

THE MATRIX: MORPHEUS IN EXILE¹

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What is *The Matrix*?² Andy and Larry Wachowski's 1999 movie is neither more nor less than a patchwork of explicit, contradictory, and almost indiscriminate quotations. It takes us from Judeo-Christian narratives, ancient theosophies, and Buddhist enlightenment to the rampant technophobias of the modern and postmodern eras. It ranges from a technophilic celebration of simulated, video game combat to revelry in Edenic, Zionic paradise. The movie is a contemporary, millennial, morality tale, a New Testament for the twenty-first century, with a salvatory impulse and enough varying religious iconography to suggest that it embraces all faiths and melds them into a universal world order of global dogma. It offers snippets from the most puerile tracts of liberation and revolution to the darkest dystopian visions. Its language extends from the most pompous to the most portentous. It gestures towards the literary and cinematic cases of *Alice in Wonderland*, *Neuromancer*, and *The Wizard of Oz* at the same time as it invokes the philosophies of Plato, G. W. F. Hegel, Karl Marx, Jacques Lacan, Guy Debord, Louis Althusser, Marshall McLuhan, and Jean Baudrillard.² In mingling these familiar evocations across the smooth façade of its profoundly ludic and fetishistic surface, *The Matrix* is, perhaps, the first movie to truly wear its artificial heart upon its sleeve.

The Matrix will assume, perhaps already has assumed, a place as one of the most significant contributions to that loose arrangement known as Science Fiction cinema since Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982).³ *The Matrix* inhabits its own role in the important lineage carved out by these earlier movies: from the paradigm shifting gravity of Kubrick's high modernist utopia, to Scott's post-industrial, postmodern, posthuman, dystopia. While *2001* and *Blade Runner* have become exemplary as creators of discursivity, *The Matrix* is one tremendous cliché.⁴

A brief synopsis of *The Matrix*'s plot is useful in framing the issues at stake in our engagement with the movie. It is somewhere near the year 2199. The revolutionary Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne), commander of the hovercraft Nebuchadnezzar, believes that his fate is to find the Saviour who will free humanity from the bondage of *The Matrix*, and deliver it home to Zion, the last remaining human nation near the earth's core. Morpheus is convinced that the Saviour is Thomas Anderson (Keanu Reeves), an unsuspecting computer hacker who goes by the net moniker Neo. The movie follows Morpheus in his efforts at persuading Anderson that he is the One. To this end, Neo, guided by Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss), agrees to meet Morpheus and accepts his gift of knowledge in the form of a red pill: "Remember, all I'm offering is the truth", says Morpheus, "nothing more." In taking the pill, Neo comes to know that *The Matrix* is a computer generated world set to simulate life in 1999. It is, as Morpheus points out, "the world that has been pulled over our eyes to blind [us] from the truth": that humans are "slaves" in "bondage." *The Matrix* is controlled by Artificial Intelligence and runs on the energy harvested from crops of human beings — what Morpheus calls "the desert of the real." Under Morpheus's tutelage, Neo eventually comes to believe that he is in fact the One. As the One, he will be able to convince others of the truth, thereby instigating a revolution that will save humanity from bondage. By the end of *The Matrix*, it is the prospect of this deliverance that is realized. Home itself, however, is still not

reached: Zion remains a mythical place, and the truth remains to be seen.

“What is *The Matrix*?” asks Neo. “It’s the question which drives us,” replies Trinity. The simplicity of this question and the complexity of its answer have and will continue to provoke much writing on the movie. At first, the question and answer elicit a discussion of the borders between reality and simulation, the limits of appearance, essence, and fantasy from Plato’s cave to Baudrillard’s simulacra.⁵ Morpheus alludes to these concerns when he asks Neo:

What is real? How do you define real? If you’re talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste, see, then real is simply electronic signals interpreted by your brain. [...] Let me tell you why you’re here. You are here because you know something. What you know you can’t explain, but you feel it. You’ve felt it your entire life. That there is something wrong with the world. You don’t know what it is, but it’s there. Like a splinter in your mind. Driving you mad. It is the feeling that has brought you to me.

Morpheus is proposing that within *The Matrix*, everything that we understand to be real, the things we can smell, taste, see, and feel are merely computer generated electronic signals programmed by AI and interpreted by the brain as real. This simulation hides the truly “real” world, both in its dystopic (“desert of the real”) and utopic (Zion as home) form.

In “*The Matrix: Morpheus in Exile*” we will approach the question, “What is *The Matrix*?” and the answer, “It’s the question which drives us” from a perspective different than the one that prioritizes appearance and essence. Our interest is in the drive to knowledge that underpins both the question and the answer. This drive allows us to make sense of how desire is structured in *The Matrix* and how it functions in the crew’s quest for home. But the drive cannot

be realized and the quest for home remains unfulfilled. We will thus examine how the movie employs desire to display the inadequacy of its fantasies of knowledge and the possibility of a return home. The conclusion we will reach is that the formation of desire within *The Matrix* consigns us all to an enduring exile.

To this end, we will focus on one of the more soporific sensibilities that *The Matrix* has to offer. We will attend to Morpheus, the humble yet cognizant figure who entices Neo, our reluctant hero, out of technoslavery and into the light: out of the bondage of false consciousness and into the domain of truth, knowledge, and understanding. It is Morpheus who wrenches Neo out of the slipstream of becoming — the chaos, confusion, and possibility of what the commander calls “knowing the path” — and delivers him into the kingdom of being — the full presence of “walking the path.” Morpheus is the purveyor of truth, the champion of reality. He offers Neo and the others the truth about *The Matrix*, and Zion as the reality of home. Zion gives hope to his compatriots and purpose to their mission. However, once these truths are taken on board, the crewmembers are thrown into varying states of self-imposed exile from *The Matrix* and Zion, each longing to return home. And still there is more to Morpheus’s disclosure. Named after the ancient god of dreams, Morpheus also gives shape and form to dreams. While exposing *The Matrix* as a dream world, he simultaneously constructs the dream of home in the state of Zion. Is Zion then nothing more than a dream world, and as such, an unobtainable goal? One also wonders if Morpheus has fallen into a dream of his own making.

Part I of this essay considers the way in which desire functions in the movie. This section begins with a general discussion of desire as negation: one must give up in order to fulfill one’s dreams. It moves on to a close reading of desire in the combat training session between Morpheus and Neo — master and slave — as an enactment of Hegel’s thinking on the dynamic between lord and bondsman, and how this dynamic impacts upon Morpheus’s distinction

between being and becoming. It concludes by offering a few speculations on how the movie's configuration of desire, gender, and sexuality reframes Hegel's dialectic.

Part II begins with Morpheus's voice in order to explain how the act of interpellation — the hailing of a subject — is a racialized event. Even before we see him, his voice functions as an apparent signifier of truth. The movie seems to be committed to Morpheus as the marker of its integrity. However, as we will show, Morpheus's role as purveyor of truth is put into doubt when we begin to expose the way in which *The Matrix* locates Morpheus's voice, his supplying of drugs, and his desire to return home as elements within a fantasmatic dream world.

PART I

Like Dorothy in Oz, Morpheus lives in exile. In exile from the land of freedom (Zion), living in the hovercraft Nebuchadnezzar, willingly condemned to self-exile from the simulated dream world of *The Matrix*, Morpheus, like Dorothy, wants to go home. As Tank (Marcus Chong) informs Neo: "Zion is the place, man. You'll see it one day. Last human city. All we got left." Yet, as a fantasmatic homeland, Zion is never seen. Its only visible manifestations are its by-products, Tank and his brother Dozer (Anthony Ray Parker), who are "both 100 percent pure, old fashioned, homegrown human. Born free. Right here in the real world. Genuine children of Zion." But if Zion is a place of utopian fantasy, we might wonder if anyone will ever see the dream fulfilled. With this doubt in mind, we can begin to see home as a place of nostalgic or uncanny longing.⁶

Morpheus and his crew nevertheless continue their quest to save humanity and lead it home to Zion. In order to realize their desire they must give up certain pleasures. The crew, for instance, must deny itself all the comforts that *The Matrix* has to offer for the brutal existence of the real world. This giving up

is a general example of the way in which desire as negation works in *The Matrix*. More specifically, Morpheus must convince his crew that to believe in Neo is to give themselves up to his dream and Neo's realization of it. Neo, in turn, must give himself up to their desire.

Neo's understanding of this truth begins with his acceptance of Morpheus's maxim: "You have to let it all go, Neo. Fear, doubt and disbelief. Free your mind."⁷ In effect, Morpheus must teach Neo how to forget.⁸ Through the negation of his ontological bad faith, Neo will come to be the One. The pivotal moment in Neo's transformation is the combat training session. During this scene, Morpheus, the Masterful Father, must teach his student, the untutored slave, how to be the One. The Master encourages the slave to "stop trying to hit me, and hit me": "Don't think you are. Know you are." The move from "trying" and "thinking" to "doing" and "knowing" is an ontological shift from becoming to being. This is the crux of the matter. And Neo eventually learns the lesson well. When, for example, he refuses to run from the Agents — standard practice for any mere mortal — Trinity asks Morpheus, "What is he doing?" and Morpheus responds: "He's beginning to believe." Morpheus's desire for Neo to be the One propels *The Matrix's* utopian plot forward, towards home, but it simultaneously undermines just such a resolution.

In order to chart the dynamic of desire, it is beneficial to consider how the combat training session choreographs Hegel's dialectical play between lordship and bondage within the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁹ The lord, Morpheus, is in a position of power, full of self-knowledge because, as Hegel notes, he "enjoys" the "thing": he enjoys knowing the truth. The lord requires a bondsman in servitude who will "work" for it and him (Hegel ¶190). The master, Morpheus, requires a slave, Neo. In working for the lord, the bondsman fulfils the lord's need and "desire": as the One, Neo fulfils Morpheus's need and desire. As Morpheus explains: "You are the One, Neo. You see, you may have spent the last few years looking for me, but I have spent my entire life looking for you."

When the lord becomes a slave to his desire (Morpheus has a blind faith in Neo being the One), and the bondsman takes on the role of the lord (Neo becomes the One), “what the bondsman does is really the action of the lord”(Hegel ¶191). While the master teaches his slave how to be the One, he simultaneously institutes his own demise. As Hegel observes, “What now confronts [the lord] is not an independent consciousness, but a dependent one” (Hegel ¶191). The lord is dependent upon the bondsman for his self-consciousness. In his desire for Neo, Morpheus manifests Hegel’s negative desire — the lord becomes the bondsman.¹⁰ Morpheus is enslaved by his Neophyte. Divided by the dialectics of desire, and dependent upon the One to bring him home, Morpheus is destined to remain in exile. His position of mastery is set off course.

If Morpheus’s position as master is placed in doubt, where does this leave Neo? Is he the true master of the Nebuchadnezzar, and, as he insists twice in the movie, to Morpheus and to the Oracle (Gloria Foster), is he the master of his own fate? Is he the One? Has the ontological shift from becoming to being taken place? As *The Matrix* makes clear, being cannot but always ever be a becoming. An important moment in Neo’s arrival as the One demonstrates his very undoing. He is thrown in front of an oncoming subway train by Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving) who announces, “Hear that, Mr. Anderson? That is the sound of inevitability. It is the sound of your death. Goodbye, Mr. Anderson.” To which Anderson proclaims: “My name is Neo.” Neo pronounces his seemingly singular ontology “I am the One.” However, when Neo names himself he in effect divides and defers his being.¹¹ Anything more than “My” — and even then *différance* is inscribed — re-instates the dialectical formulation of becoming. With becoming comes desire. To desire is not to be: and to be is not to desire.

Because Neo is full of desire, he must give up being the One. This self-abnegation manifests itself in two relationships: the first with Trinity, the second with Morpheus. To begin with, Trinity is to return to the opening

sequence of *The Matrix*. Right from the start, Trinity cannot take her eyes off Neo.¹² Unexpectedly relieving Cypher (Joe Pantoliano) from his shift watching over the sleeping Neo, Cypher can feel her voyeuristic desire: “You like him don’t you. You like watching him.” Trinity displaces her desire for Neo onto Morpheus’s profound faith in his being the One: “Morpheus believes he is the One.” Later, Trinity herself comes to believe that Neo is the One because of her love for him. The desire and love between Trinity and Neo is intimated throughout the movie. The voyeuristic looks, meaningful and hoarse whispers, playful verbal sparring, and surreptitious favours culminate in two kisses and an embrace. Trinity’s first kiss (a)rouses Neo from the dead: “Neo, I’m not afraid anymore. The Oracle told me that I would fall in love, and that that man, the man that I loved, would be the One. So, you see, you can’t be dead. You can’t be, because I love you. You hear me. I love you.” Gender-bending the tale of “The Sleeping Beauty,” Trinity’s kiss breaths life into Neo. Revived by her kiss, Neo believes that he is the One. And yet, the moment of awakening truly brings the double-edged sword of desire: certainly Trinity initiates the declaration of their love and desire, but, in the end, it is Neo who pulls her towards him, in their final kiss and embrace. Neo is a slave to his desire. His desire for Trinity is a symptom of his own impossible dream of being the One.

The formation of sexual desire within *The Matrix* seems to rest on the love between Neo and Trinity, and yet the movie hinges on a homosocial longing between Neo and Morpheus. This shift is borne out by a vital change made to the earlier screenplay. Originally it was Trinity who consoles Neo after he is baptized into the real world. Neo asks her the ultimate question: “Am I dead?”, to which she replies: “Far from it.”¹³ However, in the movie, Trinity’s original role is taken on by Morpheus, thereby transforming heterosexual romance into homosocial desire. Morpheus longs for Neo to be the One, and the longing is reciprocated. It is useful to remember that Neo is brought to Morpheus by a “feeling.” This tempts one to consider Morpheus’s Socratic tutelage as a

homosexual play. The master-slave dialectic — with its sado-masochistic overtones — sees him teaching his beautiful, young disciple the tricks of the trade, the paths to be-coming, but far from maintaining his mastery, Morpheus must recognize that he has been nothing more than the other.¹⁴

PART II

“Look, a Negro!” It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.

“Look, a Negro!” It was true. It amused me.

“Look, a Negro!” The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.

“Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible. (Fanon III-12)

This exemplary and distressing incident as it is relayed in Franz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* outlines and defaces the bond between “the desire of the look and the limits of language.”¹⁵ Fanon stages an encounter that is perhaps pre-emptive of what Louis Althusser will later call interpellation.¹⁶ In this latter thesis, the human subject is hailed, or called, by an officer of the Law. For Fanon also the scenario is not so much the beginning of a dialogue as it is a command, an injunction without recourse. The black subject becomes both a subject of and subjected to the legislature of the interpellation.¹⁷ In the particular instance cited above, Fanon is brought into discourse through two distinct if inter-animating patterns of signification — and this is always true of interpellation: through the sphere of the visual and by way of the tract of the auditory. On the one hand, Fanon comes into view through the narcissistic

desire for knowledge and thus mastery over the other as it is exercised by the drive to look. In being assaulted by this look, Fanon takes the blow which, as he says a little later, “splattered my whole body with black blood” (112). This black blood, a synecdoche for his black skin, and his black self, is a primary signifier for the fixing of meaning.¹⁸ The look brings the weight of intolerable histories to bear on Fanon’s figuration of his own visibility, and foregrounds a prejudice in which black blood evinces inhumanity and animality, which, in turn, give way to cannibalism. This avowal of animality is echoed in *The Matrix* through Agent Smith’s accusatory zoophobic address to Morpheus in which he speaks of his loathing for the “stink” of Morpheus’s (black) sweat. On the other hand, when it comes to interpellation there is also the tract of the auditory with which to deal. For Fanon is, of course, hailed, called by the voice of the Law. Impelled to recognize this voice, he is both seduced into turning in response, and in doing so is determined by it. What if Fanon were to raise his own voice in reply? Is there anything he could say in response? What if he were to hail?

If Fanon is battered by the Law’s masterful gaze and made mute by its enslaving voice, in *The Matrix* Morpheus seems to be licensed by it. Morpheus’s interpellation is a process that needs to be thought through both the field of vision and the voice of the other. Morpheus surfaces long before he is presented to us. Even before the movie’s credits unfold we hear the voices of Trinity and Cypher speaking of Morpheus’s conviction that the man over whom they watch is the One. A little while later, as Neo sleeps by his computer, its screen offers us glimpses of newspaper footage that defames the notorious terrorist Morpheus. When Morpheus and Neo finally make direct contact, it is not so much face-to-face as it is ear-to-ear. It is through an exchange of voices via the inhuman machinic apparatus of the cellular telephone. (It is worth noting that its analogical antecedent plays a central role in *The Matrix* by acting as a bridge between the digital realm of *The Matrix* and the real world. It is the means by which the crewmembers are able to move in and out of *The Matrix*.)

Morpheus's voice arrives at Anderson in the form of a Nokia 8110i via Fed Ex.¹⁹ He calls him, literally. His voice is successfully delivered. Through the authority of Morpheus's voice as the Law, he interpellates and in so doing names Neo.

It is certainly the case that in *The Matrix*, along with a majority of films, and often within film theory too, the voice is given a privileged position as articulation, redolent of proximity, immediacy, and full metaphysical presence. Severed from its corporeal body of enunciation, Morpheus's voice is at its most irrefutable when sounded in this pure and unadulterated form. It is ventriloquised through a network of attachments — telepathic as well as telephonic exchanges. But we must be vigilant against a desire to privilege either the organic or technological presence of the voice. The voice as a phenomenal enactment of speech cannot in any simple way guarantee the fact of metaphysical presence.²⁰ If we follow Derrida or Lacan we learn that speech is preceded by writing or language. Also we come to understand that, because of this, it offers not so much a badge of full presence as the very absence of presence. In Morpheus's case, when the (black) voice is cut off from the (black) body of enunciation, the voice becomes a fetish: a substitute for the recognition and disavowal of Morpheus's body. In a reversal of Fanon's dilemma in which the fetishised black body draws attention to the absenting of a voice, here we hear Morpheus's voice before we see his body, and because of this we are acutely aware of that voice's corporeal embodiment.

In addition, we must be attentive to the fantasy or flight of fancy that is *The Matrix's* construction of Morpheus's black voice as the voice of the god of dreams, the voice fabricated by him, the voice of the dream itself, and, therefore, of the dreamer too. To understand this is to cast suspicion on the fidelity of Morpheus's remark to Neo: "Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream, Neo? How would you ever know the difference between the dream world and the real world?" Similarly, we must be cautious of a comment in which

Morpheus again addresses Neo: “You have the look of a man who accepts what he sees because he is expecting to wake up. Ironically, this is not far from the truth.” We should not be convinced by these two utterances for reasons Morpheus neither eludes to nor invokes, but of which Sigmund Freud is well aware: the true wish of the dream, the one wish it seeks to fulfill, says Freud, is “the wish to sleep! We dream in order not to have to wake up, because we want to sleep” (Freud, *Letters* 354-55). This is the rub: we neither expect nor want to wake up. Why should we expect that Morpheus’s efforts as the (ad)minister(er) of morphine might be geared towards alerting Neo, or us for that matter, to the deceptive trickery of the ideological simulation of *The Matrix* and the true horror of the reality it hides? As the god of dreams, his express purpose, and etymological duty is to put us to sleep, to keep us asleep, to detain us in the realm of dreams in order that, ironically, we may fulfill our own wishes by not having to wake up.

Freud suggests that dream analysis was to become the royal road to the unconscious, and that, as Octave Mannoni has subsequently proposed, “any dream has an umbilical cord through which it communicates with the unknown” (48-85, 50). Freud also ventures a correlation between the architecture of dreams and that of neurosis. There are obvious fragments of fantasy at work in *The Matrix*: the dreamer is necessarily mistaken because s/he, like the neurotic, desires the desire for nothing. Similarly, the interpreter of the dream is mistaken if s/he believes that s/he can translate dreams into anything other than a prevarication of their true meaning. In the same way, Morpheus himself, the god of dreams, is mistaken as he parades down his own royal road in the comprehensive — and exquisite because it is so exhaustive — belief that Neo is the One. Morpheus, in fact, becomes a slave to his own mastery and desire. And he is not just mistaken for this reason. Let us not forget that his erroneous ways also turn on an unfulfillable desire to mark the very distinction between fantasy and reality, between the world of the digital

and the real world. By extension, his inability to fulfill this desire, even though he holds a topography of the route to Zion, makes it impossible to return home. The wish, the desire to return home, cannot be realized.

But there is more at stake than this: coming to terms with the arrangement of both Freud's and Morpheus's dream world is more than simply a matter of debating or renegotiating the interplay of relations between fantasy and fact. Dreams must be thought of not only as wish fulfillments, as the fulfillment of hidden wishes, but also, as Freud touches upon, in relation to the hallucinatory states of psychosis: not that there is no escape to the real, but that the real itself has been evacuated. As such, the contrivance of *The Matrix* and the ruse of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* is that neither of them is under any illusion about their fantasmatic dis-order. They are about nothing other than the primary disturbances that induce distinct patterns or registers of fantasy. It is because of this that *The Matrix* so early on presents us with a copy of Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, and not just a copy but a hollowed out one at that, rather than, say, a volume of Marx and Engel's *The German Ideology*, saturated with worth and poignancy. Realizing the design of these patterns of fantasy is to begin to hear the splinter in one's mind as a voice which tells us, with a haunting, nagging, and relentless tenacity, that we are somewhere other than in the midst of yet another battle to overcome false consciousness. Instead, this voice disfigures, distorts, and, most hazardously, dislocates. It dislocates and relocates Morpheus, his dream world, his fellow travelers, and their hovercraft, the Nebuchadnezzar. Driven by this vehicle, whose namesake is also known for his vivid dreaming, Morpheus and his crew are destined to pursue the hopeless promise of a return home, and, at the same time, the discovery that home itself is always and already in exile.

In this essay, we did not set out to answer the question "What is *The Matrix*?" as it is posed in the movie itself. The answer to this question is quickly self-evident. Rather, we hope to have questioned the question itself, to have

asked what drives the asking of the question in the first place. More than simply an effort to inquire into the dynamic between appearance and essence, simulation and the real as *The Matrix* directs us to do, our interest has been in interrogating the drive to knowledge that structures the movie's desire for us to do so.

Analyzing the figure of Morpheus has enabled our interrogation. As the fulcrum around which all desires turn, he tutors Neo in becoming the One, and sets into motion the other characters' quest for home, hoping to direct them out of exile by furthering their dreams of Zion. As such, Morpheus' integrity is unequivocal and his motivation sound. This is the case because of the masterful position he assumes, which he, his crew, and we as viewers take for granted. Yet, as we have shown, it is this masterful presence itself that is the mark of his undoing. This ends up being the case because Morpheus's role as purveyor of truth is put into doubt when one begins to draw attention to how *The Matrix* positions the very things which constitute his integrity and motivation. His masterful tutelage of Neo, the veracity of his voice, his act of supplying Neo with the truth in the form of a therapeutic narcotic, and his desire to return home all become suspect; they all become nothing other than elements within his fantasmatic dream world. As the masterful father, the desirous other, and the god of dreams, Morpheus signals the desire for knowledge that drives *The Matrix*. In the end, then, it is desire in *The Matrix* as a will to know that both organizes and undermines the movie's own desire for resolution. This will cannot be realized, the quest for home must remain unfulfilled, and life must be lived in exile.

NOTES

¹ We would like to thank ZKM and Eikk, especially Peter Weibel, Elisabeth Bronfen, Lothar Spree, and Monika Böttcher for organizing the conference “Inside *The Matrix*,” at which an earlier version of this article was first presented in October 1999, and for their hospitality during this event. It was at this same event that Slavoj Žižek first gave his paper “*The Matrix*, or, The Two Sides of Perversion.” Special thanks to Elisabeth Bronfen for her encouragement and enthusiasm. Thanks also to Miriam Nichols at *West Coast LINE*, to her two very helpful anonymous readers, and to Raiford Guins, Jackie Stacey, and Scott Wilson for their advice and comments.

² *The Matrix* is underpinned and structured by a series of theoretical fragments usurped from the history of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and postcolonial theory. As the movie’s unacknowledged organizing principles some of these will be drawn out and made explicit in this article. For now, mention of the following citations and scenes from the movie will suffice: the dialectical phenomenology of Hegel (in order to know the truth, Morpheus explains that Neo, is a “slave,” who must “let it all go [...] Fear, doubt and disbelief. Free your mind” — through negation the slave acquires knowledge); Marx’s attack on ideology (Morpheus: “You are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else, you were born into bondage, born into a prison [...] a prison for your mind”) and false consciousness (*The Matrix* “is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth”); the ideological state apparatuses of Althusser (Morpheus: “*The Matrix* is everywhere [...] you can feel it when you go to work, when you go to church, when you pay your taxes”); the subject formation of Lacan (the mirror forms a deceptively totalizing, or fragmented self-image for several characters in the movie); and the simulacra of Baudrillard’s postmodern theory (a copy of *Simulacra and Simulations* appears as a prop). See: G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*; Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, 127-88; Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative Function of the I,” In *Écrits: A Selection*, 1-7.

³ See, for instance, exchanges in the pages of *Literature/Film Quarterly* during 1985-1986; Giuliano Bruno, “Postmodernism and *Blade Runner*,” October 41, 61-74, and many of the essays in Annette Kuhn, ed. *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*. *The Matrix* occupies a position as the most successful contribution to the Virtual Reality sub-genre of Science Fiction cinema, which includes Brett Leonard’s *The Lawnmower Man* (1992), Kathryn Bigelow’s *Strange Days* (1995), David Cronenberg’s *Existenz* (1999), and Josef Rusnak’s *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999).

⁴ The *American Heritage College Dictionary* definition of cliché includes the following: “[Fr., p.part. of cliché, to stereotype (imit. of sound of dropping a matrix into molten metal to make a stereotype plate).]”

⁵ For more on this, see Žižek’s “*The Matrix*” and McKenzie Wark, “*The Matrix*: Keanu Lost in Plato’s Cave,” www.nettime.org/nettime.w3archive/199911/msg00181.html.

⁶ On the notion of home, see Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” (1919), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol XVII; Elisabeth Bronfen, “Freud’s hysterics: Jaspers’ nostalgics,” *parallax* 3, 49-64; Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual*

Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory.

7 The Biblical doubting Thomas is alluded to here. But whereas Thomas had to put his doubt aside in order to recognize Christ as man and Saviour, Neo (Thomas Anderson) must negate his doubt in order to recognize himself as both man and Saviour. In the movie, this is made clear as Neo is baptized twice into the “desert of the real.”

8 Paul de Man on Nietzsche’s forgetting, in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust*.

9 At first Hegel suggests that ontological recognition must come in a trial by death: either the lord or bondsman must die in order for complete acknowledgement to take place. In *The Matrix*, the Oracle also predicts a situation bound by death when she informs Neo: “In the one hand you will have Morpheus’s life. In the other you will have your own. One of you is going to die. Which one, is up to you.” The choice in the end comes to nothing as both Hegel’s determination and the Oracle’s clairvoyance is swept aside. As Hegel informs us, a fight till death solves nothing, the elimination of one or the other, or both, satisfies nothing in the grasping of truth. Both master and slave live as Neo saves Morpheus, and one is left wondering who is the lord and who is the bondsman. Again we hear the echo of Hegel’s voice: “For this consciousness [that of the bondsman] has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord. In that experience it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations” (*Phenomenology of Spirit* 194).

10 The function of desire within Hegel is developed in Alexandre Kojève’s *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. For a more explicit reading of desire and the other within a Lacanian framework, see Žižek’s “*The Matrix*.”

11 The issue at stake here is a lesson taught to us by Derrida’s work wherein the delimitation of a word beyond itself (and even in the conjunction of letters) produces the situation of *différance* and dissemination. (See “*Différance*,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, 1-28).

12 On the matter of gender, *The Matrix* manages to plug into something other than the hypermasculine cyborg-with-a-heart-of-gold of 1980s Science Fiction cinema that we see personified in James Cameron’s *The Terminator* (1984) or Paul Verhoeven’s *Robocop* (1987). Examples include Trinity’s ambivalent gender (Neo: “I [...] thought, ... you were a guy.” Trinity: “Most guys do.”), and Switch’s possible lesbianism. Even the title of *The Matrix* itself and the web it weaves is testament to the recent accomplishments of cyberfeminism. Likewise, its various scenes of artificial reproduction and rebirth are useful for those interested in writing analyses of Science Fiction cinema informed by Julia Kristeva’s work.

13 This scene is echoed by the later resurrection in which Trinity’s kiss revives Neo from the dead.

14 The history that makes it possible for us to bring together Hegel and race in this article is discussed by Susan Buck-Morss in “Hegel and Haiti,” a lecture delivered at Goldsmiths College, 16 May 2000. Joseph S. Walker, “Missing from *The Matrix*: Motion, Stillness, and the Body of Bruce Lee,” delivered at the Society for Cinema Studies in 2000 discusses Keanu Reeves’s non-whiteness. Buck-

Morss's paper adds the discourse of race to the normative class-based understanding of Hegel's lord-bondsman dialectic. What *The Matrix* contributes to this is a dynamic in which the racial identity of both the master and the slave are problematized.

15 Homi Bhabha, "Remembering Fanon," in his forward to *Black Skin, White Masks*, vii-xxv (p. xvi).

16 Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus" was first published in *La Pensée* in 1969. Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* first appeared with Éditions de Seuil in 1952 as *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*.

17 In Judith Butler's "'Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All': Althusser's Subjection," in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, 106-31. Butler identifies interpellation not as an event but as "a certain way of staging the call" (107). It is interesting to note that unlike the voice of the policeman's hailing with the authority of the Law in Althusser's staging of interpellation, in the Fanon incident it is the child – still a voice of the Law – who speaks.

18 See Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism" in *The Location of Culture*, 66-84.

19 We are not encouraged to ask – the transparency of product placement notwithstanding – why this particular mobile is selected or why this mailing company is chosen by Morpheus to handle the instrument that allows his black voice to be articulated. Nor are we invited to imagine from where the envelope carrying the mobile is sent, the speed of its dispatch, nor the now immaterial consequences had the parcel failed to arrive at its intended destination, and to do so at exactly the right moment.

20 For an engagement with the cinematic voice see Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Many of the maneuvers in this section are made possible by Silverman's reading.

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