Dani Shalet, "Entry on: The Matrix (The Matrix, 1) by The Wachowskis ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1517. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

The Wachowskis

The Matrix (The Matrix, 1)

United States (1999)

TAGS: Christianity Delphic Oracle Lethe (River) Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Morpheus Plato Underworld





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Matrix (The Matrix, 1)
Studio/Production Company	Warner Bros., Village Roadshow Pictures, Groucho II Film Partnership, Silver Pictures
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1999
First Edition Details	*The Matrix*. Directed and written by the Wachowskis (credited as the Wachowski Brothers). Music by Don Davis. Warner Bros., Village Roadshow Pictures, Groucho Film Partnership, Silver Pictures, 1999, 136 min.
Running time	136 min
Format	DVD, Blu-ray
Official Website	Warnerbros.com (accessed: September 16, 2022).
Available Onllne	*The Matrix* at warnerbros.com (accessed: September 16, 2022).

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Awards	2000 – Academy Awards: Best Film Editing, Best Sound, Best Effects, Sound Effects Editing, Best Effects, Visual Effects; 2000 – BAFTA Awards: Best Sound, Best Achievement in Special Visual Effects; 2000 – Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films: Best Science Fiction Film, Best Director; 2000 – American Cinema Editors: Best Edited Feature Film – Dramatic; 2000 – Blockbuster Entertainment Awards: Favorite Actor – Action/Science Fiction, Favorite Supporting Actor – Action/Science-Fiction; 1999 – ACCA: Best Film Editing, Best Film Editing, Best Visual Effects; 1999 – BMI Film & TV Awards: BMI Film Music Award; Other awards available at Imdb.com (accessed: September 16, 2022).
Genre	Action and adventure films, Cyberpunk fiction, Science fiction films
Target Audience	Crossover (15+)
Author of the Entry	Dani Shalet, Canterbury Christ Church University, Danielle.shalet@canterbury.ac.uk
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehamptom.ac.uk Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com

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Creators



The Wachowski sisters in 2012. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons, originally from anna-hanks.com/blog (accessed: September 16, 2022).

The Wachowskis , b. 1965, 1967
(Director)

Lana Wachowski was born June 21st 1965 as Lawrence (Larry) Wachowski. Along with younger sibling Lilly Wachowski, Lana Wachowski directed and wrote, as well as produced, *The Matrix* trilogy. Wachowski's work was inspired by a love of comic books, *Dungeon and Dragons*, as well as film. Wachowski is also a Human Rights Campaigner, including as an advocate for Transgender rights, and philanthropist.

Lilly Wachowski was born Dec 29th 1967 as Andrew Paul (Andy) Wachowski. Along with older sibling Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski directed, wrote and produced *The Matrix* Trilogy. Wachowski's other work includes *V for Vandetta* (2005), *Cloud Atlas* (2012) the Space Opera *Jupiter Ascending* (2015), and the award-winning Netflix series *Sense8* (2015–2018). Wachowski is also an advocate for Transgender rights.

Sources:

Lilly Wachowski at IMDb (accessed: September 16, 2022).

Lana Wachowski at IMDb (accessed: September 16, 2022).

Rose, Steve, "Lilly Wachowski: putting gender on the agenda in life and film", *The Guardian* 11 Mar. 2016.

Bio prepared by Dani Shalet, Canterbury Christ Church University, danielle.shalet@canterbury.ac.uk

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Additional information

Casting	Keanu Reeves as Neo, Laurence Fishburne as Morpheus, Carrie-Anne Moss as Trinity, Hugo Weaving as Agent Smith, Joe Pantoliano as Cypher, Gloria Foster as Oracle.
Adaptations	Animation — *The Animatrix* (2003); Videogames — *Enter the Matrix* (2003), *The Matrix Online* (2005), *The Matrix: Path of Neo* (2005); Comic Books: Posted on the *Matrix* series website between 1999–2003 (written by the Wachowskis; illustrated by Geof Darrow).
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	*The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003), *The Animatrix* (2003), *Enter the Matrix* (videogame 2003), *The Matrix Online* (MMORPG 2005–2009), *The Matrix: Path of Neo* (videogame 2005).
Summary	Thomas Anderson, a programmer by day and a computer hacker by night is given a chance to see his 'reality' for what it is, a computer simulation. When alone at his computer one evening, Thomas Anderson (Neo as he is known by the hacker community), falls asleep

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at his computer only to be awakened by a message typed on his screen that reads “Wake up Neo” sent by the elusive ‘hacker’ Morpheus who Neo is searching for.

Morpheus then sends Neo instructions that read “follow the white rabbit” leading him to another hacker, Trinity and to a resistance leader called Morpheus. Eventually Morpheus gives him an ultimatum, telling him to take the “blue pill….wake up in your bed and believe what you want to believe” or choose the “red pill…stay in wonderland” and see how “far the rabbit hole goes”.

Curious as to what the Matrix is and what is behind it, Neo takes the red pill and wakes up from the simulation, only to find himself in a post-apocalyptic future where humans are harvested, like batteries, by intelligent machines. We find out from Morpheus that there was a war between AI and humans, humans lost, and the machines learned that they could harvest humans to replenish their power. The machines built the Matrix to distract humans from their inevitable fate, which is to ‘feed’ the machines until humans reach the end of their ‘natural’ lives.

Morpheus is a leader within the group known as the resistance who are fighting the machines to regain control of the planet. Many of those in the group were born in Zion but the Redpills make up a few of their number. The ‘Redpills’ include individuals like Morpheus, Neo, Cypher and Trinity who have been awakened from the Matrix and are aware of its true nature.

When Neo ‘awakes’ from the Matrix, Morpheus ‘flushes’ him out of his sleep pod and starts to train him on how to manipulate the Matrix. Believing he is ‘the one’, a man who will destroy the Matrix and free humans who are imprisoned within it. Morpheus takes Neo to visit the Oracle who is meant to give Neo a prophecy about what he will become. She tells him two particularly important things: the first is that he has potential, but he is not the ‘chosen one’; the second is that Morpheus will die unless he makes a choice. He leaves the Oracles house with less certainty of his destiny.

Meanwhile, Morpheus is betrayed by Cypher, and is eventually captured by agents – computer programmes that are meant to keep order within the system. He is then tortured by Agent Smith who wants him to reveal Zion, a safe haven for humans who have been ‘freed’ from the Matrix. Morpheus is eventually rescued by Trinity and

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Neo, who makes the choice to save Morpheus even though it will kill him (making the Oracle's prophecy fulfilled) but Neo is killed by Agent Smith, only to be born again, as the 'chosen one'.

Analysis

The Matrix presents a rich story that weaves its own unique tale through the tapestry of mythology along with Christian imagery, with Neo intimating at once the god Dionysos the Christian Messiah. As this entry covers the first film in the series, an analysis of the character will left for the entry on *Matrix: Revolutions* (the third film of the trilogy) where Neo fulfils his prophecy and completes his epic journey.

Such is the wealth of mythological elements and archetypes within the film that it can be readily used to bring ancient myth to a more modern audience, including to teenagers. For example, according to an article by Andy Culpepper from 1999, the *Matrix* provides a means for teachers to get students (or at least teenaged boys) excited about myth, by tying in elements of gaming and computers with mythology.* What is more, the film can be regarded as a reimagining of myth and also a modern lens into ancient Greek philosophy. According to *The Matrix* Parent's Guide, the film has initiated discussion centering on our own existence" bringing up questions on philosophy, and religion.** I myself have used *The Matrix* to illustrate difficult concepts in philosophy like Plato's Allegory of the Cave and dualism to 16–17 year old students. It worked successfully as it gave them a 'modern' interpretation of rather difficult concepts.

Mythology, gods and goddesses

Morpheus

The name of this character, who leads the Resistance against the machines and awakens Neo from the Matrix, evokes the Morpheus of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Not only is the one who awakens Neo from his slumber, but to those who are living within the Matrix, he is nothing more than a phantom, an elusive figure, a myth. This is illustrated at the start of the film where we see Neo running a search algorithm to find Morpheus. His search pulls up several news articles. One reads "Morpheus eludes Polices at Heathrow Airport" and the other: "(Morpheus?) International Manhunt Underway". It is also Morpheus who sends Neo a message on his screen that says, "wake up Neo"

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which is followed by another message that reads: “follow the white rabbit”.

This message is a reference to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) which tells the tale of Alice, a young girl who starts her adventures by following a ‘white rabbit’ down a “rabbit hole”. This theme can be interpreted as Alice entering the underworld, a convention known as *katabasis*, or the epic hero’s journey to the underworld. Alice’s adventures in turn evoke those of classical mythological heroes who underwent this same journey. These include Odysseus’ in the *Odyssey* to seek the council of the seer Tiresias and Orpheus in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* to rescue Eurydice. The Matrix’s protagonist Neo, with the help of Morpheus, also embarks on this same journey, when the ‘white rabbit’ appears as a tattoo on the arm of his friend Choi’s girlfriend, Dujour echoing the start of Alice’s journey.

It is possible that both Choi and Dujour together, represent a god, the Roman god of choice, Janus. The reasoning behind this is that their names Choi and Dujour when put together make the French phrase ‘choix du jour’ (‘choice of the day’). As Janus is the god of choice, one can more easily see the connection, especially as Neo must make choices throughout the entire film. It also must be noted that the representation of Janus would also fit with Neo’s journey, not only as the god of choice, but of beginnings, endings, gates, and doorways, many of which Neo navigates through on his journey that ends in the ‘virtual’ and begins in the ‘real’. Furthermore, like Janus the two headed god who is always looking ahead and behind, the two characters male and female, yin and yang, make up the phrase.

The Oracle

Like the priestess at the oracle of Delphi, this character is a prophetess. She is also an ancient computer program revered by the Resistance. When Neo first enters her apartment, he is greeted by a younger woman who is her handmaiden. Unlike the Oracle who is dressed in ordinary clothes, and is a woman in her 60s, the priestess is a younger woman, perhaps in her 30s, who wears a satin robe. We only see once, before Neo enters the Oracle’s kitchen.

The kitchen suggests the inner sanctum of the Delphic temple. Over the kitchen entrance hangs a sign that reads *temet nosce* (“know thyself”). According to the ancient author Pausanias, this phrase was

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one of the three maxims that were inscribed in the pronaos of the temple of Apollo at Delphi. The oracle tells Neo that he has the 'gift' but he is waiting for something. Confused by this, as he has been led to believe he is the "one" by Morpheus, he answers with "what"? The oracle responds with another rather cryptic answer, 'your next life, maybe'. He leaves her apartment with more questions than answers, feeling uncertainty about his future and his destiny.

Ancient Philosophy

The Tale of Er

The Tale of Er, from the last book of Plato's *Republic* (10.614b following) shares several similarities with Neo's epic quest. Plato's Er, is a warrior who 'dies' in battle and is chosen by judges to share his experiences of the afterlife with humankind on his return – much like Neo who is meant to share his experience of the Matrix and free those who are trapped within it. Furthermore, like Neo, Er is gifted with a second life to teach others about the souls' journey and to free them from making the wrong choice. This reflects Neo's choices throughout the film, but more accurately his choice of how he wishes to be reincarnated after his death at the hands of Agent Smith. He can either die and end his suffering or choose to become the "One" even though this is by far the more difficult path. Like the souls in Er's vision, those who suffered or had been punished often chose the better life.

Another connection between the *Matrix* and *The Tale of Er* are the waters of Lethe, one of the rivers that runs through the underworld, named after the goddess of forgetfulness.*** Like its namesake, the souls that drink from the waters forget their past lives and the afterlife. How much they forget, depends entirely on how 'deeply' they drink. In Plato's tale, the souls are instructed to drink, apart from Er who is warned about the waters. When Neo awakens from the Matrix, he is lying in a pod of goo, asleep. This goo may symbolise the waters of the underworld that flowed around the cave of Hypnos (another connection to the God Morpheus, with Hypnos ['Sleep'] being his father). Not only did these waters cause forgetfulness, but in Plato's Republic it also caused the souls to fall into a deep slumber.

Plato's Allegory of the Cave:

Plato's Allegory of the Cave, also in the *Republic* (1997, 7.514ff), tells

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of three prisoners who are bound to a wall in a dark cave. Their only concept of 'reality' are the shadows cast on law wall of people carrying all sorts of oddities (ibid, 7.514b). These shadows are cast by a fire that glows in the cave. One day one of the prisoners is freed and he makes his way to the surface of the cave, almost blinded by the light of the sun. He enters a world he has never seen, and he is awed by his experiences, believing it more superior than the cave. He wants nothing more than to share his newfound 'enlightenment' with the prisoners in the cave. On his return to the prisoners in the cave, he is blinded by the darkness, having seen the light. As he is now blinded by the only 'life' the prisoners have ever known he is unable to convince them to leave the cave, and may even attempt to kill those that tried to set them free (ibid, 7.517a). Echoes between the Allegory and the concept of the Matrix have been noted by several authors (Irwin 2002; Yeffeth 2003).

The Prisoners in the cave: Like the prisoners who are chained to a wall in the cave. Those trapped within the Matrix are bound to the machine by chainlike tubes. We get a few minutes look at the battery farm after Neo takes the red-pill and awakens in his pod. What is more, like the prisoners in the cave, those trapped in the Matrix are unaware of the world 'beyond' the virtual and trapped not only by the machines, but their own consciousness.

The shadows on the wall: We know from Morpheus and Agent Smith that the Matrix's primary function is to simulate reality. It is meant to make the prisoner feel as though they are living in the 'real world'. We are even told by Agent Smith that there have been multiple versions of the Matrix, one of which was the perfect world. As well as being comparable to *nirvana* this also suggests the fields of Elysium of classical mythology. That said, Agent Smith reminds us that humans could not cope with the 'perfect' world, so it had to be rebuilt.

The freed prisoner: While the freed prisoner bears comparison to the character Neo, there is a fit too with Morpheus, who appears to free Trinity, Neo, and Cypher from the Matrix. In the sequel *Matrix: Reloaded*, we get a sense that he has freed many other people as well, as he is renowned as well as infamous in Zion. It must be noted that *The Matrix* demonstrates what may happen if the prisoners who were left in the cave were freed. As stated above, one of the scenarios that Plato hypothesised, that when returning to the prisoners in the cave, the freed prisoner may be attacked or perhaps even killed. We see this scenario play out in Cypher's relationship with Morpheus. Cypher is

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tired of his life outside The Matrix and he feels that Morpheus's dream is more of a nightmare. All he wants is to return to the Matrix and forget everything he has seen in the 'real' world, so he makes a deal with Agent Smith that if he hands Morpheus over to them, he will be returned to The Matrix. Thus he betrays Morpheus and the rest of the crew of the Morpheus's hovercraft the Nebuchadnezzar.

A number of these themes will be returned to in the entries on *The Matrix: Reloaded* and *The Matrix: Revolutions*.

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* Culpepper, Andy, *Myth meets Internet in 'Matrix' Keanu and company take English teachers on a wild ride* at cnn.com (accessed: September 16, 2022).

** Gustafson, Rod, *The Matrix Parent Guide. Parent Movie Review*, at parentpreviews.com (accessed: September 16, 2022).

*** On the forgetfulness instilled by Lethe, cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 11. 581—613 (accessed: September 16, 2022).

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Christianity Delphic Oracle Lethe (River) Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Morpheus Plato Underworld
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Conflict Emotions Freedom Gaining understanding Humanity Learning Philosophy Prediction/prophecy Reincarnation Utopia and dystopia War
Further Reading	Culpepper, Andy, *Myth meetings Internet in 'Matrix'* , at cnn.com (accessed: September 16, 2022). Gustafson, Rod, *Parents Previews of the Matrix*, at parentpreviews.com (accessed: September 16, 2022).

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Irwin, William, *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real (Popular Culture and Philosophy)*, Chicago: Open Court, 2002.

IMDb, *The Matrix* (accessed: September 16, 2022).

The Matrix Wiki, at matrix.fandom.com (accessed: September 16, 2022).

Yeffeth, Glenn, *Take the Red Pill: Science, Philosophy and Religion in the Matrix*, Smart Pop, 2003.

Addenda

Please note that this is entry one of three. An analysis of other characters, like Neo, will be written up in future entries.

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