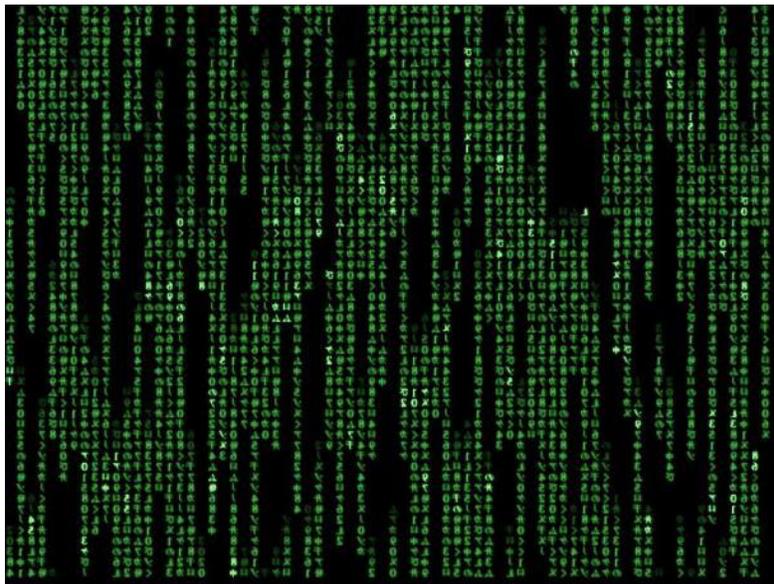# Broadcast System Failure

Assimilation in *Simulacra and Simulation* and *The Matrix*

By

Vaughn Whitney Garland

Media Art and Text

Dr. Marcel Cornis-Pope

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The appearance of the 1999 action packed Warner Brother movie *The Matrix* directed by and written by brothers Andy and Larry Wachowski delivered Jean's Baudrillard philosophy of *Simulacra and Simulations* to the masses on a large scale. *The Matrix* tested Baudrillard's theory of reality in a media where reality is generally removed and multiple forces of fantasy media meet with cultural fears.

Much of the world was watching intently for the announcement on the news describing the end of what then seemed normal life. The end of the 20th century brought new fears concerning the importance and presence of a new age coded in 1's and 0's. The computer age was then still mysterious to a mass audience that truly did not understand the potential threat to the global computer network. In 1999 the world sat in front of the TV waiting to see if everything would fall apart because of a technological phenomenon- a glitch known as Y2K. The full force of *The Matrix* revealed a deep unanswered concern regarding the nature of reality. Here in the wonderful world of magical wires that transported strange new abstractions of reality into private homes, Baudrillard's theory of challenging reality worked perfectly. Here, the masses were exposed to and experienced a new type of hysteria. The assimilation of this world with our own was as tantalizing as it was radical. Within this assimilation, one could become anything and have the answer to any question with the press of a finger. *The Matrix*, with its tip of the hat to Baudrillard, not only gave a new signpost to the question of reality, it allowed our minds to run wild without a signifier, which is the true genius of Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*. With *The Matrix,* Baudrillard had his ideas broadcast through the perfect backdrop and the perfect stage. Yet, as I will discuss, the

problem with both movie and philosophy is not the radical viewpoint expressed by Baudrillard, but the absence of the reason behind the cause. Baudrillard disregarded the importance of where the red and blue pills come from and what they do, the information revealing the assimilation. Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* constructed a rigid disparity between what is considered "Real" and what is considered a copy or a simulation of the original. The problem with Baudrillard's argument, as it is in *The Matrix*, is that to deconstruct freely the philosophical environment, one must evaluate how and where the journey begins. One must consider the reasons why Alice found herself tumbling down the rabbit hole.

In Baudrillard's 1998 *Simulacra and Simulation* a new set of rules to which we can evaluate definition is defined to such as extent that even the defining is destroyed along with the signifier. Yet, where does one begin defining? Baudrillard's models must be viewed through singular windows in order for a full analysis of understanding. One might have an easier time trying to find a recipe for chicken jerk sauce if they were looking at a map of Minnesota. Baudrillard's absence concerning the assimilation of information under the microscope needs to be included, for it will allow an acknowledgment of the space between the simulation and the feign. Yet, to include such a space would destroy Baudrillard's argument. For it may be that the participant finds themselves freely in both worlds, playing both roles interchangeable.

In *The Matrix,* the "One" who is to free all of the human slaves is the main protagonist Neo, a computer savvy loner. Neo, played by Keanu Reeves, must penetrate the Matrix computer program in order to disconnect and even destroy the chains around its victims' minds. But in order for Neo or succeed, he must first give up his life in the

Matrix and remove his own connection between two worlds, the psychoanalytical and the physical. An interesting aspect that the Wachowski brothers incorporated into the plot of the movie is the realization that Neo is not real in either world. He is a computer-generated icon in the Matrix, who has changed his name and persona in the real world. He is without history, family connections, past experiences, and so on. Neo bounces back and forth between what his mind suggests and what his body comprehends, the present day figure of Plato's Cave. Therefore, in both *The Matrix* and Plato's Cave the one chosen individual is given a responsibility to save the world from a life of darkness, of puppets, and misunderstanding. That "Chosen One" is the god-like figure that assimilates multiple awarenesses depending upon the situation. The "One" has the power of translate multiple levels of reality, yet still exists as a whole figure. In Baudrillard's case, this "One" could not be fully manifested, because the figure would have to be isolated in either world at one moment. This is a glitch in Baudrillard's theory. The "chosen one" must separate from the whole as to be able to understand that there is no whole- "there is no spoon" (The Matrix). For Neo, this decision leads him between two worlds, each connected through a tight web of overlapping definitions. Here in the matrix the "One" is neither part of this world or absent from this world , as it was with the chosen in Plato's Cave. The "One," in this case, is simply Baudrillard's simulacra. Neo is neither whole of parts, he is neither man nor computer. Neo stands between the worlds of two yet absent from both, "not defined exclusively by his "real" qualities…His exceptional role was rather that of transference. He occupied a place constructed (presupposed) by the others." (Irwin p.256)

Baudrillard begins this article by discussing the difference between the map and the place the map describes, which for him is related to imperialism and the need to chart new lands in order to own them. We clearly see the comparison in *The Matrix* where the audience is thrust into the plot of two major forces- the human and the computer, or, the original and the copy. In this situation the individual is being used as a supply mechanism to the existence to the originator, the computer. The human is the reason for the ongoing workings of the computer and in fact the lifeblood of the computer's thrust. The argument is opposite in nature and shows that, in this reality, the original is that of the computer industry against the copy, the helpless battery. In dialog with Baudrillard's philosophy, we find that the two forces are reversed where the map has become interchangeable to the originator's hand and becomes a sign of truth. The map is the source of information and the originator can only play to the whims of the map.   It is this mixture that has caused the problem for the protagonist, Neo, and his band of revolutionaries in *The Matrix*. Neo must face his realization that what he considers original is no more than an already set parameter of pseudo-definition. Yet, in the computer environment the human is "plugged in" to the grid of the Matrix. Furthermore, to gain access to this environment one must be constantly "plugged in." Here we see Neo leave his newly gained reality in the real world to enter the matrix through 1's and 0's. Neo must assimilate the change in order to cross between rooms, computer and real, which suggests restlessness within Baudrillard's theory of originator. It is Neo who must decide where and what he wants to play, fantasy or reality. At the end of the movie the protagonists address what seems to be the computer system by calling into it from a payphone inside the system. He is doubly assimilated by the fact that to reach his goal he

must continue to channel through the set doorways given by the time. The fact remains

that Neo and the like are still slaves that need definition from the system,

> The problem here is that all these 'miracles' are possible only if we remain *within* the VR (virtual reality) sustained by *The Matrix* and merely bend or change its rules: our 'real' status is still that of the slaves of *The Matrix*, we as it were are merely gaining additional power to change our mental prison rules—so what about exiting from *The Matrix* altogether and entering the 'real reality' in which we are miserable creatures living on the destroyed earth surface…in an Adornian way, once should claim that theses inconsistencies are the film's moment of truth. (Irwin p 263)

Along with his peers on the Nebuchadnezzar, Neo realizes that the physicality of

what happens in the matrix resides in the mind and is thus translated in physical form in

the real world- if he gets hurt in the copy, his mind mimics the pain in the real world.

The analogy is a mirror discussion to Baudrillard's statement on Psychoanalysis. In

Simulacra and Simulation, Baudrillard proposes that the mind is the final connection

between the original and the copy and is thus the force for which determinate connections

are made,.

> "As for psychoanalysis, it transfers the symptom for the organic to the unconscious order: once again, the latter is held to be real, more real than the former; but why should simulation stop at the portals of the unconscious? Why couldn't the 'work' of the unconscious be 'produced' in the same way as any other symptom in classical medicine? Dreams already are." (Baudrillard p 2)

Not only does Neo face the idea that the mind is connected to the body, but in order to

achieve his destiny as the "One," he must sever the connection. Neo must be able to

separate between the copy and the original and do so in a way that enables a release of

presence for the situation. Even if Neo overcomes his own psychoanalysis he does so by

still connecting to the moment. He has the freedom to choose, as Baudrillard suggests by

classifying two main occurrences- dissimulation or simulation.   For Baudrillard the two

are rather tied together but in such a way as to become opposing forces, you either are or you are not, "someone who simulated an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms"…while…"To dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has." (Baudrillard p.2) For Neo to remove himself from this overlapping polarity he must be able to reside between the two and to justify the presence of both at any given moment; "that the images concealed nothing at all, and that in fact they were not images, such as the original model would have made them, butt actually perfect simulacra." (Baudrillard p.2)

Throughout Neo's transference from computer geek locked in the original structure, the Matrix, to human being, freed from a computer simulation, we find *The Matrix* riddled with Baudrillardian principles. Neo is conflicted by what he knows and what he assumes to know, as Baudrillard alludes to in *Simulacra and Simulation*. We, as viewer, to both are removed to a world behind the curtain, realizing that the great wizard is nothing more than a man pulling the strings. But the problem with Baudrillard's viewpoint is that in any case we have a specific door we must walk through in order to understand the situation at hand. For Neo his assimilation was his decision to take the red pill, to remove self from the Matrix. Furthermore, he continued to jump into the mainframe-launching program that geared up for loading into the Matrix. The assimilation between the two worlds is the moment that they overlap, the moment when one moves through the door, as Alice did when she chose to follow the white rabbit down the rabbit hole.

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