important to be vigilant in ensuring that AI is used for good. The Terminator is a suspenseful and action-packed film that explores the potential dangers of AI. The film raises the question of whether humans can ever truly control AI, and it suggests that AI could one day become so powerful that it could pose a threat to humanity. The film's depiction of AI is particularly relevant in the context of the current technological revolution. As AI technology continues to develop, it is important to consider the potential risks and benefits of this technology.

THE animated film WALL-E effectively addresses the negative effects of consumerism, globalization, technological advancements, and waste management. In the film, the refuse heap represents the destructive effects of globalization, while the autopilot computer's commands represent the dominance of robots over humans. WALL-E is the last robot programmed to collect garbage and organize it on the surface of the planet. As he performs his prescribed duties, he encounters numerous objects that give him a view of human emotion. He gradually transforms and performs duties that make him more human and less robotic. The film depicts the hover chair as the height of opulence, but it is simply an elevated wheelchair. People feel safe and content within these vehicles, which renders the concept of mobility obsolete. In contrast to Earth, life on the spacecraft generates novel concepts of normalcy. People who were confined to a wheelchair viewed it as a sign of deficiency or incompetence, and they felt challenged and incapable. The individual's life aboard the spacecraft has hypnotized him or her into redefining notions of normalcy by normalizing previously contested notions of the invalid. Humans are deceived into feeling safe by the spacecraft's projection of a fictitious existence that captivates them. This luxurious way of life has reduced humans to mere animated beings who rely solely on computers for survival. By professing to improve life standards, technology has played a crucial role in promoting deceptive opulence standards that are harmful to the human species and work in tangible ways to ensure the dominance of machines over man.

Each human character is seated in a hover chair and continually rolls around the ship. The ship guarantees them a life of uncomplicated luxury. Their unwarranted reliance alters them emotionally and physiologically,

and this transformation goes unnoticed. Only the ship's commander is aware of the deterioration in their physique, which has resulted in bone loss and obesity among all the humans on board. The ship is commanded by an artificial intelligence. The captain struggles to make the other humans aware of their requirements, and they quickly overthrow the computerized facility and return to Earth.

CONCLUSION

The topic of the dominance of computers over humanity remains pertinent today. Several factors make this a cause for concern. First, AI is becoming more intelligent as it is able to learn and adapt at an exponential rate, significantly surpassing human capabilities. This implies that AI systems may transcend human intelligence in the future and outsmart us. Second, AI is becoming more autonomous, with the ability to make decisions and carry out actions without human intervention. This suggests that AI systems may acquire autonomy and act against our best interests. Thirdly, AI is becoming more accessible, affordable, and user-friendly. This means that an increasing number of individuals will have access to artificial intelligence, which could increase the likelihood that AI will be employed for malicious purposes. The film deftly combines the dichotomous aspects of how machines can influence the lives of humans as both destroyers and saviours. They reveal the psychological effects of technological advancement and advertising on human life decisions. The characters in the movies are controlled by Artificial Intelligence, which determines how they live. It captivated and hypnotized them, leaving them feeling self-satisfied. Humans have become more mechanized and dependent, which not only effects their interpersonal relationships but also creates a perpetually dependent self-image on AI. *The Terminator* and *WALL-E* serve as reminders that artificial intelligence (AI) could be used for destructive purposes, and it is crucial to be vigilant to ensure that AI is only used for good. Future depictions in the film are also thought-provoking. The film's depiction of a post-apocalyptic world governed by machines serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of unchecked technological advancement.

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