Coded Discourse: Romancing the (Electronic) Shadow in *The Matrix*[1]

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Criticism on the Wachowski Brothers' science fiction film, *The Matrix* (1999), has generally followed along the lines of early criticism surrounding the cyberpunk fiction of the late 1980s. This isn't really surprising, since critics and fans of both the film and the subgenre have portrayed *The Matrix* as the first successful filmic translation of the imagery of cyberpunk, which is usually seen as being founded by, and epitomized in, William Gibson's 1984 novel *Neuromancer.* As P. Chad Barnett forcefully puts it, "the corpse-cold body of cyberpunk has been revived by a film that has brought the true feel of that notorious word to the screen for the first time" (2000, 360). Going beyond the superficial use of a computer-generated realm of existence in such films as *Tron* (1982), *Lawnmower Man* (1992), and *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999), *The Matrix*, as the argument goes, captures the full flavour of cyberpunk, including not only the notion of a complete

mental projection into a computerized net, but also the "retro-future" feel of the genre, where space-age computer technology co-exists with grime, filth, and perhaps most importantly, an all-encompassing urban decay, character-ized by Gibson as "The Sprawl."[2] Cyberpunk's imagery, meanwhile, is often said to co-exist with the textual creation of a new form of postmodern iden-tity, a cybernetic, post-human ontology in which, to quote Barnett again, "a host of technologies [. . .] place *real* human forms at risk of extinction," pri-marily because "the flesh is burdensome wetware, exchanges are all symbol-ic in an electronic land of signs, and reality is virtual at best" (2000, 360, 361). David Lavery notes in his essay on *The Matrix* and virtual reality that "Convinced that 'physical reality is tragic in that it's mandatory,' virtual real-ists are ready to break with that seemingly irrevocable precedent" (2001, 152). Further, cyberpunk and its progeny have, it's been argued, helped with this split, creating, or at least aiming for "a new 'mode' of being" (Farnell 1998, 472), a "truly abstract space of imprecise possibilities," brought about through the genre's representation of "technological and posthuman indeter-minacy" (1998, 475). *The Matrix*, then, within this critical framework, is sup-posedly the filmic refinement of this posthuman identity, the indeterminacy of which is shown narratively in the film's reliance on the classic science fic-tion plot of the alternate world (in which the main characters realize that the world around them is somehow fake, and they must break through the appearances in order to discover and inhabit reality).[3]

But does the film actually present an image of this supposedly freeing and utopian realm of the posthuman? Is there an ontological critique fuelling the Wachowskis's use of such truly stunning visuals as "bullet time" (which seems to slow time to the point that a bullet's path can be clearly seen), their use of 360 degrees of still-picture cameras arranged in minutely timed sequence?[4] The images created with these techniques—including the blurred multiplication of characters' bodies as they move more quickly than should be possible, and Neo's (Keanu Reeves) ability, in both the first and final films, to move beyond his own body, "infecting" the repressive program of Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving)—may seem to imply visually a form of de-individu-ated subjectivity that finds its mirror in the film's portrayal of communal resistance cells of rebellious humans. Despite, or perhaps because of these heroic effects, the question remains, though: does *The Matrix* truly offer a radical critique of enlightenment subjectivity, or does it simply reproduce dominant ontological biases, specifically surrounding gender and race? Perhaps the "posthuman indeterminacy" of the film and the genre are really only window-dressing for the reproductions of dominant ideological identi-ty constructs, an argument perhaps supported best by Joshua Moss's online review, "Breaking the Cyberpunk Curse," in which he writes that *The Matrix*

"has mythic structure. Dream meditations on the values of life. A poetic Christ-like resurrection at the climax. Not to mention hot chicks in tight leather" (2000).

Such arguments about the reproduction of the dominant culture's ideological framework have been made about cyberpunk in general, and Gibson's *Neuromancer* trilogy in particular. Sharon Stockton argues that the classic cyberpunk hero is someone who "is removed entirely from problems of influence and given the status of prime mover, of pure subject in a world of pure object, of phallic projection into a feminized matrix that approximates the universe" (1995, 589). Nicola Nixon further states that the "corporate collectives" that Gibson's heroes fight against are invariably figured as a generally orientalist, usually Japanese, threat. She writes of Gibson's cyberspace "cowboys" that "It seems telling that the American icon of the cowboy, realized so strongly in Reaganite cowboyism, the quintessence of the maverick reactionary, should form the central heroic iconography in cyberpunk" (1992, 224-25).[5] Ross Farnell opens a similar discussion, writing of the first two books in Gibson's "post-cyberpunk," nanotechnology trilogy that, "Beneath an aesthetics of difference hides a subterranean narrative of conservative sexuality and gender, old 'norms' in new digital clothes" (1998, 471), a reading Farnell doubles through an analysis of race in Gibson's work.[6] Thus, there are two basic readings of cyberpunk that could lend themselves to *The Matrix*. In one, as Farnell goes on to argue, an idealized heterotopia is constructed that stands as a "solution"—however "open-ended"—to conservative narratives (475); indeed, at one point Barnett reads *The Matrix* "As a heterotopian construct" (2000, 366). In the other reading, the genre reproduces the discourses of white male supremacy, as Stockton and Nixon see in Gibson's first trilogy. I want to argue, though, that while *The Matrix* is problematic in precisely the ways Stockton and Nixon suggest, simply seeing the film as such a reproduction of dominance would miss out on some of the nuances that *are* created by its explicit meditations on the nature of subjectivity and of ideology "itself." *The Matrix* can be read as a text that allows both of these readings, using a disturbed and disturbing set of plots and images surrounding gender and race that can be seen to point to the performative nature of dominance as such. As I will argue, this reading may allow the film, and perhaps cyberpunk in general, to be used as an entry point into—but certainly not an ultimate depiction of—a critique of enlightenment subjectivity. Slavoj Žižek gestures toward this in his essay on *The Matrix* when he writes that "Cyberspace was supposed to bring us all together in a Global Village; however [. . .] instead of the Global Village, the big Other, we get the multitude of 'small others,' of tribal particular identifications at our choice" (1999, 11).[7] Despite Žižek's lack of elaboration on the racial impli-

cations of this statement, such an argument can be made through a specific analysis of the film's allusions to and images of African Americans and African-American discursive traditions, all of which seem to point to an explicit critique of American racism and white power, only to be undercut by the main plot concerning Neo.[8] However, certain gender constructions call this dominant plot into question, especially as figured through the rearticulation of the racist film tradition of the mammy figure in the character, "The Oracle" (played by Gloria Foster in the first two films, and Mary Alice in *Revolutions*).

I. Virtual Race War

The Matrix's central plot concerns a human rebellion against the Artificial Intelligence that has taken over the earth and uses human beings as its power source. The AI keeps its human "batteries" docile by creating the artificial, cyber-realm of the Matrix, or what we know as the real world of the late 1990s. What critics have not yet dealt with in detail, however, is that this rebellion is, to a degree, raced as an African American rebellion against a white power structure. In addition to what I would argue is the racially specific casting of Lawrence Fishburne as Morpheus, the "father" to the family of rebels that comes to include Neo, and in addition to the racialized domestic setting of the Oracle's apartment, the film as a whole relies on what is, in America and elsewhere, a racially charged narrative: the emancipation of a population of people held as slaves. In the scene in which Neo first meets Morpheus, the latter attempts to describe the Matrix. Morpheus says, "It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes, to blind you to the truth," to which Neo responds, "What truth?" Morpheus answers, "That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else, you were born into bondage."[9] That this line is spoken by an African American only adds to *The Matrix*'s appropriation of the trope of slavery as a means through which to define the quest for freedom. As Toni Morrison has written in the section of *Playing in the Dark* from which my paper's title is taken, the "Africanist narrative (that is, the story of a black person, the experience of being bound and/or rejected)" is often used in (white) American literature, and I would add film, "as a means of meditation—both safe and risky—on one's own humanity," providing "opportunities to contemplate limitation, suffering, rebellion, and to speculate on fate and destiny" (1992, 53). Morrison's discussion is almost lifted into the same scene of *The Matrix*, when Morpheus and Neo first meet:

> Morpheus: 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. Do you believe in fate, Neo?
>
> Neo: No.

Morpheus: Why not?

Neo: Because I don't like the idea that I'm not in control of my life.

Morpheus: I know exactly how you feel.

Žižek, when quoting this same passage, finds it necessary to point out that Morpheus is "the African American leader of the resistance group," but does not explain why this is significant (1999, 24). The casting of Fishburne as Morpheus, especially when the screenplay introduces him only as a "DARK FIGURE," serves to highlight the Africanist narrative, to use Morrison's term, that is present in the film. In this reading, Neo's assertion of free will in the face of an overly deterministic, subjugating structure is placed in relief by and gains its moral and ethical force from the words of the black character, who "know[s] exactly" what such an assertion means.

However, Morpheus's race may seem to make this not an African-*ist* narrative, but in fact a narrative of African American resistance. That is, Morpheus's story may be his own, not Neo's, allowing for a metaphorical identification of the Matrix AI with contemporary ideological structures of white power, and Morpheus's resistance cell with a contemporary black rebellion against that structure. This reading is especially supported by the fact that the AI's repressive apparatuses are embodied as white policeman or agents. Indeed, in *The Matrix Reloaded*, the figure who presents itself to Neo as the "Architect" of the Matrix itself (Helmut Bakaitis), the apparent wizard behind the machine and authority behind the law, is also white (and, being dressed in white and sitting in a white room, is figuratively the "whitest" character of the films, duplicating the visually white space of the blank "construct" that Morpheus uses to explain the Matrix to Neo).[10] Moreover, the security cameras that observe Neo's interrogation in the first film are shown in *Reloaded* to be part of the literally panoptic wall of screens in the Architect's room. The Architect thus embodies Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, becoming the all-seeing eye that observes and imprisons, attempting to ideologically and physically control all of humanity.

As my reference to the panopticon suggests, this identification of the Matrix and authority, and especially law enforcement, is in the first film explicitly used to critique the institutional racism of American policing.[11] In one scene, Morpheus battles with the agent known by the nearly pseudonymous name of the dominant culture—"Smith." The only dialogue they exchange during the fight happens near the beginning, with Smith introducing himself:

Smith: The great Morpheus. We meet at last.

Morpheus: And you are?

Smith: A "Smith." Agent Smith.

Morpheus: You all look the same to me.

This dialogue is followed by one of the more brutal fight scenes in the film, in which Agent Smith seriously injures Morpheus, leaving him broken and bloody. The fight does not end there, however; instead, leaving Morpheus on the floor, Smith walks out of the bathroom in which the battle takes place and says to a group of uniformed policemen, "Take him." Immediately upon hearing this command, the group of police rush into the room and kick and beat the fallen Morpheus. The action and visuals in this scene directly allude to George Holliday's infamous videotape of the LAPD's savage beating of Rodney King: while the King video is shot from a distance and at a slight angle, and the *Matrix* scene is shot from directly above, both "scenes" show a black man lying on the ground, occasionally in a foetal position, surrounded by police who, with extraordinary force, are beating him with batons. The critical silence on this scene is *very* odd: while an online response to the movie notes that this "scene is the most potent evidence in the movie that the [racial] symbolism was intended,"[12] the closest that any academic critic I have found comes to discussing its obviously racialized nature is Lavery, who notes that "Morpheus quips" "you all look alike [*sic*] to me" "with *speciesist* humour" (2001, 154; my emphasis). The racially charged humour of a black man telling a white cop "you all look the same to me," when combined with the obvious visual allusion to the King videotape, would certainly seem to point to a reading of this film as a story of a black rebellion against the white power structure.

This reading seems especially valid given the host of other allusions to the history of African American resistance: Morpheus, during an interroga-tion by Agent Smith following the beating, is chained to the chair in what looks somewhat like a cinematic replica of the infamous courtroom sketch of Black Panther Bobby Seale gagged and chained during the Chicago 7 trial—an allusion strengthened by the fact that the cyber-city created by the Matrix uses Chicago's street names[13]; earlier, when Morpheus is teaching Neo how to fight in the Matrix, bending the computer-based rules of the simulation, Morpheus performs quite a stunning Ali Shuffle before continu-ing to beat Neo—anyone who catches that shuffle and the explicit reference to Muhammad Ali therefore has access to another allusion to African American resistance (this boxing reference is expanded by the appearance, in *Reloaded*, of African American boxer Roy Jones, Jr.). Moving beyond these brief allusions and beyond the character of Morpheus, the "last human city" left on the planet in the film is called Zion, meaning "fortress," "place of refuge," referring to the Promised Land in Judeo-Christian tradition, an allu-sion that was used in both ante- and postbellum African American Christian theology as a term connected to freedom (as evidenced by the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, founded as the "Freedom Church,"

which has had a long and rich tradition, and has included "as some of its members" such famous people in the history of black resistance as "Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth").[14] Grisso, in his online analysis of *The Matrix*, notes that "Zion" figures heavily in works "by the Rastafarians, eg. Bob Marley in some of his songs, to distinguish those of the faith from those beholden to 'Babylon.'" This connection is even present within the narrow cyberpunk tradition: Zion is the name of the separatist, space-dwelling, black Rastafarian group in Gibson's *Neuromancer*. When the audience finally gets to see Zion in *Reloaded*, the city is multi-racial, and many—if not most—of the positions of power are held by people who are visibly non-white. Cementing the explicit use of Zion as a figure of African American resistance and freedom (especially, but not solely, for an academic audience) is the cameo in both *Reloaded* and *Revolutions* by Cornel West, playing "Counsellor West" on the city's ruling council. West's real-life position within African American studies, and the self-naming of his character, point to the films' explicit engagement with African American history and resistance.[15]

Before we see West or Zion, however, in the first film there is the rebel ship itself, and the Oracle's apartment within the Matrix, which I will deal with in more detail below. Both of these settings, like Zion in *Reloaded* and *Revolutions*, are figured as mostly black, but at the very least multi-racial spaces that stand opposed to *all* of the city scenes wherein Neo is being introduced to the Matrix. These latter spaces are, visibly anyway, largely or completely white, as are all of the cops and agents in the Matrix's "employ." So, up to a point, this film is one that depicts a specifically African American rebellion against a silencing dominant culture that literally builds itself using the bodies of those under its control. In other words, this film could be read as an extended allegory for a black resistance to contemporary social structures of white power.

But only to a point. In many ways, *The Matrix* is a science-fiction version of Hollywood's interracial buddy flick, perhaps best seen in the *48 Hrs.* and *Lethal Weapon* series, and recently parodied—again to a point—by the *Rush Hour* films. Indeed, some of Robyn Wiegman's statements about the role of race in *Lethal Weapon* could be simply mapped onto *The Matrix*:

> Lethal Weapon revamps race and gender relations in the contemporary moment by figuring the white man as both victim of the social order and its rejuvenated hero. [. . .] [Mel Gibson's character] Riggs is shown [at the beginning of the film] lying in bed smoking a cigarette, his mobile home strewn with debris. A man on the edge of breakdown [. . .] Riggs is lost, the squalor of his environment indicative of his alienation [. . .]. Here, in a reversal of paternalistic ideology, it is the white man who [. . .] can be restored to life only through the aid of the black "father"—the figure responsible, in the film's resolution, for drawing the alienated white man

back into the folds of sanity and the bourgeois family. (Wiegman 1991, 321-22).

Wiegman's description of the opening of *Lethal Weapon* echoes exactly the introduction of Neo in *The Matrix*. Neo is shown asleep in front of his computer in his unkempt, single-room apartment, only to be awakened by messages on his computer. Then there is a knock on Neo's door, and he engages in a shady software deal with a TechnoGoth named Choi:

Neo: You get caught using that . . .

Choi: Yeah, I know, this never happened. You don't exist.

Neo: Right.

Choi: Something wrong, man? 'Cause you look a little whiter than usual.

The scene as a whole, then, as in Wiegman's reading of *Lethal Weapon*, shows the white character, in the "squalor of his environment," which seems "indicative of his alienation." Indeed, one of the first images of Neo in this scene (and in the movie), shot from above, shows him literally encircled by the detritus of the technological world. Grimy computer equipment and other forms of mess surround him, taking up more than half of the screen and extending beyond three sides of the shot.[16] The cramped nature of the image in his apartment is heightened by a slow rotation, indicating that Neo, before his actual and figurative awakenings, is completely delimited and subjugated by his social surroundings. In this version of the trope, the subjection is explicitly tied to his looking "whiter than usual." At this point in the first film, Neo is also beginning to be "restored to life" by Morpheus, described later by the character Tank (Marcus Chong) as a "father," again echoing Wiegman's description. Father-figure Morpheus is not the hero of this film; the "whiter than usual" son, Neo, is.[17] The pairing of these two characters, generically inscribed in the buddy movie, brings us back to Morrison's construction of white American literature as a romancing of the shadow, as a racist appropriation of an Africanist narrative in order to further the self-worth of the white hero.

Additionally, Neo's heroic quest itself is one that is based on ontological suppositions that themselves have implications in terms of race. Specifically, Neo's status as the chosen one, as the saviour predicted by the Oracle, is founded on his ability to completely control the hyper-rational, disembodied realm of the Matrix itself. As Stockton's article demonstrates, the realm of cyberspace is figured ontologically as a space of dominance, what she refers to as the space "of pure subject in a world of pure object" (1995, 589). The Matrix, like cyberspace, is a site of mental disembodiment, the Cartesian cogito almost completely severed from the body. Historically, unfettered access to this traditional humanist notion of the individual has been represented as

being limited to the privileged members of the dominant culture. As Sidonie Smith writes, this Enlightenment identity is characterized by disembodiment and rationality, and therefore contains an

> implicit [. . .] hierarchy wherein what is and is not appropriate, at any given juncture, to the universal subject gets staked out. Founded on exclusionary practices, this democratic self positions on its border all that is termed the "colorful," that is, that which becomes identified culturally as other, exotic, unruly, irrational, uncivilized, regional, or paradoxically unnatural. (Smith 1993, 9-10)

In other words, the hyper-rationality of the Cartesian duality that Neo enacts is one that is based on conventions and practices of othering. These conventions specifically get played out, in the film, in racialized terms that recreate the contemporary privileged positioning of white men, despite the coded (sub)narrative of black rebellion. Thus, just after Neo is informed that "the Matrix has you"—that is, when he first becomes cognizant of his existence as a disembodied mental projection—he is said to be "even whiter than usual."

On the surface of the narrative, there may seem to be a problem with this reading. After all, what Neo is fighting for is humanity's freedom, for the end of the Matrix's control, and therefore, apparently, for the reembodiment of the population. He seems to be fighting against the hyper-extended demonic parody of the Cartesian duality in which people in the Matrix exist purely mentally while being unaware of the very physical violations perpetrated on their bodies in rows upon rows of human farms. In *Reloaded*, in fact, a glorification of human physicality is figured through the paired scenes of Neo and Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) having sex and a pre-war gathering in Zion. While Trinity and Neo consummate their relationship, the rest of Zion's citizens participate in an orgiastic, rave-cum-religious festival of dance, the camera providing in both cases very close shots of sections of sweaty bodies in constant contact with each other.[18] Isn't Neo therefore, in all of the films—but as laid out emphatically in the first—fighting against the disembodied, transcendent, purely rational, "universal" subject that Smith discusses, and working towards a reintegration of the previously marginalized, embodied subjects?

The answer to this question is complex and ambiguous. Yes, Neo seems to be fighting for this reembodiment rather than his own transcendent mastery, but he is doing it through his thorough control of and complete existence as the hyper-rational subject. This is centrally the cyber-version of the interracial buddy flick, an electronic *Dances with Wolves*, in which the non-white and/or female characters must wait for the white male hero to save the day. And, in *The Matrix*, the salvation is achieved through the final realization of the racially charged, Enlightenment ontology that Sidonie Smith discuss-

es. This racialization is especially apparent in the scene in which Neo saves Morpheus from the interrogation of Agent Smith. After shooting all of the agents present in the room with a very large machine gun (which he holds just above his groin in an obvious assertion of his phallic power), Neo looks at Morpheus and says, very quietly, "Get up." This phrase is repeated a few times in the film, generally when people are trying to make their own projected bodies move while in the Matrix, functioning almost as if it were a software command. In this scene, it is only when Neo executes this command that Morpheus is able to break his chains and get out of the room. But even then Morpheus doesn't make it to safety by himself; Neo has to jump out of the helicopter and catch him in mid-air.

II. The Gendered Body Electric

There is, however, another submerged discussion of identity going on here that may allow a fissure to open up in this dominant ontology. The discursive realm of gender, as it is portrayed in the first film, points towards the primarily performative, non-essential nature of the heroic identity that Neo realizes. First, both his romantic relationship with Trinity and her position in terms of what is supposedly "his" destiny problematize his existence as "pure subject," as the transcendent individual who acts through his will and his will alone. There are several scenes in which Trinity rescues or otherwise controls Neo, but two of them are especially significant. The first occurs immediately before Neo rescues Morpheus. Trinity and Neo are on the roof of a building engaged in a gun battle with an agent, in probably the most famous— and most often spoofed—scene of the film. The agent shoots at Neo, who dodges all of the bullets, only getting grazed a few times. Neo moves as fast as the agents themselves, something no one has done before. Indeed, the portrayal of the speed of his movement mimics Neo's burgeoning transcendence beyond the physical: showing Neo maintaining a posture that defies gravity and anatomy, this effect represents, in keeping with the logic of the plot, a traditional masculine ontology, showing Neo's ability to transcend the body through his mental control.

Despite this depiction of his transcendent mastery, however, the other thing no one has done before is win a battle with one of the agents, and everybody thinks that Neo, the One, can do this. But, in this scene, it is Trinity who shoots the agent, after managing to get beside him without being noticed. It is Trinity who saves the day by using the phallic power, represented again by the gun, that Neo constantly tries to assert. In fact, Trinity's ability to manipulate the Matrix in the same way that Neo does explicitly confuses gender paradigms. Based on the same bigoted ontology discussed

before, women are also othered through embodiment.[19] In her second scene in the film, Trinity introduces herself to Neo in a bar:

Neo: Who are you?

Trinity: My name is Trinity.

Neo: Trinity. The Trinity? That cracked the IRS d-base?

Trinity: That was a long time ago.

Neo: Jesus.

Trinity: What.

Neo: I just thought, um . . . you were a guy.

Trinity: Most guys do.

Trinity's control of cyberspace, her ability to inhabit Stockton's realm of "pure object" as a "pure subject," disrupts gender assumptions, as is also shown when she defeats armed policeman in the opening scene of the film. Trinity thus calls into question the gender paradigms associated with the Cartesian ontology that supposedly supports Neo's identity as the male hero.[20]

This gender reversal becomes especially evident in another scene in which Trinity saves Neo. Near the end of the film after Neo has apparently been killed by the agents, as Barnett briefly mentions (2000, 364), Trinity engages in a parodic mimicry of Prince Charming awakening sleeping beauty: telling Neo's seemingly dead body that she loves him, she then awakens him with a kiss. After he comes back to life, Trinity executes the same control command that Neo uses on Morpheus, telling him to "Get up," which he does, and then, of course, saves the day. But this explicit gender reversal, and its repetition of the earlier scene with Morpheus, points to the ways in which Neo's identity, his pure subjectivity, is performatively enabled by the gendered, embodied figure which the dominant ontology would deny by relegating it as "other." Judith Butler, in her now standard description of the performative process of identity construction, writes of the supposed dominance of heterosexuality, that it "is perpetually at risk, that is, that it 'knows' its own possibility of becoming undone" (1991, 23), and so is in a constant process of being compared to various "other" sexualities without which it would cease to be understandable as a category. In the classic deconstructive move of Butler's argument, an essentialized, "dominant" identity always presupposes the very others it would erase or deny, thus denying its own "essential" or "originary" status.

III. The Angel in the Machine

The viewer would seem to be left, then, with a film that, on the one hand, problematically enacts what Morrison discusses as the appropriation of the Africanist narrative in an attempt to support the dominance of whiteness, while, on the other hand, it critiques the gendered implications of a similar ontological structure.[21] In *Reloaded*, this relationship is phrased succinctly in a dialogue between Trinity and Neo: speaking of the citizens of Zion, the rebels, Trinity tells Neo, "they need you," to which he replies, "I need *you*." The character of the Oracle ties these two narratives together, though, and finally offers a comment on the performativity of dominance as such. The figure of the Oracle is very much cast as a representation of the racist and sexist stereotype of the mammy, most famously portrayed by Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind* (1939). This stereotype was perpetuated through both pro-slavery and abolitionist works in the nineteenth century, and introduced into film, as Lisa M. Anderson discusses, most famously in *Gone with the Wind*, but also in *Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Imitation of Life* (1959), and even in 1980s television in Nell Carter's character on *Gimme a Break*. Anderson defines the mammy figure as

> the symbol of black motherhood as perceived by whites. In the mythic con-
> struction, the black woman "mammy" is the caretaker of the whites' homes
> and children first, and her own second. Her primary duties are to the whites
> for whom she works. [. . .] In essence, then, the mammy is a black woman
> who focusses her time, love, devotion, and attention on whites, particularly
> her "adopted" white family, rather than on her own black family. (Anderson
> 1997, 10)

Certainly the Oracle fulfills this part of the stereotype, looking after the various children—most of them white—who are sent to her for testing to see if they are "the One." She also fulfills the more physical attributes of the stereotype, who, as Anderson describes, is "typified visually" in part by her place in the kitchen, "her apron, and her large size, as well as her racial markers" (1997, 10). Also, the Oracle fills the role of "comic relief," to a point, as do traditional depictions of the character-type (39).[22] On this level, then, the Oracle seems to serve the same stereotypical purpose as Morpheus' character: she is there to provide support for the white hero.[23]

But, because of her place in the resistance and because of all of the films' constantly doubled sense of representation created by the figuring of the Matrix itself, the Oracle appears to be more of a parody of the mammy stereotypes, and, as with Trinity, her support of Neo in effect shows his lack of power. The Oracle expands on the bigoted stereotypes of the mammy, especially as portrayed in *Gone with the Wind*. Anderson notes that, in that film, Mammy is "the all-knowing and interfering (with good intentions)

guardian of the family" (1997, 17). Bogle likewise writes that, in *Gone With the Wind*, Mammy is the "all-seeing, all-hearing, all-knowing commentator and observer" (1994, 88). Extending the stereotypical character's powerful position in the centre of the house, the Oracle literally becomes an "all-knowing" and interfering character, as her title suggests. In fact, in the original script as it appears on several online sites, the Oracle's apartment is described as "a part of Zion's mainframe" that is "hidden inside the Matrix so that we can access it." One could read this line, in conjunction with the use of the mammy stereotype, as a form of ironic mimicry—as the rebellious others signifyin' on dominant sexist and racist discourse, hiding the rebellion against the white matrix until it is too late.[24]

However, *The Matrix* still seems to be left with the problem that it is Neo, the One, who saves the day. But the Oracle is the figure through whom the problematic raced narrative of Neo and Morpheus and the gendered critique offered by Trinity's character become joined. Only through the Oracle's interference with Neo is he able to become "the One." As Morpheus says to Neo near the end of the film, "She told you exactly what you needed to hear." The Oracle also explicitly makes fun of Neo's assertion that "he doesn't believe in all that fate crap," ironically suggesting that his identity is in fact a determined one, not the self-contained individual of Enlightenment ontology. The Oracle points out that Neo's supposedly dominant gendered *and* raced identity is performative, in Butler's sense. His dominance in general is not essential to his nature; it cannot in fact exist without those through whom he expresses dominance. Neo needs the multiplicity of the Oracle, Trinity, and Morpheus in order to be the One (and the names of the latter two reflect multiplicity "itself").[25]

But, at the end of the first film, Neo *has* finally assumed the mantle of the "One," the "superman" (a reference made explicitly in *Reloaded*), and in order to do this, he, and the film, must repress the exposure of the performative nature of his identity. And this is why, at the end of *The Matrix*, we do not see Neo ultimately freeing everyone from the bondage of the Matrix, and why we also don't see any of the characters who supported and maintained his identity throughout the film. Neo calls the mainframe Matrix intelligence on a phoneline, and says:

> I know you're out there. I can feel you now. I know that you're afraid. You're afraid of us. You're afraid of change. I don't know the future. I didn't come here to tell you how this is going to end. I came here to tell you how it's going to begin. I'm going to hang up this phone, and then I'm going to show these people what you don't want them to see. I'm going to show them a world without you. A world without rules and controls, without

borders or boundaries, a world where anything is possible. Where we go
from there is a choice I leave to you. (*The Matrix*)

Neo then leaves the public phone, and flies into the air, fulfilling the super-
natural saviour role of the traditional comic book superhero. There are more
sinister implications to Neo's speech, however. Neo cannot function outside
of the dominant ontological matrix and still be the self-contained singular
hero—the One without the Other—because the performative nature of this
identity has been exposed. In order to maintain his own dominant position,
as well as maintain the generic heroic ending and make the first film hold
together, Neo must instead offer a continual existence inside the Matrix.

So, directly opposing Rebekah Simpkins's assertion that "By removing
the control, Neo sets the prisoners free" (2000, 9), the first film ends with
those controls still in place. At the end of *The Matrix*, after all, Neo does not
awaken everyone to "the real," but instead exploits the continued function-
ing of the Matrix, leaving the illusion intact so that he can fly. As Žižek
writes, "all these 'miracles' are possible only if we remain WITHIN the VR
sustained by the Matrix [. . .]: our 'real' status is still that of the slaves of the
Matrix" (1999, 28). The words "system failure" may flash on the Matrix's
"screens," but the system still continues to work. Neo's attack in effect sup-
ports the continued existence of the exploitative structure itself, which is
why he leaves the final "choice" to this dominant structure.

Indeed, as we learn in *Reloaded* and *Revolutions*, this act of reproduction
(or "revolutions" in the circular sense) could actually be one of Neo's *intend-
ed* roles. The "free will" that the Oracle, in her role as a program for the
Matrix, injected into the ideological system in order to make it function
properly (in purely Althusserian fashion), occasionally introduces anomalies
in the system, of which Neo, and the "ones" who came before him, are the
culmination; failsafes are therefore set into the system in order to ensure that
Neo keeps the program running. And, at the end of the trilogy, when the
Matrix itself is overtaken by the viral Agent Smith in a virtual coup over the
control of the governing AI, Neo does in fact restore the program's "balance"
(a continual theme in the final film). Destroying Smith by sacrificing himself,
Neo does not eradicate the Matrix, but instead allows the program to evolve
into a new stability (a "Neo"-conservative protection of the system, perhaps).
This may mean "peace" for the human inhabitants of Zion, but it most
assuredly does not mean freedom. If Morpheus is correct when he states, in
the first film, that "as long as the Matrix exists, the human race will never be
free," then the Architect's promise to the Oracle at the end of *Revolutions*, to
free those who "want out," rings hollow. Indeed, the Architect and the Oracle
may not even be talking about freeing the humans, but instead about freeing
such independent programs as the girl, Sati (Tanveer Atwal). This suspicion

seems especially true given the Architect's question in the same sequence, asked in a sinister tone, "Just how long do you think this peace is going to last?" The Oracle's response, "As long as it can," is met by the Architect with only a scoffing laugh.

The central narrative conflict of the two sequels thus concerns Neo's ambiguous position as either rebel *or* exploited dupe who is doomed to repeat, in unending "revolutions," his *support* for the system. Neo's ultimate, Christ-like sacrifice may not free humans at all, beyond "saving" the largely decimated Zion. Instead, the salvation he offers appears to serve the governing AI itself, saving it from the infestation of Smiths. Neo destroys Smith's upstart insurgency, but appears to leave the ruling machine class fully in control. Even if that class has opened up to admit such newer, "useless" programs as Sati, who is capable of, or even symbolizes the type of self-sacrificing love that Neo also embodies, the fact of the matter remains that the Matrix is *still* running at the end of the trilogy, and the final scene, while so visibly multi-racial as to resemble a Benetton advertisement, focuses solely on the machine world and independent programs, with no humans to be seen. The oppressed underclass of remaining humans, the slaves, are at best tangentially mentioned, and perhaps not at all. In this reading, Morpheus' joy over the "end of the war" is a new form of contentment with the dominant power, rather than a victory over it. The war is over, but Zion does not win.[26] Even Trinity's gender challenges are replaced by banal repetitions of Hollywood sexism: Neo must penetrate her in *Reloaded* to save her after she's shot, and in *Revolutions* she becomes the stereotypically "self-less" woman, sacrificing herself for Neo. Neo may in turn sacrifice himself, but Trinity's death is represented as being committed solely because of her romantic love of Neo, while's Neo's death serves to save the world.[27]

The entire trilogy thus largely repeats the overall trajectory of the first film. In both the first and (reportedly) final installments, Neo destroys the repressive apparatus of Smith, demonstrating a mastery over the larger computer system itself, and purportedly "saves" Zion by ushering in a new world order. This plot, moreover, echoes directly a racialized rebellion in which an oppressive, racist social structure is replaced by a new harmonious multi-racial order. This movement in turn highlights the performativity of the dominant AI, which seems to need the very rebellion it represses in order to maintain its functions.[28] But this apparently positive allegory of racial transformation and of the non-essential nature of dominance is again undercut, since it takes place only in the context of ultimately maintaining the matrix that controls the rules of the game. In fact, at the very end of *Revolutions*, the Architect promises freedom for some, but validates his word only by saying, with a smile, "What do you think I am? Human?" Freedom can ultimately

only be granted at the behest of the dominant class, it seems, and only that class can legitimate the grant.

Even the music during the closing credits of the first film mimics this movement of an explicitly racially-charged social critique followed by its silencing: the first song, Rage Against the Machine's "Wake Up," deals with the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, with the repeated lines "He turned the power to the have-nots / And then came the shot," only to be followed by Marilyn Manson's "Rock is Dead," the chorus of which ends with "So fuck all your protests and put them to bed." Rage Against the Machine's specifically radical, specifically racial social message is transformed into Manson's amorphously rebellious, largely apolitical statement about the media and shock-rock. Likewise, *The Matrix*'s and the entire trilogy's radical subnarratives may highlight the problematic nature of Neo's and the AI's power, but neither Hollywood nor its revivication (or vivisection) of cyberpunk want to allow these politicized narratives to break through their own encoding. *That* choice, the films silently suggest, must be left to the viewers on the other side of Neo's screen.

Notes

I would like to thank Julia M. Wright, the audience at the 2002 Northeast MLA convention, and the anonymous reviewers for their comments on this essay. I would also like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their continued support.

[1] This paper was completed after *The Matrix Revolutions*, the last of two film sequels, was released to theatres (the first sequel is subtitled *Reloaded*). While it has been reported that the Wachowski Brothers did conceive of the Matrix story as a trilogy, the first film is obviously set apart as a stand-alone piece (perhaps a move necessary before funding was secured for the sequels). The latter two movies, conversely, were shot simultaneously, and consist of one heavily integrated storyline, leading the studio to release them only six months apart. In simple terms, the first film, while it lays the groundwork for this second storyline, does not end with "to be concluded," as *Reloaded* does. Additionally, a pre-history to the speculative world of the Matrix is offered in several of the short animated films of *Animatrix*, while the video game *Enter the Matrix* offers another storyline that ties into the trilogy. Because *The Matrix* does stand alone, however, the argument presented here will focus centrally on that first film. But *The Matrix* obviously sets up the discursive map for its sequels; given this fact, I will draw on details from the other material when necessary to elucidate my argument.

[2] Gibson's first trilogy of novels, *Neuromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986), and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), are often referred to as the "Sprawl Trilogy." In these novels, the Sprawl is what remains of the Atlantic seaboard and surrounding areas (it is also referred to as BAMA, the Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis). Barnett compares *The Matrix* to a list of alternate-reality films which he reads as "manifestations

and symptoms of postmodern culture" (2000, 362), while Lavery contrasts *The Matrix* to many of the same films I list, seeing those films' "use of virtual reality" as "for the most part [. . .] forgettable" (2001, 156 n. 6). In this same passage, Lavery also mentions one other explicitly cyberpunk film, *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995), also starring Keanu Reeves, the screenplay of which was written by Gibson, based on his own short story.

⁳ The alternate world plot is perhaps best exemplified by the works of Philip K. Dick, who has become almost synonymous with such storylines. See, for example, his novels *Eye in the Sky* (1957) and *The Man in the High Castle* (1962).

⁴ See Ndalianis (2000) for a discussion of the different technical aspects of *The Matrix*.

⁵ The Matrix films also include references to Hollywood Westerns, especially in the "showdown" scenes between Neo and Agent Smith: the standard tumbleweed is replaced with old newspapers blowing across the screen, an allusion Ndalianis also notes.

⁶ For other discussions of the connections between cyberspace, cyberpunk, identity politics, and related issues, see, for example, Cadora (1995), Easterbrook (1992), Hollinger (1990), and Sponsler (1993). Both Delany (1999) and Latham (1993) discuss problems in early cyberpunk criticism, especially its emphasis on *Neuromancer* and subsequent near-erasure of other writers (especially, but not only, women writers).

⁷ Žižek's essay is an online version of a paper delivered at the symposium, "Inside the Matrix." Parenthetical citations to this essay refer to paragraph numbers.

⁸ Three critical sources to date deal explicitly, albeit to varying degrees, with race in *The Matrix*. Peter X Feng deals with the film's use of race in general terms, seeing it as a "narrative shorthand [. . .] a textbook definition of essentialism" (2002, 153). He argues that "*The Matrix* depends on the elision of racial difference" (152), presenting a fascinating analysis of Hollywood's "assimilation" of Hong Kong cinema. Morra and Smith (2001) deal briefly with Morpheus's blackness as part of a larger psychoanalytic reading of the film's portrayal of desire. Finally, there is the strong undergraduate paper by Zylena Bary (2000), published online, entitled "The Stereotypes Present in the Film *The Matrix*, Directed by Andy and Larry Wachowski." See her essay for a detailing of many of the racial and gender stereotypes in the film. Since the release of the sequels, and especially after the first view of Zion's population in *Reloaded*, several reviews and audience responses published online have mentioned the visible presence of black people in the films, if not the role of race in terms of the plot(s). Most of these discussions and reactions have been positive, focussing, as Simon Woolley puts it in his *Operation Black Vote* review, on the ways that the film's casting demonstrates how "the boundaries of racial stereotypes can be effectively challenged without always using an overtly racial theme" (2003). Esther Iverem, film critic for SeeingBlack.com writes in her review, "The Matrix Reloaded: A Fierce and Nappy Future," that "In this vision of the future, Black folks have survived and they are fierce and in the leadership," arguing that the rave scene in *Reloaded* "is filled with lots of beautiful, post-apocalyptic Black folks who are rendered with spirit and humanity, not as stereotypes. Think of the cover of Marvin

Gaye's 'I Want You' transported light years to funky science fiction" (2003). Similarly, Andrew O'Hehir, in his Salon.com review, refers to "the crunchy, liberated, poly-sexual and anti-racist society of Zion" (2003, 2). Some audience reactions do see the film's racial politics as more conservative, however: Grisso, writing for *Africans Unbound Magazine* on TheAfrican.Com, asks, "Isn't the savior figure [of *The Matrix*] again white, and perhaps calculated, like the false white depictions of Jesus, not to liberate but to further enslave? Isn't it again the Moor who teaches him and raises him up, only in the end to kneel before him and bow to his supposed divinity[?]" (n.d.). Grisso's article is accompanied by a link to discussions he's had with readers about their responses to the film, and to his article, which nicely show the range of reactions to race in the film.

[9] All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are my own transcriptions from the films. The purported original script and various transcriptions of the first movie are available on several web sites, and the screenplay is available on the DVD-ROM portion of the DVD release of the film. There are also numerous fansites dedicated to *The Matrix*, many of which contain excellent resources. MatrixFans.net <http://www.matrixfans.net>, contains a wealth of information.

[10] The "color coding" of other characters in *Reloaded* builds on this depiction of the Architect. Specifically, the "Twins" occupy an interesting liminal space in terms of color. These two ghostly characters are "hench-programs," if you will, for one of the rogue programs in the film. These rogues, including the Oracle, form a central part of the plot of *Reloaded* and *Revolutions*; they are previously powerful Matrix AI programs who are deemed no longer necessary by the Matrix, and have chosen "exile" over erasure by the system. Thus, they occupy the position of—and act very much as—what Althusser would call "the former ruling classes," who challenge the new dominant ideology because they "are able to retain strong positions" in the power structure (2001, 99). The most obvious example of this is the program called "The Merovingian" (Lambert Wilson), his title referring to the deposed French royal line who, in various conspiracy mythoi, are said to hold still the power of the Holy Grail. Thus, the Merovingian, the Oracle, the Keymaker (Randall Duk Kim), the Trainman (Bruce Spence), and others serve varying interests for and against the dominant structure. The Twins, occupying this liminal space working for the Merovingian, are covered in white makeup, and have powdered white dreadlocks and black lips, functioning as a none-too-subtle form of "whiteface" (this despite the fact that the actors, Neil and Adrian Rayment, are white). Further, the Trainman, introduced in *Revolutions*, furthers the Africanist narrative of the film in that he runs an "underground railroad," which is used to transport rogue programs from the central core of the Matrix.

[11] For discussions of racism in the US police force and criminal justice system see, for example, Davis (1998) and Hawkins and Thomas (1991).

[12] This comment, which does not reference the Rodney King video specifically, is made by one of the people responding to Grisso's article, noted above.

[13] *Gagged and Chained* is the title of an album with an interview with Bobby Seale and a re-enactment of the trial. That the Wachowskis are from Chicago does not, I think, negate the allusion, as it simply makes it more likely that they would

know of the Chicago 7 trials. In fact, the purported original script, available on several online sites, explicitly has the film set in Chicago.

[14] Quoted from the A. M. E. Zion Church's homepage, available until recently at <http://www.theamezionchurch.org>.

[15] Any quick web search will reveal that many online audience reactions and reviews note this racial characterization of Zion in one other particular way, writing—often without further comment—that Morpheus's speech in *Reloaded* to the city's population is reminiscent of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. While the comparisons drawn in these reactions are largely undetailed, seeming to pick up more on the emotive and visual relations between the two speeches, there are in fact some echoes of content. Most prominently, Morpheus's speech repeats the phrase "one hundred years," a repetition which also occurs early in King's speech. Whereas King's emphasis, however, is on the continuing oppression of African Americans despite the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation "one hundred years" earlier, Morpheus's only point is that, after "one hundred years," the inhabitants of Zion "are still here!" Both speeches highlight the oppression of the black (or, in *Reloaded*, largely black) populace, but King's is focussed on a future dream of freedom from this oppression, while Morpheus focusses on the past and largely on the maintenance of the status quo of Zion's position.

[16] The angle of the shot and the way in which Neo is encircled are both echoed by the later image of Morpheus encircled by the police officers. The scenes could offer paired but differing images of subjection, with the ideological containment of the malcontent white—and white-collar—worker being compared to the physically repressive, violent containment of the black activist. The form of enclosure in Neo's apartment is later echoed by the stereotypical "cubicle farm" where Neo, as the properly interpellated worker "Thomas Anderson," is employed. At several points, the cubicle's walls frame the shot, creating a sense of constriction and claustrophobia that is heightened by the fact that Reeves must crouch to remain inside the frame.

[17] In his discussion of the casting of multiracial actors in *The Matrix*, Feng notes that Reeves himself is multiracial, having "an English mother and a Chinese-Hawaiian father," going on to note that "While Reeves reportedly describes himself as white, Asian American spectators frequently label Reeves as Asian Pacific passing as white" (2002, 155). While Neo is, in this scene, obviously coded as white (the sarcastic emphasis on being "whiter *than usual*" implies that he's really very white to begin with), the idea that the actor and/or character is passing could lend further support to my argument, below, concerning the performativity of racial and other forms of dominance. Given this scene, however, the current paper will read Reeves's character, Neo, as white.

[18] In *Revolutions*, this pseudo-religious celebration of the body is demonically parodied in the Merovingian's "bar," where the dance floor is equally crowded. Rather than an ecstatic celebration of life through the glorification of the "natural" human body, this dance is populated by largely docile individuals wearing—and often covered head-to-toe by—rubber and metal S&M gear. The body here is not celebrated, but punished.

[19] For discussions of the ways in which women's ontology is tied to the body, see, for example, Susan Bordo and Sidonie Smith.

[20] This revision of gender expectations continues in *Reloaded* and *Revolutions* mostly through the character of Niobe (Jada Pinkett Smith). Niobe is set up as the consummate pilot—evoking such comments as "Oh damn, woman, you can drive"—thus assuming the traditionally hyper-masculine role of the "flyboy," as constructed in, to take two of the best examples, *Top Gun* (1986) and *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939).

[21] *Reloaded* offers the same problem, but somewhat reversed—the war between the humans and the machine is figured much less ambiguously as a multicultural and multiracial, but primarily black, resistance to the white power structure, while Neo exercises much more traditionally patriarchal, comic-book heroics to save Trinity's life. These heroics culminate in a traditional rendering of the Sleeping Beauty myth (as opposed to its reversal in the first film). As I will discuss later, Neo penetrates Trinity's body with his hand, using his hyper-rational control of the Matrix, in order to bring her back to life. In *Revolutions*, meanwhile, Trinity fulfills the role of the woman who sacrifices herself because of love for "her man."

[22] For a detailed, historicized discussion of the figure of the mammy in relation to other black stereotypes in American film, see Bogle (1994).

[23] *Reloaded* and *Revolutions* subtly juxtapose this image of the mammy to a less stereotypical portrayal of black motherhood in the character of Cas, played by Gina Torres, although her scenes are relatively extremely short. Torres herself has a fairly long history of playing strong characters in science-fiction and fantasy television, including roles on *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, *Cleopatra 2525*, and most recently on the unfortunately short-lived Joss Whedon vehicle, *Firefly*.

[24] This dual positioning of the Oracle would seem to be expanded when, in *Reloaded* and *Revolutions*, the viewer learns that she is in fact a rogue program, functioning simultaneously within and outside, for and against, the Matrix. See Gates's classic discussion of signifyin' in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1998).

[25] Neo's need for the "other(s)" and the performative nature of his dominance are also expanded in the two sequels, in which Neo's position between Zion and the Matrix is much more complex: Neo's very being could be used to serve the Architect, an apparently powerful representative of the Matrix, even as he thinks he is rebelling. As to the names, "Morpheus" may not reflect multiplicity in its allusion to the Greek god of dreams, but in the world of science-fiction film, the first syllable of his name immediately brings to mind the ability to "morph" or change shape. This abbreviation for metamorphosis gained popularity with the film *Terminator 2* (1991).

[26] Another reading could be done here, perhaps, focussing on an allegory for the Middle East, resulting in the now traditional call for a "two-state solution" for peace in "Zion." Indeed, an international perspective does begin to be offered in *Reloaded*, when the Architect's viewscreens are filled with footage of international conflicts, including images from World War II, the Vietnam War, and the conflicts in the Middle

East. Such an internationalist allegory, however, does not work for the first film, with its references specifically to African American resistance. This shift from a focus on (national) racial oppression to international politics could be said to be offered in the *Animatrix*, in which the beginning of the war between human and machine is blamed on the humans, who would not let the machines live in peace. Two pieces from *Animatrix*, "Second Renaissance" parts I and II, detail the humans' enslavement of conscious machines, and further explains the machines' fight for rights in terms of American racial politics (including reference to a "Million Machine March"). These two animated shorts—written by the Wachowskis and directed by Mahiro Maeda—then go on to describe the first robot nation as being set up in the wake of a pogrom against the robots, and place this "new nation" in the Middle East. The new country is called 01, or "Zero One," which when said aloud obviously echoes "Zion." A performative relationship of dominance, in which supposedly "natural" binaries of control and resistance are constantly flipped, can again be read here: humans see themselves as superior to labouring machines, only to be later reduced to an inferior "labour" force as batteries. Again, though, this information is not contained in the largely separate first film, which does set up the oppression and resistance in terms of American racial politics, with the AI serving as the oppressive white power structure. This disparity between the first film and the subsequent works is especially highlighted by Morpheus's claim in *the Matrix* that "we don't know who struck first"; this doesn't mesh with the *Animatrix* shorts, which show the entire history as being contained in Zion's mainframe, which Morpheus could access. The first film does present in many ways, then, a separate vision of the Matrix "universe."

[27] This generic sexism, combined with an oblique orientalism, can also be seen in the character of Sati, whose name, in fact, represents this self-sacrificial love. "Sati" is the term for the controversial Hindu practice in which the widow would immolate herself on her husband's pyre. Even though this particular character lives, her parents must sacrifice themselves to the dominant AI in order to ensure her survival. This storyline, when combined with the use of the term "sati" to represent a character who helps introduce the emotion of love to the machine world, is problematic at best, as it reproduces the association and idealization of self-sacrifice with the passive—and, in this instance, childlike—female character.

[28] The idea that the AI and Zion need each other, in an endless cycle or revolution (mimicking the prehistory offered in the *Animatrix*), is emphasized by the visuals in *Revolutions* of the attack on Zion. The egg-like outer sphere of the city is penetrated by the Sentinels—attack robots that look like squid when seen up-close, but seem more like sperm when seen in a cluster from a distance. In fact, the scene in *Revolutions* in which the multitude of sentinels breaks into Zion *closely* resembles (as Julia M. Wright pointed out to me after we saw the film) William Blake's engraving of the "Circle of the Lustful" in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Bindman 1986, fig. 647). An imagistic sexual tie between Zion and the Matrix AI could also be read in the fight between Neo and Smith in *Revolutions* which, in its nearly balletic form, is reminiscent more of the consummating dance scenes in Hollywood musicals than of a fight to the death (the "fight scene as sex scene" motif is taken to an extreme in the opening to the animated short "Final Flight of the Osiris" from *Animatrix*, where

two characters slowly strip each other during a sword fight. The story was also written by the Wachowskis, and is set after *The Matrix* and before *Reloaded*). These visuals can thus be interpreted as reinforcing the relationship between the (dominant) AI and the (subjugated) Zion as a mutually necessary reinforcement of, rather than attack against, the other.

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