

“MAXSON IS GIDDY” MODEL:

There Is No Spoon: Poststructural Analysis of *The Matrix*

“What is real? How do you define 'real'? *The Matrix*, released in 1999, offers an alternative response to this age old question and alludes to several key elements of poststructural theory, despite following a relatively linear plotline. Emerging predominantly in the 1960s and 1970s in response to structuralism, poststructuralism challenges the status quo and the factors we, as a society assume to be givens. Amidst Keanu Reeves' iconic fight scenes, Wachowskis' film focuses on questioning reality and many critical elements of the world as we know it.

In movie, the remnants of Earth are controlled by machines, and humans are held hostage, bred in capsules and liquefied after death. The machines use humans as a source energy, and the only life know to the billions is “the matrix,” a programed dream world in which everyone lives completely oblivious. After a seemingly hopeless search for answers, the film's protagonist, Neo, is given the opportunity to see the world for what is really is. His friend and mentor Morpheus eventually reveals “The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now, in this very room.” While the concept of existing within an intricately designed computer program seems far fetched to many, this story was the first of many science fiction texts to break past societal preconceptions of reality.

Proceeding with the assumption that everyone is living within the Matrix, the Wachowskis' have the opportunity to further explore the power dynamics of order and chaos, as well as the the infinite possibilities that are created when there laws are disregarded. In a training program meant to simulate the Matrix, Morphous urges Neo to challenge the rules of the physical world and free his mind. From mastering martial arts to jumping off skyscrapers, he illustrates how anything is possible. Yet, while Neo and his allies push past the bounds of physics and explore the unknown, the Agents in the film remain fixated on maintaining order. They are virtually indestructible, and control the Matrix, ensuring that the humans remain helpless and incapable of exercising free will. Louis Althusser hypothesizes in his

theory of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatus, those who hold the most power are reluctant to forfeit any of it. This can be seen in *The Matrix* as the Agents are terrified to see even a small number of human thinking beyond their binary system of control and acting for themselves

Aside From the primary plot line, the film contains several other subtle references to challenging the status quo, contributing to the poststructural nature of this text. For example, the leading female character, Trinity is portrayed a s mentor to Neo, and is clearly more experienced in navigating the “real” world. Especially for the time period, this was far from a conventional portrayal of women. When Neo is shot by agents when he is in the Matrix, and is presumed to be dead, he is essentially brought back to life when his love interest kisses him. This reversal of the sleeping beauty stereotype challenges traditional gender roles. In addition to this, the movie challenges societal preconceptions in the portrayal of the Oracle as an old black woman. Not unlike the wise women described in Toni Morrison's Nobel prize acceptance speech “When Language Dies” only six year earlier, the mysterious oracle possesses a rare and prophetic power, and is regarded with the utmost respect despite the historic oppression of women of color.

While *The Matrix* still follow a linear plot line from beginning to end, and the movie is clearly still a white savior narrative, the Wachowskis' film can still be seen as a poststructural piece. It reverses stereotypical gender roles, gives power to the oppressed, and most of all, calls the audience to question the reality we live in. This iconic film was undeniably one the first to emphasise the importance of poststructural “world without rules and controls, without borders or boundaries; a world where anything is possible.”