"Unplugging" As Real and Metaphoric: Emancipatory Dimensions to *The Matrix* Film Trilogy

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In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute

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Abstract: This paper is a reflection, on the 10th anniversary of a great work of art. After reviewing some of the global impacts of the Wachowski brothers' highly acclaimed action sci-fi film *The Matrix* (1999-2003), I present a case for the use of the film in critical theory and pedagogy and it's apparent un-interest to such theorists and pedagogues. Based on my study of the film in my dissertation (Curriculum and Instruction, UBC) and in the years following, a case is made for the emancipatory "unplugging" potential of *The Matrix* narrative for 21st century curriculum work and activism. Cautions are raised about "waking up" for oneself and those we assist to do so.

INTRODUCTION: *The Matrix* World Phenomena

The Matrix is a film that astounds not only with action and
special effects but also with ideas.[1]

[a Hollywood blockbuster] ... *The Matrix* is a kitchen sink
running over with ideas great and small, often tossed in
with more concern for their cool-appeal than their coherence.[2]

Between 1999-2003, a trilogy of sci-fi films (produced by Warner Bros. Entertainment, Inc.) entered the world. The *Matrix* films both instruct with their own pedagogy and inspire others to use as a spin-off for further pedagogy. I like what sociologist Kimberly Barton said about the power of contemporary films like *The Matrix*, whereby they offer a space of private-public communication "... by cultivating visual media that enliven the human capacity for thought and deliberation."[3] In her view, and I concur to a large degree, "The film's depiction of the human condition can best be described in Marxian terms as one of alienation" and the path of attempting to get beyond it. And I agree with cultural critic Joshua Clover, "certainly the Matrix is ideology."[4] Morpheus in the film says to Neo at one point: "The Matrix is a system... that system is our enemy." From the start one has to realize this is a film entitled *The Matrix* (a series) but it is also about the Matrix. Sound confusing?, only if you haven't watched the film, at least a few times to get beyond all the action movement, glitz, special effects... and then...

In one sentence: "*The Matrix's* central plot concerns a human rebellion against the Artificial Intelligence [machine-technology] that has taken over the earth [c. 2199] and uses human beings as its power source."[5] The film depicts the "real" world of earth's ecosystems as largely devastated by humans' exploitation. Only machines can live in that "real" world, for the most part. The small number of humans and cyborgs that are fighting against the machines are fighting for their very survival—it is a major competition and war of worlds.

This dark futuristic and apocalyptic theme locates easily in the fiction genre of "cyberpunk" (and film *noir*) as the specific cultural-political and artistic criticism of the late 1980s.[6] According to cultural theorists Diaz-Diocaretz and Herbrechter

(2006), "*The Matrix* enlists its audience in the revolutionary unshackling of contemporary culture from its bondage to the entertainment industry as it draws movie goers into the cathartic experience of self-liberation from the technologically engineered synapses of the managed 'self.'"[7] Interestingly, as many critics have claimed, this film also paradoxically seems to have enlisted many movie-fans into the hyper-commercialized aspects of *The Matrix* products that followed the movie— becoming in some ways, a very successful block-buster "cult" film and Hollywood sales job.

Much could be said about cyberpunk as a form of resistance to oppression, and at times much could be said that it reinforces forms of oppression. My interest in *The Matrix* is that it is both cyberpunk and something else—that something is, what philosopher Ken Wilber would call "integral" in approach[8] and emancipatory in projection. At its most basic level it includes ideas and questions both from the East and the West that draw from premodern ancient wisdom traditions, modern science and philosophy traditions—rather than merely a digital postmodern cyber-youth-think world of knowing. Philosopher and cultural critic Cornel West (who appears in the movie), argues the writers-directors of *The Matrix* have a "deep democratic vision."[9] I see this trilogy as *the* most important story for our times. Let me explain.

Yes, there's something "radical" and perhaps "revolutionary" happening in this film, but what it is exactly, is not always so clear. Art is like that, and beyond what critics have to say, art is there for audiences, individually and collectively, to bring out what they want to "see" in the film/art. In an unprecedented gesture, the film's writers-directors, the Wachowski brothers, wrote an Artist Statement to accompany the DVD (10 disc) set that came on the market place in late 2004. They did not want to impose their own meaning on the film, and are more interested in what people see in it. They wrote,

> We encourage the consciously curious to flip back and forth [while
> viewing the DVD tracks of critics and experts on the film] going
> from complexity to simplicity, from internal to external, and
> somewhere between the search and the denial of meaning, we
> ask the curious to "make up their own damn mind."
> - The Wachowski Bros.[10]

And in order to make up your own mind about what the film is about and what the Matrix is, it is likely going to take several viewings. The fast action and richness of the ideas come so fast that most of us are not capable of taking it in upon one viewing. In fact, my experience is, one has to study the film to get the deeper meanings and possibilities. Of course, most viewers are not that interested and will enjoy it as entertainment and leave it at that, waiting for the next entertaining film to come along. I encourage viewers to go "deeper down the rabbit hole"—an adventure well worth the effort.

So many interesting things have been said about *The Matrix* sci-fi action trilogy film (1999-2003) that it would take several books to address them adequately. It has been both loved and criticized. Whether one likes the film or not, there is no doubt it has captured the attention of millions of people around the world, inspired 20 or more books and hundreds of articles and websites, and has invoked serious debates and critical analysis from academics like no other film in history. The filmography and techniques are ground-breaking and have influenced many films and the entire world of digital film-making since. The debates the film has raised are due to multiple and complex reasons and are beyond the scope of

this short paper to discuss in detail. There is lots of information in libraries and on the Internet if one wants to pursue it, without expending money on buying books.

Most of the discussion on the film I find rather trite and abstract (heady, academic and inaccessible); meaning, of little emancipatory significance, unlike what I see the purpose of the film's story is. My focus of analysis, like the movie narrative itself, is biased toward the liberation and transformation of humanity, as we are being challenged by the complex and rather dangerous future. Suffice it to say, in my view, and many others, the film's narrative (a modern myth,[11] and/or "metamyth"[12]) has been a cultural and political world phenomena, reflecting the power of an artistic mastery work with a "prophetic message"[13] for American society and the rest of the world as we enter the future of a rather bleak and anxiety-provoking 21st century.

To end this very brief introduction to the film, which caught my attention in 1999 and became the core meta-narrative for my Education research dissertation "Fearless Leadership In and Out of the 'Fear' Matrix" (2003), I want to give some highlights of how the film has impacted groups of people in concrete ways, which informs us of its initial educational, sociopolitical and cultural (if not spiritual) power and potency for healing, change, transformation, liberation and enlightenment. A few more interesting examples are as follows:

(1) on June 7, 2003, three weeks after the 2nd film of the trilogy (*Matrix Reloaded*) was released in the West, more than a hundred young people in Japan dressed up in dark-suits, with dark sunglasses, in an attempt to look-like Agent Smith in the film; they converged on Shibuya subway station in Tokyo as fans organizing to create a message of the normal salary-man of the System, gone-wild and reenacting signature scenes from the movie; similar spectacles (if not protests) were staged at mass transit locations in Osaka and Kyoto.[14]

(2) with all the global exposure of the films and products produced along with them, by January 2003, *Time* magazine's cover suggested "2003 is The Year of *The Matrix*" (with a picture of Neo, the main protagonist on the cover); the two sequels to the 1999 first film were to be shown in the fall of 2003.

(3) just like with the sci-fi film series *Star Wars* and creation of a new alternative religion called Jedism, a generation earlier, *The Matrix* trilogy has invoked another new alternative religion called Matrixism; it has its own serious websites (not all in exact agreement) such as http:// phosphoressence tripod.com/ and a reported following of over 2000 members subscribed online (but 16,000 adherents as reported by Religion-wiki; Matrixism, with its own unique symbol being pasted all over the world, is all about "the path of the One" available to everyone (so they say) and four basic tenets and a history of the movement (originated in 2004) are given on the websites with a note that "*The Matrix* films themselves are the sacred text of our religion."

(4) author, activist, Richard Moore (2006) published a global activist handbook entitled *Escaping the Matrix: How We the People Can Change the World*[15] ; he utilizes the metaphoric aspects of the choices ("red pill" or "blue pill") people need to make in order to escape the Matrix of this world, which is corporatism, capitalist western globalization etc.; he apparently has a large

worldwide following of small (somewhat anarchist) groups setting up their own independent ways to build local democratic governance and sustainable life systems "unplugged" from the status quo economic and political authorities of the Matrix.

(5) in new age circles there is a "Fear Matrix Removal Program" that has apparently come from the ascended masters for humans to "unplug" from the Fear Matrix; the Internet has literally hundreds of sites referring to this and associated ideas of "unplugging" from the Matrix (or Fear Matrix); although, I am largely skeptical of these sites and processes claimed for liberating humans, I too have used 'Fear' Matrix as a construct based on the film trilogy,[16] albeit, some of the uses of "Fear Matrix" on some websites goes back to a few years before *The Matrix* films.

The Matrix and Critical Pedagogy

As a professional educator and public intellectual, my concern is what impact are our public and private forms of education having on peoples, the environment and our future? I am a critic of all kinds of educational programs and philosophies, while I espouse my own alternatives. I am not enamored with the general way the Western world, where I grew up and live, manages the whole sphere of socialization and education. That's a long story beyond what I want to get into, rather, the point is I am writing this paper on *The Matrix* primarily from the view of a critical pedagogue not a pedagogue who sees that there is nothing much wrong with the status quo. Critical pedagogy (e.g., with Left-leaning roots in Paulo Freire's liberation work and others in Latin America and around the world) is my location but it is not perfect either and has its own problems, not the least of which it has never well admitted to and worked through its biased ideological "whiteness" (i.e., racism).[17] That said, there are strengths well worth drawing from that tradition as well, I like to modify that tradition with my own *critical integral pedagogy* (see Ken Wilber's work and others, as well as my own[18]).

In my 10 years of research, off and on, regarding *The Matrix* trilogy as curriculum for our future, I have seen lots of critical thinkers in cultural studies, literary and film criticism, communications and English studies, and science, philosophy and religion dig-in to the potentials of this narrative the Wachowski brothers have created. Rarely, have I seen a critical pedagogue or critical social theorist approach the film and elaborate its importance for future education, although many critical pedagogues use the term "matrix" to represent a network of oppressions.[19] I am a leader in this regard, in terms of deconstructing and reconstructing uses for the trilogy specifically as curriculum and pedagogical critique.[20]

In my dissertation I have emphasized how "learning" is critically challenged in the story, and how mostly humans are primarily "conditioned" rather than encouraged to 'think for themselves.' Basically, as the film points out (at least metaphorically), we are "slaves" in a System (the Matrix) which corrupts and limits our way of perceiving the world and living in it creatively and healthily. You have to watch the film to get all that. I also don't want to oversimplify the plot creating an artificial binary (dualism) as "good" (non-Matrix) vs. "bad" (the Matrix). Clearly, it is more complex but I'll leave that for another essay at another time. One of the more interesting critical pedagogues recently to take up the narrative of the trilogy in relation to critical pedagogy and a concept of everyday immersion in "structures of dehumanization" is Tony Monchinski (2007). He agrees with some of the critique in

the films in terms of the Matrix but he prefers to see it as only a metaphor because "Oppression in our classrooms, in our societies, in our world, emanates between humans. There are no tyrannical computer-program overloads dictating our lives and subjugating our species,"[21] as the films tend to show. Monchinski, unlike critical integral pedagogy, prefers only philosophical realism (to idealism) in order to define a secular (rationalist-humanist) "critical pedagogy,"[22] not a sacred or (post-humanist), postmodern, spiritual or cybernetic one, and that leads him to be critical of the film overall, even though he admits it has a lot of impact on his students as they pursue using the language in the films as well as studying some of the ideas in the film.

In my view, the really important critical pedagogy (education) worth watching in the trilogy comes from watching the cyborgs (Neo, Trinity, Morpheus, etc.) who are the main liberational rebel-warriors on the spaceship that goes "in and out of the Matrix"—hacking it, attacking it—and attempting to free other human beings who are still "plugged-in." One has to ask, how are they different from the "real" and "pure" human beings also seen in the movie (as they mostly work with the cyborgs)? How do they learn differently? Everything the cyborgs learn, from the moment they are "unplugged" and freed from the Matrix (you ought to study the film to better understand what the Matrix is), is dedicated towards the freeing of other human beings, and the protection of Zion (the home of the small number of humans in the center of the earth). The cyborgs are rebel-fighters, emancipators, resistance activists, hackers. I prefer to call them "Sacred Warriors" in a long venerable tradition found around the world. In otherwords they are not mere "soldiers."[23] From the point of the view of the "Authorities" (of the Matrix), they are "terrorists" and are under near constant surveillance by the Agents (who enforce the System, the Program).

One can interpret these images and realities depicted in the film as metaphors rather than take them only literally; and in doing so it is rather easy to see their message to us: *we are slaves until we are freed from the Matrix*. Which in my view, is: we are slaves until we are freed from fear (i.e., the 'Fear' Matrix). One new age website has praised the film trilogy with the following claim:

> The movie *The Matrix* has provided this planet with the truth. Built with the machinery of control were the Matrix of Fear, the Matrix of Hatred.... all matrices of miscreation are part of the Matrix of Chaos. The battle has raged....[24]

According to philosopher James Lawler, "The world of the Matrix is a world of fear.... According to the belief-structure of the Matrix, we can never escape from fear."[25] Cultural critic Stephen Faller suggests the films represent the Matrix "... as an expression of the fears, the quests, and the dreams that human kind has strugged [with] to define and conquer."[26] Education, as I and many other critical thinkers have said, is not about freedom as long as it is conservatively ruled by fear-based conditioning (i.e., a "culture of fear"[27] or 'Fear' Matrix), propaganda, teaching and curriculum. So, it astounds me why critical pedagogues generally have not engaged with this trilogy. Surely, that will change as the years go by and yet, at some practical level, it doesn't really matter because millions of young people without academic's or adult's approval are already doing their own deep learning from this trilogy, and they are seeing 'the light' so to speak. They are enacting and re-enacting the teaching lessons from the film—in order to liberate themselves from the everyday world that has limited their view of what is real and what is possible. They no longer wish to live in fear (and terror)—a fear they didn't

even know existed in how they were (are) being cultivated to "fit in" and conform to the System. If the 1960-70s spirit is alive and underground stirring, I see it in this new generation. Dr. Cornel West, in the interviews about the film on the DVD box set, says there is a whole generation following this movie trilogy and they are the "Matrix generation." I for one am using the trilogy for my own "unplugging" and I am learning lots from young people about this too. Of course, I think it would be ideal if the older generations (like us Boomers, especially) could collaborate with the Gen X, Ys and Millenials to study the implications of this film and the ways to improve this world. Boomers, especially, have to understand and appreciate that these newer generations are the first to have lived in and with electronic media more intimately than any other—in many ways, that constitutes not something 'good' or 'bad' by necessity but it definitely makes them a different morph of "human." It also makes them more proficient at managing a highly mediated cultural/political/economic world.

Liberation and Transformation: "Unplugging" & Post-humanist Identities

As I mentioned earlier, my focus is on the learning and transformation processes involved with the main characters—cyborgs, resistance fighters. My professional life and commitment is to doing "curriculum work as a public moral enterprise"[28] and this trilogy has great potential for such emancipatory work. I see the rebel cyborgs offering us a visual methodology for emancipatory projects, democracy and social justice of a radical kind, and development of our own identities and maturation. I am not saying all of what these cyborgs do in the films is "wonderful" necessarily, surely, they are flawed like humans *and* they also are outstanding models for us. Maybe a cyborg is the next evolution of a better-than-human-being for a postmodern world—a question worth considering, and one that challenges our human hubris that "we humans" are the top and only model of being that exists and will ever exist—well, development and evolution have a way of challenging such species arrogance, time and time again.

What stands out, however, in their very foundational cyborg identity is that they are "unplugged" (in the film they are reminded of this continually because of their "plugs" permanently embedded in their skin). Unplugged means they made a choice in the film, and took the red pill not the blue pill. According to some critical pedagogues "The 'blue and red pill' scene in *The Matrix* serves as an excellent metaphor for the relationships some educators/activists have with their students...".[29] The role of the critical pedagogue, more or less, is to "wake up" their students from the commonly held, often unconscious, attitudes and perceptions that hold themselves and others under hegemonic ideologies and oppression. *The Matrix* film series opens with this scene and message very clearly, when we see "Wake up, Neo" (typed by Trinity off screen) on the computer screen in Neo's apartment.

Cyborgs (human-machines), are complex beings of a postmodern highly technological society. We in the West especially, but also in the East where high-tech is the rave (e.g., Japan) are growing accustomed to see images of cyborgs in the last 20-30 years especially. People are deeply enjoined with technologies of all kinds, including the computer, tv, cell phone. For some, like new cybernetic philosopher Ken Warwick, getting surgical electronic implants to hook up one's brain directly to computers and the Internet is not sci-fiction, but fact.[30] They are more and more, especially young people, born and raised in a cyberworld—a world

of machines predominated by the logic of machines (and digital reality of the virtual). And no doubt this has led to a different kind of "human" and some say post-human. Old humanist rhetoric, from a critical cyborg perspective, is just that-- "old" and "outdated." Radical cyberpunk (and cyberfilm noir) pushes this challenge into our faces and makes us ask seriously what is a "human" and beyond that—a "cyborg" (or post-human)? Unpleasant, or interesting—this is what the trilogy brings up for many viewers, one way or another.

I am particularly interested in the self-formation evolutionary processes (and realities) of the cyborg-unplugged-red pill identity. In the film we see this in Neo, Trinity, Morpheus (and a few others). What most critics fail to respect, I believe, is that these characters do not represent "humans" as normally thought of in ways we might critique humans—that is, as being sexist, racist, classist, and so forth. They are, by contrast, cyborgs.[31] And I see them as beyond human ("transhuman," as some theorists argue). They have been forced to sacrifice some human attributes and forced to develop new and super-human capacities (again, the film shows this literally but it is metaphorical too).

The idea of "the One" as a savior in the trilogy's mythological referencing is not surprising because the cyborgs are super-human and have capacities that the humans in the film don't have and will never have. The origin of the cyborg-unplugged experience and its care and attention (as the first film shows in detail) is profoundly a new experience for them—and it is one where they appreciate being "born again" so to speak. Thus, in that born again cyborg-unplugged experience and identity they are on a mission, and a sacred journey aimed at the emancipation of themselves and humanity (and all Life). This is what I find so deeply compelling in the narrative, without the story becoming too religiously utopian or idealistic (in many ways the ending is rather dystopian and disturbing[32]). This plan of "saving" (or at least "hacking") is what I see turns a lot of postmodern ('geek' and 'hip') young (and not so young) people on big time. They want new vision, mission and purpose, beyond what the everyday world offers. However, they want it 'dressed-up' in drag that relates to "cool" and their actual youthful lives and styles, aesthetics and experiences, living in the current times. The cyborg-unplugged identity (i.e., "cyber-rebels"[33]) provides that for them (cf. Matrixism). Admittedly, many people and youth just want an '*enemy*'[34] to identity and focus anger on as well, and the Matrix is a representation of that. In America, and elsewhere, with all the "terrorist attacks" getting more effective and difficult to identify—people search for an 'object' to attack back and blame for their fear and terror.

These youth-Matrists see a world in great danger now, and in the future, as *The Matrix* represents so vividly in "the desert of the real" scenes. They want to be free, and they want others to be free with them. This is foundational spiritual development and political revolution by any other name. The movie narrative shows how this works, in the context of today's postmodern cyberworld and technological civilization (in its late phases). What better education could there be for us living in these conditions than to watch how the crew on the spaceship (Neo, Trinity, Morpheus, etc.) work as a "team"—collaboratively engaging their mission, under leadership from Morpheus, but also under leadership from others too. Various warrior-rebels take leadership and then follow Morpheus's leadership or Neo's leadership or Trinity's leadership (and all, it could be argued are following the Oracle). It is a shared duty, and image of "fearless leadership," albeit, not always in its most mature forms, but nonetheless it shows the basic path of this red pill way.

I see the movie as a collective emancipation. I do not see it as only "Neo" being the one liberated. They each have to depend on each other all the way—they are the same spirit in many forms, working toward a common cause. It just so

happens, "Neo" gets a lot of focus and air-time as the next person (among several before him) who is "unplugging" and on the archetypal journey as "the One." But as I see the film narrative, anyone could be "the One" on any particular day, based on who is thought to be "the One" (in the case of the film series we are watching Morpheus's vision unfold, again). In real life, beyond the film narrative, it could be any body who sees a potential initiate (or themselves)[35] as "the One" and then all operations could focus on that and what kind of human would we get? And what if we all saw each other as "the One" right now? How would we help them unplug? How would we nourish their leadership and what would get in the way of that? These are real issues, pedagogical, political, psychological, sociological, spiritual. *The Matrix* shows us the "unplugging" and its consequences.

The "Unplugging" Phenomena: Lessons & Cautions

Be care-full how you 'awaken.'

A little research shows that the notion of "unplugging" (metaphor for "awakening") goes back in secular cultural (at least technological Western) discourses (critiques) to the late 1980s, often associated with unplugging from "the plug-in-drug" which was television then. The term "unhook" is also used, as if one is addicted ("hooked") and needs to become free from the addictions of normal life. Other activists and social critics also used the term "unplugging" as a way to describe, 'dropping-out' (a 1950s-60s-70s term) of the System. Yoga instructors will sometimes advise their students to "unplug" from distress, pain, distractions of the everyday life when they come into the yoga class, for then they can clear. The symbolic meaning of "unplugged" really took hold in popular discourse after *The Matrix*, and has been appropriated in the culture and subcultures of political activists, including Christians and the idea of a conversion experience, getting free from technology (one's computer) for a while, and in new age circles one can take programs to "unplug" from the Fear Matrix (illusions of reality) to find the true Reality and peace (all for a mere $400). The examples are plentiful. However, rare is it that anyone discusses the pathological or problematic aspects of unplugging from the Matrix (the System). I'll focus on this later point to end this paper.

The Matrix films shows, to some degree, both the upside and the downside of unplugging. It shows that not everyone can handle too much reality too fast when they are awakening. The scenes of Neo in the first film at the beginning depict this well. At one point, Neo literally vomits hearing and seeing *too much reality*, as Morpheus is teaching him "what is the Matrix?" for the first time. Sheehan (2005) is worth citing at length in this regard in his discussion of *The Matrix*. He wrote,

> 'Human kind cannot bear very much reality.' Countless versions of this statement have been used [historically], often in radically different ways, to underwrite condemnations of inauthentic life. Plato was the first, in his grim, unforgiving allegory of the cave (*Republic* 255-64). Karl Marx's declaration that 'Religion... is the opium of the people' revised the notion, whilst counteracting excuses for political apathy (1992:244). And Oscar Wilde made use of a similar idea, from still another direction—a tribute to the creative imagination, artfully disguised as a defense of 'lying.' Coined by T. S. Eliot in *Four Quartets* (1936), the phrase has been renewed in the digital age, quickened by the new technologies of escape. One of the main feats of the *Matrix* triology is not just

to refract these meanings through the hypnotic glow of the monitor,
but to offer detailed speculations as to what lies on the other side
of that glow. (p. 162).

On my own journey of awakening, seeming to "unplug" on more than one
level and at more than one life-juncture, I know the terror involved. I have seen it in
others I have worked with as a therapist and educator, and leader of a social
movement. I relate to Stuart Hall's concept of the "diasporic intellectual"[36] as an
analogy for being 'displaced' once you start to unplug and carry it out publicly, with
real life, often delimiting, consequences. I wrote about this years ago:[37]

Watching the Resistance movement characters [Neo, Trinity, Morpheus]
in the narrative of the film *The Matrix* made me feel like I was watching
my life on screen. It deeply moved me by about the third or fourth
watching of the film. I saw rebels with a cause but without a home. I
saw the pain and sacrifices of that life 'inbetween' and the terror that
goes with it.... [as a teacher] I have been caught continually in a
place of doubt about how best to talk about and undermine the 'Fear'
Matrix, and reduce the stranglehold of 'fear' on everyone's throat—
while, wondering if that assertion is based on assumptions and a personal
twist of perception [on my part] that is not true for other people—others
who have not experienced what I have nor do what I do. I have been
challenged continually about the value of raising the topic of 'fear' [and
the Matrix] to such a high pitch as I do in my work. Is it really valuable
to people? Am I unethically raising more fear in people than they already
have [or will let into their awareness] and that in doing so I am further
damaging their soul? (a concern I value as expressed by Sardello, 1999).[38]
In *The Matrix*, Morpheus makes an apology to Neo after Neo has been
exposed to the truth of the Matrix—and, Neo flips out in a panic attack.
[citing from the first film:]

Morpheus: I feel that I owe you an apology. There is a rule that we do
not free a mind once it reaches a certain age [unspecified]. It is
dangerous.[39] They have trouble letting go. Their mind turns against
them. I've seen it happen. I'm sorry. I broke the rule because I had to
.... When the Matrix was first built there was a man born inside that had
the ability to change what he wanted, to remake the Matrix as he saw
fit. It was this man that freed the first of us and taught us the truth; as
long as the Matrix exists, the human race will never be free.

The film narrative brings home the lesson (and caution) of what happens
when we help someone "unplug" but don't follow-up closely enough of what
happens to them in that process. For example, the corruption and failure of the
Rebel's Mission can be seen through Cypher's character/role as 'betrayer.' In their
zeal for emancipation, Neo, Trinity and Morpheus appear to completely miss what
is happening for Cypher, and that has a huge (mostly disastrous) impact—it cost a
lot of losses, suffering and lives. Were those losses all necessary or could they
have been prevented? I think the latter is the case, but that doesn't matter—
drama/art is what it is—tragedy is there for a reason—good reason—it catches our
attention and we think more deeply than if everything went just smoothly and in
harmony. Learning and conflict are necessary, and comfortable companions as we
truly grow in authenticity and beyond.

Why was Cypher ignored until it was too late? Watch the first film especially. I think he was ignored because of the zealousness of Morpheus's discourse and impact as "leader"—he had his mind set on Neo as "the One" hero. His focus on Neo became so much everyone's focus. Heroes are worshipped—a fatal flaw if we miss the context for their development. There are great lessons to learn in taking the "red pill" and "unplugging" and I for one think we can learn from the mistakes of the rebel crew in the film, as well as learn from what they did well. As viewers, we have hindsight, and distance, from the characters and the plot. We can rewrite, reboot, and remake the reality that Neo, Trinity and Morpheus experienced. That's the beauty of the stored memory of the film. It is an intelligence waiting for us to tap, and take to another level of intelligence (wisdom and compassion)—as we seek to become free and free others of all forms of oppression, and as we seek to restore ecological balance and sustainability to Life systems on this planet. We are going to need all the intelligence we can muster.

The role of *love* and *fear* are vibrant throughout the trilogy, and for good reasons. Not near enough study of these dynamic aspects in the films has been done, and I for one look forward to learning more. I would like to learn about it in groups studying the films and what has been said and written about the films. Then I'd like to see groups teaching other groups, and so on... a meshwork of great insights and support is needed. I think this enough said, now I turn the steering wheel to you.

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End Notes

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[1] From philosopher, Grau, C. (2005). Introduction. In C. Grau (ed.), *Philosophers explore The Matrix*, pp. 1-9. NY: Oxford University Press, 1.

[2] On p. 14, from Clover, J. (2004). *The Matrix*. London, UK: BFI Publishing.

[3] On p. 54-55, from Barton, K. (2006). Revolution in *The Matrix*: A cue call for reflexive sociology. In M. Diaz-Diocaretz, and S. Herbrechter (eds.), *The Matrix in theory*, pp. 53-72. Rodopi.

[4] See Clover (2004), p. 64.

[5] On p. 95, from Haslam, J. (2005). Coded discourse: Romancing the (electronic) shadow in *The Matrix*. *College Literature, 32*(3), 92-115.

[6] According to Haslam (2005), "Criticism on the Wachowski Brother's 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 [representational rendering] of the imagery of cyberpunk, which is usually seen as being founded by, and epitomized in, William Gibson's 1984 novel *Neuromancer*.... 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)...". (p. 92.).

[7] They are summarizing Kimberly Barton's argument in the same volume. Diaz-Diocaretz, M., and Herbrechter, S. (2006). Introduction. in M. Diaz-Diocaretz and S. Herbrechter (eds.), *The Matrix in theory*. Rodopi, p. 14.

[8] Contemporary integral philosopher Ken Wilber and others have defined "integral" as a way of knowing and being and acting, whereby all relevant and valid forms of knowledge, no matter how different, are given their due in attempting to represent and understand reality (from an integral, and/or holistic perspective). More complex notions of Wilber's *integral* view include E-W synthesis and developmental and evolutionary systems theory. See for example, Wilber, K. (2000). *Integral psychology*. Boston, MA: Shambhala. The trajectory of the entire *Matrix* trilogy is developmental and evolutionary, as well as drawing on many disciplines and traditions for its ontological and epistemological (i.e., metaphysical) platforms in the narrative. For one of the best applications of "integral theory" (Ken Wilber's work) to anti-oppression work, see Quiñones Rosado, R. (2007). *Consciousness-in-action: Toward an integral psychology of liberation and transformation*. Caguas, Puerto Rico: ilé Publications.

[9] West, C. (2004). *Democracy matters: Winning the fight against imperialism.* NY: Penguin, (p. 187).

[10] Excerpt from Wachowski, A., and Wachowski, L. (2003). An introduction from the Wachowski Brothers. In the pocket booklet to the DVD set *The Ultimate Matrix Collection* (©2004 Warner Bros. Entertainment, Inc.)., pp. 1-2.

[11] "*The Matrix* tells the time-old story of the death and the resurrection of the initiate" (p. 14). Wilde, S. (2001). *God's gladiators.* Chattanooga, TN: Brookemark Llc. Ken Wilber has called it a "modern myth for our times" in various interviews. Wagner and Flannery-Dailey wrote, "Although as a 'modern myth' the films purposefully draw on numerous traditions, we propose that an examination of Gnostic Christianity and Buddhism greatly illuminates the overarching paradigm of *The Matrix* series as a whole..." (p. 259). Wagner, R., & Flannery-Dailey, F. (2005). Wake Up!: Worlds of illusion in Gnosticism, Buddhism, and *The Matrix* project. In C. Grau (ed.), *Philosophers explore The Matrix*, pp. 258-287. NY: Oxford University Press. Other academic writers have recognized the mythic qualities as well, as the film draws on myths of premodern times and represents them in a new cyberpunk way, for example: Frentz, T. S., & Rushing, J. H. (2002). "Mother isn't quite herself today": Myth and spectacle in *The Matrix. Critical Studies in Media Communications, 19*(1), 64-86; and Samuel, K. A. (2001). No begetting the future: Technological autochthony, sexual reproduction, and the mythic structure of "The Matrix." *Journal of Popular Culture, 35*(3), 175-203.

[12] Among others like Jake Horsley, this classification is attributed to Danser, S. (n.d.). *The Matrix* as metamyth. Retrieved from http://www.indigogroup.co.uk/foamycustard/fc045.htm.

[13] This point is specifically made by Dr. Cornel West in the "Roots of *The Matrix*" DVD in the 10 DVD box set *The Ultimate Matrix Collection* (© 2004 Warner Bros. Entertainment, Inc.).

[14] Taken from Donovan, R. (2003). "Manga and *The Matrix*: Japan's cultural and linguistic influences on the Matrix series. Japan Inc. Communications, 2003. Retrieved Dec. 17, 2008 from http://www.encyclopedia.com.

[15] Moore, R. (2006). *Escaping the Matrix: How We the People Can Change the World.* Wexford, Ireland: The Cyberjournal Project.

[16] For example see, Fisher, R. M. (2003). Fearless Leadership In and Out of the 'Fear' Matrix. Unpublished Dissertation. Vancouver, BC: The University of British Columbia. See also Fisher, R. M. (2002). What is the 'Fear' Matrix?: Part 1: Failure of Cultural. Technical Paper No. 13. Vancouver, BC: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute; and Fisher, R. M. (with J. Quaye & B. Pope) (2008). Fearless leadership. In Four Arrows (Don T. Jacobs) (ed.), *The Authentic Dissertation: Alternative ways of knowing, research, and representation*, pp. 143-148. NY: Routledge.

[17] See critique by Allen, R. L. (2005). Whiteness and critical pedagogy. In Z. Leonard (ed.), *Critical pedagogy and race*, pp. 53-68. Blackwell.

[18] See Fisher, R. M. (2007). A guide to Ken Wilber and the education literature: An annotated bibliography. Technical Paper 27. Vancouver, BC: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

[19] "Matrix" (a negative connotation) as a concept is used for the "matrix of domination" (e.g., Patricia Hill Collins); others also are specific in using the term for a hidden curriculum of discourses, of power and hegemony, often associated with capitalism, imperialism, racism, colonialism, and general dominant-subordinate webs of relationships as part of the everyday world (of oppression-repression dynamics); *matrix*, generically means (as a noun) "womb-like" or "mold" or "template." According to Wilber (1977/82), "In Mahayana Buddhism, this 'within which is beyond' is called the *Tathagatagarha*, or Matrix of Reality [a positive connotation]. The word 'matrix' suggests the universal field-like nature of reality, and thus is reminiscent of the *Dharmadhatu* or Universal Field.... also means the Womb of Reality, the womb in which we are reborn..." (p. 87). Wilber, K. (1977/82). *Spectrum of consciousness.* Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House.

[20] One particularly good postmodern educator in art education has offered a practical article for high school students, see Stewart, E. O. (2003). *The Matrix:* A secondary postmodern primer. *Art Education: The Journal of the National Art Education Association, 56*(3), 36-43.

[21] Monchinski, T. (2008). *Critical pedagogy and the everyday classroom: Explorations of educational purpose.* Springer, p. 16.

[22] "As enjoyable as the Matrix is.... the Matrix's separation of the real world versus the world of appearances smacks of philosophical idealism... back to Plato...". (p.16).

[23] One could list a lot of books making this distinction, but one of the better one's is Lane, R. J., and Wurts, J. (2002). *In search of the woman warrior: Role models for modern women.* London, UK: Vega.

[24] Retrieved from Metaphon & Monikah (Commanders-in-Chief), from http://groups.yahoo.com/group/universalhealing/message/9319.

[25] Lawler, J. (2002). We are (the) One!: Kant explains how to manipulate the Matrix. In W. Irwin (ed.), *The Matrix and philosophy: Welcome to the desert of the real*, pp. 138-152. Chicago, IL: Open Court, p. 147.

[26] Faller, S. (2004). *Beyond The Matrix*: *Revolutions and revelations.* Chalice Press.

[27] Fisher, R. M. (2007). Culture of fear and education: An annotated bibliography. Technical Paper 28. Vancouver, BC: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute.

[28] See for example, Gaztambide-Fernandez, R. A., and Sears, J. T. (2004). *Curriculum work as a public moral enterprise.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

[29] Cammarota, J., and Fine, M. (2008). *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory action research in motion*. NY: Routledge, p. 6.

[30] See for e.g., Keven Warwick, Prof. of Cybernetics at the University of Reading, UK, in his book *In the Mind of the Machine* and his autobiography *I, Cyborg*.

[31] In critiquing what these characters do or don't do, or how they dress and seem to portray stereotypes or not, the context of them operating in a Matrix program not of their design (i.e., the Architect's design), and sometimes out of that program, yet with a history of being completely plugged into the Matrix for most of their life, then we might cut them and the movie trilogy more slack—context is everything. The Matrix program (Architect) of the machines is what we ought to be mostly critiquing for carrying out stereotypes of race, gender, class, sexual idenities, violence, etc. Virtually every critic of these things misses this contextual point.

[32] On the surface the end of the trilogy seems warm and hopeful... but that is minor compared to the deeper narrative all the way through. I think cultural critic Paul Sheehan says it well in claiming that the only real "god" in the movie is a "machine-god." "Neither the salvation of Zion [in the film], nor the iconography of a 'crucified' Neo, can hide the grim fact that in a post-Christian, post-Buddhist, post-human world, the place of God has been usurped by a mega-machine, a technological deity. Despite the hopeful coda, the birth of a new Matrix, the superposition of technology and religion binding the narrative loses its precarious hold and a bleak retrospective shadow is cast over the *Matrix* trilogy" (p. 171). Sheehan, P. (2005). Immanence, autonomy and integral anomalies. In S. Gillis (ed.), *The Matrix trilogy: Cyberpunk reloaded,* pp. 162-172. NY: Wallflower Press. At the same time, Wilber's nondual analysis of the trilogy (see DVD box set) leads him to see the machines as the human 'shadow' and he argues they are "light" and thus "Spirit" repressed—thus, a false enemy.

[33] This term was used by Sardar, Z. (1999). Playing the game. *New Statesman* (April, 26, 1999), 36.

[34] For a substantive healthy (Green v-meme) view of "enemy" and its necessity in liberation work, development, and education, I recommend Newman, M. (1994).

Defining the enemy: Adult education in social action. Sydney, Australia: Stewart Victor. I also can take a 2nd-tier and/or non-dual perspective (much like Wilber does in his analysis of *The Matrix*) and see there is "no enemy" (like there is "no spoon")... it is all an illusion that needs to be transcended ultimately. As well, one could make a case that the Matrix represents "evil" (that which is destined to destroy humanity and its growth), as for example, Audre Lorde's analogy in *Sister Outsider*, where she wrote about women's fear and the silence it brings—and how useless it is in the long run "... because this machine [the Matrix] will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak..." (cited in Poling, 1996, p. 107). Poling, J. N. (1996). *Deliver us from evil: Resisting racial and gender oppression.* Fortress Press. Again, a nondual perspective on "evil" likewise could be taken (*a la* Wilber).

[35] This point is made by Lawler (2002).

[36] Cited in Morley, D., and Chen, K-H. (eds.) (1996). *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies.* NY: Routledge.

[37] Fisher (2002), *What is the 'Fear' Matrix?*, pp. 16-17.

[38] See the spiritual-educator Sardello, R. (1999). *Freeing the soul from fear.* NY: Putnam Penguin.

[39] This point is evident in the film narrative throughout, but particularly when we see other possibilities to be "the One" at the Oracle's apartment (first film)—they are all children. The message of the film, sublime, is that they are probably the best people to work with to "free their minds." The invoking of Sati (another young girl) at the end of the film as the next morph of the 'Oracle' is also a predictor of the importance of youthfulness in "unplugging" and being successful to re-create the world a new in profound ways. Thus, educational curriculum (K-12) is critically important to the task. I have always been curious to ask children to watch *The Matrix* (unfortunately, it is rated R). I still think experiments here are warranted, with all due caution. Certainly, teens are most 'ready' to watch the trilogy but even they may be too old [numb] to really "unplug." I am skeptical myself, of this "age" criteria posited by the film, though it has a lot of truth to it, no doubt. One could invoke the psychospiritual literatures from around the world that tell us "we need an ego before we transcend it"—the Matrix reinforces a dysplasia or freezing of development at "ego" (i.e., fear-based reality and identity), as that is easiest to control by Authorities who use fear-mongering techniques to punish and manipulate others. To unplug from the Matrix is definitely a movement of transcending the ego, although, that can be done in steps (consciously, and ethically), I believe.