

# **Subjectivity** **and** **Social Resistance:**

## **A Theoretical Analysis of *the Matrix Trilogy***

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### **Abstract:**

*The Matrix* (1999) is a science-fiction film that successfully bridges modern cinematic action sequences with philosophical parables. It recalls the tradition of philosophical elaboration through science-fiction narratives; a tradition that has existed since the time of Plato.

This study aims to bridge the divide between philosophy and psychology by using a theoretical analysis to discuss and explore the ideas of social thinkers (featured in *the Matrix Trilogy*) and critically analyse them alongside established psychological theories. More specifically, this study provides an in-depth and critical exploration of the ways in which the philosophical works of Jean Baudrillard and Karl Marx, and the widely used and recognised psychological perspectives on human development, cognition and learning offered by both Urie Broffebrenner and Jean Piaget to simultaneously elucidate a model of human subjectivity and development in today's techno-consumerist society with specific attention to critical resistance.

This study suggests that with the rise of the internet and modern communication media; sociocultural and political issues that Broffebrenner conceptualised as existing in the macrosystem, now have a presence in the microsystem, and correspond to Broffebrenner's requirements as to what constitutes a *proximal process*. These processes, according to Broffebrenner, have the most long-standing effects on our development and contribute the most to our personality.

This study also argues that the pre-operational stage and the process of symbolisation both of which Piaget identified are important phases in the child's life that see the accrual and development of signs and discourses. These signs and discourses then contribute to the development of our mind's cognitive structures which Piaget called *schema*. These structures are developed as we grow and help us make sense of the world by processing information and organising our experiences. This would mean that we perceive and interpret our world through ideologically shaped mental structures.

These findings stress the importance of ideological influences and their impact on development and hearken more closely towards ideas about the presence and the effects of ideology by thinkers like Plato and Marx, as well as the dystopian futures explored in science-fiction media like *the Matrix Trilogy*, George Orwell's *1984* (1948) and Aldous Huxley's *A Brave New World* (1932), and also the options for critical social resistance explored in the narratives and heroic deeds of these books and their characters.

## Contents

<b><u>Part One: Science-Fiction and Philosophy</u></b>	1
1. Science-Fiction Philosophy and <i>the Matrix Trilogy</i>	2
2. A Prison for your Mind – Ideology, Alienation and <i>the Matrix Trilogy</i>	12
3. Social Constructionism and <i>the Matrix Trilogy</i>	29
4. Plato's Cave and Baudrillard's Desert	41
 <b><u>Part Two: The Psychological Perspectives</u></b>	53
5. Broffenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory	55
6. Piaget – Learning and Cognition	67
 <b><u>Part Three: Social Resistance</u></b>	79
7. The Superman and the Experience Machine	80
8. Agency, Consciousness-raising and the Red Pill	91
 9. Conclusion	114
 10. Reference List	

**Part One:**  
**Science-Fiction**  
**and**  
**Philosophy**

## Chapter 1: Science-Fiction, Philosophy and *the Matrix Trilogy*

### 1.1 The Relationship between Science-Fiction and Philosophy

In 1999, the Wachowski siblings thrilled film-critics and audiences around the world with an action-packed spectacle called *The Matrix*. The film, only the second to be released by the duo, succeeded not only at the box-office, but in academic circles too. It captured the attention of many different types of people within the audience; from professors, philosophers and social-thinkers, to housewives and students. *The Matrix* was followed by two sequels in 2001, *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions* which both continued the trend detected in the first film: using social theory and ideas within an action-packed Hollywood blockbuster. Being a Hollywood blockbuster, the question must be asked whether *the Matrix Trilogy* can be used philosophically; especially given that it played up to the traditions expected of such films (A-list star power, unadulterated action scenes). In this regard, *The Matrix* films have also achieved a rank among another legacy of cultural fiction: the legacy and tradition of philosophy through science fiction. Using science fiction to convey philosophical parables is a long-standing literary tradition (Rabkin, 2007). Upon examination, many classical tales can be interpreted as philosophical ones which use science-fiction as a vehicle to convey social critique and allegories. *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), *Frankenstein* (1886), *Brave New World* (1932), *1984* (1948), *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), *The Tempest* (1611)– are all examples of classical fantastical literary pieces that can be considered philosophical. The question must also be asked about this study and its intentions. This study aims to be more than an examination of the themes and ideas of *the Matrix Trilogy*; rather the primary aim is to use theories of human development and cognition from within the field of psychology to elucidate a model of subjectivity in late-industrial society and explore the options of critical resistance. Also, the study sets out to present the social and political significance of pieces of science-fiction like *the Matrix Trilogy*.

**“I define science-fiction as the fantastic genre that is most important today; it is the one that claims plausibility against the background of science.”**

(Rabkin, 2007, p. 3).

Many important philosophical works exist in the field of science-fiction. Plato's utopian work, *The Republic*, is one of the earliest examples of this genre; his tale of the Ring of Gyges (a ring which turns the wearer invisible) is a model for understanding how meaning and morality is constructed socially; his Allegory of the Cave - featuring a group of prisoners shackled in a cave from

birth - is a powerful model for understanding the dynamics of ideology, ignorance and enlightenment. "Plato considered how the application of intellect can change the conditions of human life, and how those changed conditions will affect people. Thus he was a proto-science fiction writer." (Rabkin, 2007, p. 4). Plato's *Republic* served as a critique of the society of his time, yet its allegories can be applied throughout history and to society today. The literary tradition that followed from *The Republic* would serve as pieces of social critique aimed at the social and political issues of the age that they were written in. Thus, *The Republic* can be seen as one of the earliest works of political science-fiction; specifically, the branch of utopian science-fiction (Rabkin, 2007). If science-fiction is the branch of the fantastic claiming plausibility against the background of science, then works of utopian fiction are the branch of science-fiction claiming plausibility against the background of political science (Rabkin, 2007, p. 19). Plato's *Republic*, Thomas Moore's *Utopia* (1516), and Francis Bacon's *the New Atlantis* (1627) are examples of early utopian science-fiction works. The word 'utopia' itself was coined by Thomas Moore for the title of his book, *Utopia*, and the island setting featured therein. The etymology of the word is a pun on the Greek words *eu-topos* (good place) and *ou-topos* (no place), which sound similar in English (Rabkin, 2007, p. 19). *Dystopia* is the Greek for 'bad place' which has come to be used in the literary tradition to describe systematically stable, horrifying societies generally featuring some form of subjugation of the many for the benefit of the few (Rabkin, 2007). Utopian works set in the post-industrial world often feature the metaphorical theme of technology, no longer the slave of humankind, but rather as the master. These post-industrial settings feature economies increasingly based on human beings as machines, this suggests that, "*utopian fiction has become largely dystopian*" (Rabkin, 2007, p. 20).

With the industrial revolution and the rise of technology, Mary Shelley's masterpiece, *Frankenstein* (1818), echoed the same sense of social critique that *The Republic* did. It was during this time that science had established itself as a dominant cultural form. Shelley recognized the importance of framing technology and science as social and political issues, a fact which is often ignored today. *Frankenstein* was a more explicit form of science-fiction than *The Republic* as it involved actual science and technology as the subject of its critique. The tale of Frankenstein's monster is an exploration of the relationship between technology, society and the individual (Rabkin, 2007). Frankenstein's monster represents the perversion of the natural by the technocratic and self-serving search for knowledge. Written in 1818, a time when science was coming to the fore of social consciousness, the tale of Frankenstein's monster shows us the scientist withdrawn from community as a danger (Rabkin, 2007). The monster symbolically represents the fears and consequences of

technology and science emancipated from the dominion of humankind and the needs of humankind; thus the tale of Frankenstein's monster forms one of the most important modern myths in today's technologically advanced society. It is not a tale of the dangers of science and technology, but rather a cautionary tale against technology in the control of an egotist who's ambitions are isolated from the collective needs and the restraining wisdom of the community (Rabkin, 2007, p. 9).

The end of World War II and the beginning of the 'Cold War' period brought on new social issues as the world was divided along Capitalist democratic ideals, and the Communist ideas of the Soviet regime. The 'Cold War' was named such because it was defined more by political and military tension rather than actual full-scale war. During that period, both sides campaigned against each other through a number of smaller wars fought predominantly on the boundaries of allied territories; but also through systems of propaganda, and technological achievements like the 'Space Race'. The United States created a picture of itself that was built around its ideals of democracy and freedom, popularized as the 'American Dream'. It was a vision of a world made better by Capitalism and the free market. The Soviet Union on the other hand was depicted in terms of totalitarian control under a single regime.

Aldous Huxley put forth a critique of American culture in his book *Brave New World* (1932), specifically aimed at consumerism, which Huxley envisioned as a tool of control used by a totalitarian government to keep its populace passive. In Huxley's book, consumption is encouraged by the state to degrees of absolute boundlessness. Things that are old are destroyed, because people only want to buy things that are new. Consumption (along with other aspects of culture that benefits the state) is taught and encouraged through a pseudo-psychological process called *Hypnopaedia* during infancy. The use of a drug called *Soma* is enforced by the state. *Soma* induces states of absolute bliss without any negative side-effects to physical or mental well-being. It is dispensed by the state and people who do not use are stigmatized. This drug is taken regularly by all, but stronger usage generally occurs at the onset of any distressing feelings; the feelings disappear and a state of bliss is ushered in. The negative consequence of the drug is therefore an inability to experience unhappiness, no capacity to deal with distressing feelings. *Hypnopaedia* enforces the social structure through learning rather than force. *Soma* abolishes the unpleasantness of the system that may be 'discovered'. Sexual promiscuity (at the level and manner in which it is present in the novel) reduces the reasons for unhappiness and removes the tensions between people. Huxley's book also seemed to predict significant world events over the next decade; World War II and the dropping of the atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. More importantly, Huxley's vision predicted the trajectory that boundless

consumerism would follow for the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Following World War II and the dropping of the atomic bombs, during the early years of the Cold War, George Orwell's *1984* (1948) emerged as a critique to the directly repressive form of the totalitarian system of control; one where might and power ruled instead of consumer ideals designed to pacify and placate the masses. *1984* served as critiques of Benito Mussolini's fascist government, and Joseph Stalin's Communist totalitarian regime; with specific parallels such as Ingsoc's 3 year plan and Stalin's 5 year plan, and the Ministry of Love and the thought-police with the KGB. However, Orwell's vision can apply to aspects of Western culture as well. Its key ideas about 'big brother' who was watching you is even more relevant today in the light of current revelations regarding global monitoring of electronic communications, and the manipulation of language by the government to keep the populace passive remains an important idea relevant in today's society in the fields of corporate communications and spin-doctoring. It also features ideas central to structuralism and social constructionism, as the repression of language used by *The Party* is designed to constrain thought and ideas within the populace, thus making them easier to control. For many years, Orwell's vision had seemed to trump Huxley's as a more accurate and complete critique of totalitarianism; however as time passed, and scientific efforts shifted from things like reaching space towards achieving and maintaining control through developing consumer technology and products and perfecting the advertising methods to encourage consumption, Huxley's vision seemed to ring true once more. Both *Brave New World* and *1984* are fantastic exercises in political science fiction which follow in the same tradition as Plato's *The Republic*. However, they are both dystopian science-fiction works.

In the mid 1980's, a new wave of dystopian science fiction stories arrived – known as *the Cyberpunk Movement*; this genre would go beyond the post-industrial settings of the previous utopian tradition to reflect the state of our modern information age. Cyberpunk literature generally features social systems marked by extreme technological enhancements, an oppressive government or tyrannical corporation, and a group of people living rebelliously within the social system and are looking to overthrow the government or corporation and gain their freedom and the freedom of their community. The 'cyber-' aspect is derived from the blurring of the distinction between human being and machine which is usually a common feature of cyberpunk scenarios; human beings with technological enhancements installed into their bodies by the government or controlling corporation to ensure their control over society and the maintenance and continuation of their doctrines. The '-punk' aspect is derived from the marginalized groups in the social system who seek to disrupt the status quo and overthrow the ruling government or corporation (Schneider, 2004).



The 'Cyberpunk' movement is epitomized by William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), which exists today as one of the first critiques of the information age – and is also our source for the term 'matrix'. Today, Cyberpunk is considered to be a postmodern science-fiction genre reflecting the dark future-journey of humankind and technology. Cyberpunk plots often feature hackers, artificial intelligences, and corporations. Hackers are able to use technology for different purposes than intended by the creator. Artificial intelligences represent the *Frankenstein* tendency of going beyond the control of the creator. The corporations represent the greed, profiteering, powerful yet power hungry forces in society – Dr Frankenstein. Cyberpunk narratives are usually set in the relatively close future. Post-'techno-capitalist' dystopias overrun with social and cultural decay are often the chosen setting of these narratives. *The Matrix Trilogy* similarly features a fictional **dystopian** future-society in the same tradition of The Cyberpunk Movement, *Frankenstein* and others before it.

*The Matrix Trilogy* encompasses many of the traditions of the science fiction genre. It represents philosophical science-fiction in its most evolved form. It does not simply exist as a work of dystopian Cyberpunk, but features ideas from diverse philosophical traditions.

## **1.2 Philosophy at the Movies**

All the previously discussed science-fiction philosophical works have existed in the field of **literature**. Literary devices are among the most essential tools of the education system. Also, classical works of literature have been featured as set books in almost every secular programme around the globe. *The Matrix Trilogy* is not literature, however; it is **cinema**. This raises the question about whether movies – which have a culturally established position as pieces of pure entertainment – can be philosophical. It is also necessary to make a distinction between movies aimed directly at education; for example National Geographic's multitude of documentaries covering various topics from history, religion and natural sciences; and blockbuster Hollywood films created for purely entertainment purposes. *The Matrix Trilogy* belongs to the latter.

Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) is not only credited as being the first feature length science-fiction film, but also as establishing the new medium of cinema as one that can be creative and explore issues that typically existed in literature. The author of a book had more creative freedom as film was limited to what the director can create visually. The special effects budget for *Metropolis* makes it one of the most expensive European films to date. Lang used *Metropolis* in the same tradition discussed earlier, as a means of symbolic criticism aimed at society and the social issues it was dealing with at the time. Specifically, to critique post-World War I Germany, a country marked by poverty,

class struggle, emergent Capitalism and anxieties about its future. *Metropolis* exposed Capitalism by showing the suffering of the worker and juxtaposing it with the luxurious lives of the elite.

In today's age, film is the most wide reaching and most publicized art form. It is embraced by people of all heritages and backgrounds. It is a cultural form that cannot be ignored by anyone; even those who shy away from cinemas are aware of the popular releases, and long after a film is removed from the circuit it is broadcast on television networks around the world. Citing these facts about film, it is clear to see why today film is a potentially effective albeit expensive tool to communicate a philosophical message; *The Matrix Trilogy* clearly excels at this. It plays up to the Hollywood action blockbuster stereotypes which allows it to be embraced by a large audience; absent these stereotypical elements the philosophical content alone would not land it in prime position to convey its message, nor would the majority of moviegoers choose to watch it. The popular *Terminator* movie franchise is another example of an action-packed blockbuster starring Austrian bodybuilding icon Arnold Schwarzenegger and loaded with combustible special effects, fulfilling the stereotypical elements of an action blockbuster, yet communicating an important dystopian cyberpunk perspective on our relationship with technology and Artificial Intelligence. The Artificial Intelligence in the *Terminator* films are modern versions of Frankenstein's monster. Pop-culture in this sense can also be seen as a vehicle for the delivery of these perspectives and philosophies, as "it is the common language of our time" (Irwin, Garcia, 2007, p. 55). Ridley Scott's *Bladerunner* (1982), Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1963) and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), and Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) are examples of films designed to entertain viewers while simultaneously trying to popularize philosophical issues and social critique.

### **1.3 Philosophical Elements working through Film**

A central element to the exploration of any philosophical idea is the concept of a '**thought experiment**'; which generally features a narrative. Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* is one such example; a tale is narrated by Socrates to Glaucon in which he describes the situation of the cave dwellers and the experience and enlightenment process of the freed prisoner. It is possible then for films to claim a share in this narrative practice of philosophy, which has generally belonged to literary forms of philosophical inspection. Thus, films like *The Matrix* can also be capable of philosophical reflection as their narratives feature thought experiments. However, film combines the narrative element with visual elements that belong to art forms like sculptures and paintings – this visual element is something that traditionally, philosophy itself does not agree with. It does not typically lend itself to

successful interpretations through art forms such as cinema.

**“Within philosophy there is a degree of prejudice against the visual image”**

(Falzon, 2002, p. 3).

Philosophers have often referred to the use of visual images as suggestive of a more archaic or simple form of thought, distinctly separate from the world of abstract theoretical forms of thinking and conception. The use of visual images is seen as only fitting for those who do not have the capacity for more sophisticated means of thinking and articulation. Images are immediate while philosophical thought is more abstract. However, the heritage of thought-experiments in philosophy may contradict this notion. Thought-experiments provide us with a **vision** through which a philosophical idea is explored. A brief survey of the heritage of imagery used in philosophical literature reveals:

*A ring that confers invisibility (Plato's Ring of Gyges), a ship that is transformed piece by piece into two distinct vessels (the ship of Theseus), a donkey starving to death between two equal bales of hay (Buridan's ass), numerous visions of a perfect, utopian society, harrowing visions of life without authority of any kind, an evil demon that causes people to go wrong even in what they think is most obvious (Descartes' maleficent demon or the evil deceiver), a melting piece of wax (Descartes' wax argument), a missing shade of blue (David Hume), a statue that smells roses (Étienne Bonnot de Condillac), an island of idle South Sea islanders, a brain in a vat whose experiences are generated by a mad scientist, an 'experience machine' in which all desires will seem to be satisfied (Robert Nozick), a society in which people are chosen by lottery to be killed for their organs; the list goes on and on.*

(Falzon, 2002, p. 4).

Therefore the visual elements of film combined with the narrative elements of the thought-experiment can come together to form a more powerful synthesis for philosophical inspection.

*Although Descartes' written text could convince us that all of our perceptual beliefs were mistaken and even provide us with a thought experiment to render this possibility more immediate, these attempts pale in the face of a film – The*

*Matrix – that succeeds in presenting us with perceptual experiences that are deceptive even if they are about a fictional world.*

(Wartenberg, 2007, p. 137).

Film has the ability to be immediate in a way that literary texts cannot. This immediacy has become important in today's culture of instant gratification and can also be an explanation for the decline of the popularity of literary works versus visual ones, especially among the youth of today. It is not necessary to assume that this argument for film's potential for philosophical inspection implies that literary works should not be the primary educational tool; reading remains the primary tool for the development of the capacity to think for oneself and to be able to think critically – which is one of the founding principals of philosophical thought. This argument is only to assert that film can be used for much more than purely entertainment and can popularize philosophical ideas through its position in popular culture. Many people regard philosophy as an esoteric branch of knowledge practiced by a certain 'intellectual elite' who are distant from contemporary popular culture. This distancing between philosophical ideas and the ideas central to popular culture must be bridged; using tools from popular culture itself as a vehicle to drive philosophical ideas to the fore can be a central means to help explore the many social problems that are impacting on the world.

*The promise of critical reflection is that it leads to a more fulfilling life and a more rational society. But this will only come about, not when philosophers are kings (reference to Plato's idea of the Philosopher-King), but when ordinary people are philosophers*  
(Wartenberg, 2007, p. 141).

If film can achieve more recognition and appreciation for its ability to convey philosophical discourse, then philosophy itself can be absorbed and practiced by a wider audience, gaining greater social relevance in today's society.

#### **1.4 Chronicling Dystopia: Hard and Soft**

Over the years, a pattern can be read in the development of the dystopian fiction genre; these works seemingly emerge within two distinct but related sub-genres. For this study we will refer to them as Hard and Soft dystopias. A Hard Dystopia is defined as a totalitarian police-state as in Orwell's *1984*; where force and brutality are used to maintain order and regulate the particular social structures and systems of that particular society. Soft Dystopias however, are less totalitarian in terms of violence

and brutality, and use ideological means to ensure the social order and maintain the status quo. Soft Dystopias focus more on the dehumanizing effects of consumer culture and the excess that comes with it. These dystopias are characterized by populaces who ‘love’ their enslavement. Soft Dystopias have become more famous over the last few decades. This is not to say that there weren’t famous soft dystopias earlier on, however their messages have come to hold more strongly over the last few decades.

*1984* was a masterpiece of metaphoric sociopolitical writing; it introduced the concepts of *newspeak*, *thoughtcrime*, and *doublethink*. *Newspeak* is a fictional language from the world of 1984; it is a watered-down limited version of English which is controlled and manipulated by the state so that **freedom of thought may be constrained**. Thoughtcrime was the charge laid on those who attempted to think independently, who expressed individuality. These were monitored by the Thought Police. Double-think is the position of holding two contradictory beliefs, simultaneously accepting both as correct; this is often in different social contexts.

Huxley’s future-vision however, saw a seemingly harmonious future in which human-beings are manufactured. This manufacturing process designs each being to be particularly capable at the pre-determined tasks that the society ordains for them. Also, their social status and position is similarly pre-determined. Hypnopedia is a tool used during the manufacturing and ‘incubation’ periods of the infants being produced. As they sleep, lessons are told to them, and are constantly re-enforced. They are taught what is good, what is wrong and what is taboo – these are decided by the state. The idea is to create a populace who love their positions in society, even if their positions are lowly and their labour hard. Being manufactured, there are no longer ‘mothers’, ‘fathers’ and ‘families’. These terms are considered taboo, even smut. Two other State-enforced practices are sexual promiscuity and the use of the bliss-inducing drug called *Soma*. Sexual promiscuity is accepted, every being is the sexual property of everyone else; this abolishes the notion of marriage and love, as well as releasing the dangerous repressed desires of the population.

To characterize modern society today, one cannot go to either extreme; today’s society I believe is a hybrid of both Hard and Soft Dystopia. The Hard features ensure no ‘thoughtcrime’ goes unpunished. And the Soft features ensure the slave loves their bondage. We will refer to this as *Hybrid Dystopia*. It is important however to note that this is different from theories about Hard and Soft Science-Fiction; however the terms ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ have been adapted from there.

I believe that *The Matrix Trilogy* is an example of a Hybrid Dystopia. The power, brutality and control of the machines represent the Hard nature of their position over humankind; however, they have placed

human consciousness into an illusion reflecting the world of 1999, wherein human-beings believe themselves to be independent and autonomous and bear no knowledge about their imprisonment, making them willing-prisoners. This reflects the Soft Nature of their position over humankind. Thus I feel *The Matrix Trilogy* is one of the few science-fiction works that comes closer than most others in describing today's society using a Hybrid Dystopian vision.

**Chapter 2:**  
**A Prison for your Mind:**  
**Ideology, Alienation and *the Matrix Trilogy***

*The Matrix Trilogy* is a multi-layered nexus of social theories. In attempting to explore them, I will begin by developing an understanding of **ideology**, as most of the theories and ideas present in the films are critiques of ideology, mass consumer culture, alienation, and the nature of knowledge or ‘what we think we know’. Ideology will also be foundational in our attempt to explore other social theories and cultural criticisms so it is a necessary starting point.

**2.1 Ideology:**

Among the most prominent social theorists, Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) was one of the foremost critics of the Capitalist system and its use of ideology in manipulating the masses. Ideology refers to the complex relationship between ideas and society; between the mind and the socio-cultural environment that it is embedded in (Reiss, 1996). Marx sees ideas as being rooted in and growing from material reality; ideas affect society and society affects ideas. They interact: it is a two-way process, a dialectic. According to Marx, most ideologies present in society function to the benefit of the powerful groups in that society, they support and uphold an oppressive dynamic. Marx argues that, the ideas of the ruling class become the ruling ideas; the groups and individuals that constitute the ruling class of a society, control, manufacture and circulate the dominant ideas of their society (Reiss, 1996). The class which is the ruling *material* force in a society is at the same time, the ruling *intellectual* force (Marx & Engels, 1932, p. 64). The class which has the means of material production at its disposal simultaneously has the means of mental production at its disposal – thus those without the means of mental production are on the whole, subject to it (Marx & Engels, 1932).

Ideologies present themselves as both natural and eternal – thus those suffering under the yoke of an oppressive ideological dynamic are often accepting of their oppression and subjugation. It blinds the worker to the injustice of exploitation.

*The advance of capitalist production develops a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as self-evident, laws of nature.*

(Marx, 1867. p. 809.)

This quote can be read in the following extract taken from an important dialogue scene between two of

the trilogy's central characters: Neo, the key protagonist, and Morpheus, Neo's guide and mentor. This scene can be found towards the beginning of the first film. It is important as it establishes the true nature of the world for Neo and it also communicates the setting and dynamics of the film to the audience. Neo has been on a quest for answers after years of being distressed by the sense of alienation that pervades his life. He encounters Morpheus, the leader of a squadron of rebels that have unplugged themselves from the system. He reveals to Neo that the world he lives in is not what it seems, but rather an artificial simulation of reality designed by machines whose specific aim is to keep the human race passive so that they can harvest valuable energies from their bodies. Now humankind exists as imprisoned bodies encased in vats of fluid, but their minds are trapped in an interactive computer simulation - the Matrix programme.

***Morpheus:*** “*The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now, in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work... when you go to church... when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth.*”

***Neo:*** “*What truth?*”

***Morpheus:*** “*That you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage. Into a prison that you cannot taste or see or touch. A prison for your mind.*”

(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996)

Thus the Matrix Programme exists as a grand metaphor for ideology and ‘false consciousness’ in today’s society; a society characterized by oppression and exploitation. It is this wretched state of affairs that has inspired ‘awakenings’ in some, who recognize that something is very wrong in this world, something is at the cause of all this unhappiness. It is this acknowledgment that is vital to gaining critical leverage over ideology, society and mass culture. Critically engaging in a search for answers and understanding is the start on the journey of enlightenment and social resistance. This important awakening is acknowledged in another dialogue scene between Morpheus and Neo. This



scene precedes the previous one and is what leads to Neo agreeing to be unplugged from the Matrix programme by Morpheus.

***Morpheus:** “Let me tell you why you're here. You're here because you know something. \What you know you can't explain, but you feel it. You've felt it your entire life, that there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me. Do you know what I'm talking about?”*

(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996)

## **2.2 Alienation:**

**Alienation**, as conceptualised by Marx, can be understood as a theory of dehumanisation and unhappiness, and is one of the most widespread social conditions in today's world. Alienation can be understood as the feeling of being dehumanized, subjugated, oppressed, more eager to sell themselves as they choose between work and destitution. When human beings are forced to see themselves as less than human, when they are disempowered to empower their capitalist master, the product of their labour is taken away from them, and its subsequent sale results in furthering the master's dominion over the worker. The harder the worker labors, the greater the power that oppresses him/her grows - thus the worker's product confronts him/her as something *alien*, as a power separate and independent of the one who produced it. Borrowing the concept of '*geist*' (Spirit or Mind) from Hegel (1807), and transplanting it from philosophical to political discourse, Marx saw the ability to produce as a distinct human value; he considered it the '*geist*', the life-essence, the *spirit*, of a human-being. Thus when a worker becomes alienated from their product, they become alienated from their own Spirit; their own Spirit turns against them, confronting them as a monstrous power which serves to enslave them. Marx viewed the Capitalist system as an alienated form of human life (Singer, 1980). The human ability to work, to produce the means of its own survival, is what distinguishes human beings from other organisms. Submitting this ability to another for the sake of wages alienates humankind from their own essence, from the *geist* that makes them fundamentally different from all other forms of life (Singer, 1980). The true function of the Capitalist system is the master's 'profit' – not the worker's remuneration. This profit is of more importance than the worker; they become dehumanized, reduced to being cogs in a larger system. The more they produce, the more dehumanized

they become, the less value they have as they develop more and more profit for their master. Example, if the worker is paid R5 for an hour, and if he/she produces 10 items in that hour, and each item is sold for R20, then he/she makes R195 profit for their master whereas he/she is only paid R5. Now, if he/she produces 30 items in that hour, then he/she makes R595 profit for their master in relation to their earnings of R5 – thus, the more they produce, the ‘cheaper’ they become. Marx said that labour is something external to the worker. It is not something that comes to them naturally, it is something he/she is forced and coerced into. Labour in this sense can be seen as the forced selling of the worker’s natural human ability to produce. Given the choice, the worker would choose not to do this work.

According to Marx this state of affairs is not inevitable or natural; rather it is the result of historical processes (Reiss, 1996). These conditions are mirrored directly in *The Matrix Trilogy*.

Humankind has become the prisoners of the machines; kept in pods, they are harvested for their bio-electrical energies which are used to power the machine world. This uses a very direct dynamic in displaying the metaphor of humankind’s ‘life-essence’ being used against it.

Morpheus explains to Neo that humankind believed the machine’s source of power was the sun (solar), and that through nuclear technology, they would be able to darken the atmosphere; effectively reducing the sun’s light, crippling the machines. However, the machines found a different source of power – humankind itself. Thus, instead of destroying the humans, the machines chose to enslave them, and harvesting their naturally occurring bio-electric energy.

Thus humankind became the batteries which power the machines; and so, their life-essence appears to them as alien and hostile. The more power they produce for the machines, the more they increase the dominion of the machines over them. Another way of viewing this dynamic is to realize that humankind itself was responsible for the construction and development of the machines; humankind produced the machines, and now their own products appear to them as alien and hostile, enslaving them.

There are many critiques of Marx’s conception of alienation; particularly that Marx’s critique has to be understood in the context of Capitalist society in the Victorian Era. The contemporary view of modern society and today’s organization of work (in modern post-industrial societies) has led to the development of the ‘middle-class’; today’s work environment also provides workers with more leisure time, more disposable income and better standards of living than in the Victorian Era. This poses the question as to whether Marx’s theory of alienation applies to contemporary society.

I believe it still does. Members of the middle-class represent a small fraction of individuals who have made the shift from the working-class; most of the world’s population is living

under the poverty line. In an article on global poverty (Shah, 2013 <http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats>), almost half the world (around 3 billion people) live under \$2.5 a day; around 80% (almost 5.5 billion) of the world's population live under \$10 a day. According to UNICEF, 22 000 children die each day as a result of poverty. Almost 2300 people die each day from conditions that they develop as a result of not being able to access clean drinking water. It is also estimated that around a quarter of the world's population live without electricity. Hunger is the world's number one killer; claiming more lives a year than AIDS and other fatal conditions combined (Shah, 2013).

The middle-class exist in a more 'comfortable' form of alienation; they are still alienated from each other and from the rest of the world, they are blind to the suffering of the rest of humankind – caused by the needs of their very own way of life. Marx's theory of alienation provided a wake-up call not only for the workers, but was also seen as a warning to the capitalist master. As post-industrial societies developed their infrastructures, they simultaneously developed means to contain any proletariat uprising – **mass culture and the consumer industry** arose in response to this problem. It contained the masses by manipulating them into passivity, making them easier to control and direct. The growing strength of consumer ideology turned leisure time into consumption-time, turned 'earnings' into 'spending' – resulting in voluntary social blindness as we so easily ignore the reality of our own enslavement.

“Consumerism has become the most effective tool for convincing people to work.”

“Where the work ethic failed, the consumer ethic stepped in.” (Beder, 2001)

### **2.3 Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses:**

The French philosopher Louis Althusser's views on ideology went beyond the view of ideology as being solely what people think, but also what people do – '**lived experience**' (Burr, 1995). To use Althusser's own examples, a religious person who ascribes to a particular set of religious beliefs and ideas, would find those beliefs manifesting in particular actions. These actions themselves are not choices, but the necessary conditions of his beliefs. Be it going to church, following a particular set of moral codes and practices, or wearing a particular attire. These are manifestations of the material nature of ideology. Vivian Burr (1995) explains this principle of the 'package deal' of ideology using the same example of religion, a church visit: the practices of confession, prayer and kneeling before the altar are

intimately tied to the ideas of sin, humility and obedience to a higher power. Similarly, the clothes we wear reflect certain ideologies that we ascribe to; the type of cars we drive bear certain ideas attached to them.

Althusser understood that for every society to function and to remain in existence, it must not only produce goods and services, but it must simultaneously reproduce the conditions of production. That is, it must simultaneously ensure that whatever conditions are required for the production process to occur must simultaneously be reproduced alongside the production process itself. According to Althusser, there are two conditions of production that must be reproduced; the (i) Forces of production and (ii) the Relations of production. The Forces of production refer to the labour power, the materials required and the tools required. The Relations of production is solely focused on maintaining the relationship (to production) with the human element of the 'forces of production' condition; that is, the labour power. What is needed is a systematic means to ensure the submission of the labour force to the established order of the society.

*...a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class 'in words'.*

(Althusser, 1971, p. 89).

Institutions like schools, the church, and the army teach submission to the established order. Althusser uses the term *State Apparatuses* to refer to these institutions (Althusser, 1971). According to Althusser, these apparatuses are divided into two types; Repressive and Ideological. Repressive State Apparatuses function through force, examples of these are the military, the police, the government and the policies that the government enforce. Examples of Ideological State Apparatuses are religion, the education system, the legal system, and the culture of a society. These ideologies, according to Althusser, have a 'material' existence in the sense that we discussed earlier: the example of the religious man. Fashion is an ideological state apparatus with its material nature being very easy to see; every person who dresses and purchases according to a certain fashion trend, is ascribing to a certain belief about fashion, and certain beliefs within the ideology of fashion; more importantly, they have ascribed to the grander overarching ideology of consumerism. Consumerism then can be understood as being an Ideological State Apparatus which helps influence and maintain submission to

the established order by promoting the desire to keep earning so that disposable income is available for consumption.

#### **2.4 Consumer Ideology:**

Sharon Beder's book, *Selling the Work Ethic* (2001), covers and captures the development of consumer culture and the contemporary work dynamic. According to her, the birth of consumer culture as we know and experience it today, finds its roots in the industrial settings of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The factory mode of production led to an increase of supply which outstripped demand, as the consumption pattern of society then was one wherein people purchased what they needed; needs, as understood then, are limited (Beder, 2001). Rather than slowing down the rate of production by shortening working hours and lowering work-schedule demands, the solution that was ultimately settled upon (in the best interests of continued profit generation) was to try to manufacture 'wants', as 'wants' have the potential to be infinite. This was achieved through a number of techniques and methods. Goods that were initially only available to the upper-class citizens were now made available to those in the middle and working-class; thus began the **commoditization of status** wherein any citizen, no matter what their income-level was, could purchase 'status' as if it were any other commodity (Beder, 2001). The use of goods as status symbols was a deliberate and intended advertising technique. If people could not achieve high-flying careers and the status and success that came with it, they could simply purchase the **symbols** of such success and thus attain the respect and esteem that came with it. Through advertisements, television shows, magazines – qualities like wastefulness, artificial obsolescence, the aestheticisation of everyday life and self-indulgence were nurtured. Advertisers shifted the locus of discontentment from the work environment to areas in which they (the advertisers) could promise would be satisfied with consumption (Beder, 2001).

#### **2.5 Self-Presentation:**

According to sociologist and symbolic interactionist Erving Goffman (1959), human-beings are fundamentally concerned with the impressions that they make on others – we are deeply concerned with self-presentation. Brief social exchanges do not offer us the facilities of deeply getting to know other people; "to verify their claims, status or background." In these encounters we, "do what we can to gain an impression of them from the way they conduct or express themselves" (Goffman, 1959).

This means that self-presentation is necessarily central to human social-dynamics. It is not a simple or trivial matter, but one of concern to the individual. Goffman sees the effort to maintain

a particular 'role' or 'image' as a daily enterprise in social life (Burr, 2002). When we claim to be a certain type of person, our 'audience' acknowledges and assumes certain traits and characteristics about us which we need to fulfill, or our behaviour and dress must correspond with.

Self-presentation, as Goffman describes, is an innate feature of human social-life; we can necessarily assume that this concern with self-presentation has a role in consumer behaviour. Goffman's claims may help us understand how the desire to obtain 'status' is driven through the concern for self-presentation. The commoditization of status meant that certain modes of presentation were now available to people from lower-income groups. Advertising techniques display 'better' and different 'modes' of presentation made available solely through consumption. Advertisements, movies and other media are often the source for novel, 'stylish' and fashionable modes of presentation. These modes of presentation reflect the material nature of ideology that Althusser identified.

## **2.6 Advertising and the *Matrix Trilogy*:**

Advertising and the related discourses of consumption that are fed to us through the various media forms collectively form the blanket of consumer ideology. It blinds us from the reality of consumerism and the manufacture of discontentment and desires by advertisements that manipulate us to consume; it presents us with fantasies to fill the space between the actuality of our situations and the false-beliefs that we hold about our situations. We necessarily believe that this is how the world should be as we have been socialised into these beliefs and perceptions about the world. If it were not for the widespread belief in these illusions, they would not have the power to manipulate and control us.

These belief systems are systematically maintained and propagated through various mediums used for ideological dissemination, such as the media (movies, television, magazines, and newspapers), politics, economics, even the work environment itself. We are constantly bombarded by ideological symbols and messages; there is becoming increasingly less and less space that is free from ideological apparatuses. The role of these mechanisms is paramount to the continuation of the dominant ideologies.

The *Matrix Trilogy* features an interesting set of suit-clad 'business-looking-types' referred to as 'the Agents'. These characters are very deliberately designed to facilitate homage with CEO's, managers, supervisors, and other important administrators. Their function in the films is to ensure the smooth running of the Matrix program. The Agents themselves are programs that take on a 'physical' form within the Matrix program and deal with any disorders and disruptions that could reveal the Matrix program's version of reality as false. They are capable of extreme feats of power, strength

and agility within the program. They are also nearly omnipresent as they are able to assume the manifested form of anyone plugged into the matrix program from the machine's servers. Their names too reflect the homage the filmmakers attempt to create; Smith, Jones, Johnson, Thompson, Jackson. One of the ways of conceptualizing the roles of the agents in *the Matrix Trilogy* is to see them as metaphors for these socialisation mechanisms; just as the agents exist as programs designed to ensure the continual harmony of the Matrix, so too do these mechanisms exist to continue to disseminate and reinforce the ideas of the ruling class. **Advertising** in today's society is among the most powerful socialisation mechanisms. It serves solely to communicate a message of dissatisfaction with oneself, and promote the desire to earn money in order to spend money to overcome perceived imperfections.

The Matrix program is an illusory world constituted by the collective consciousnesses of all those 'plugged in'; hence, the Agents are programs installed into this society that shape and direct the form and flow of the social consciousness. This interpretation of the Agents identifies them as elements of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus; however, being that the films equip their characters' consciousness with physical attributes within the Matrix program, the actions of the agents then take on a physical form; their determination to maintain the structure of the illusory society through violence can be interpreted as being a repressive form of power. This interpretation sees the Agents as mechanisms of the Repressive State Apparatus, acting to forcibly control and maintain the structure of society and the dominant power structure of the machines.

## **2.7 The Language of Advertising:**

In the history of society, never before has there been such an abundance of images (Berger, 1972). These images speak to us, stimulate thought and imagination - if a picture can say a thousand words, then surely there are billions of words being told to us each and every day. We have become so familiar and accustomed to these images that we barely notice their total impact; we do not resist or ignore their presence, rather we have accepted them; and we passively accept their message, we cannot recognize our own voice as a tool to resist and argue back. Advertising and publicity are closely related to ideas of freedom (Berger, 1972). We are presented constantly with the notion of **free choice** which is offered to us through consumption and advertising; it is decorated as the most prized value of the modern 'democratic' state (Berger, 1972). Thus it can be seen as a substitute for democracy; it masks the injustices present in society and around the world. This notion of free choice is not a true form of freedom at all. Consider the amount of choice you are presented with upon entering a shopping mall; various brightly lit, multi-coloured stores and outlets, each with their own unique names, layouts and themes. Now consider a shift in perspective; do not see various clothing stores and

restaurants as a palette of various possible choices, rather see that all the clothing stores are trying to sell you the same thing: clothes. A typical shopping mall is comprised of 80% clothing stores. **The ultimate choice you make is to spend money.** That is the only decision. This form of choice, parading as freedom, is one of the means by which we are pacified into believing that we are free from the yoke of an oppressive status quo as Marx described. It is ultimately the answer to the question about whether Marx's ideas apply now, in a society that on the surface seems to offer more 'freedom' than the society that Marx initially critiqued. Consumer-choice does not constitute freedom (Berger, 1972).

### **2.7.1 One-Dimensional Man and Free Choice:**

According to Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1962), humankind's consciousness has been constrained and shaped into a single dimension; the dimension that reflects the perspectives of the established order. These perspectives are spread into the home and family through consumer products, radio and television. Marcuse was a Neo-Marxist and member of the Frankfurt School. Marcuse suggests that a two-dimensional society is one where a reflexive dimension exists in parallel to the dimension of the established order. The second dimension allows space from the ideas of the dominant power and Marcuse sees this space as the locus for the development of critical-thinking capacity which allows a society to critique its own culture and values. Marcuse's argument sees society as being flattened into a single dimension, carrying only the perspectives, ideas and discourses of the dominant ideology. The flattening of the second dimension is the result of the space between both dimensions being filled with consumer products and the postmodern lifestyle- where happiness can be achieved through consumption, and consumption is democratic freedom in practice. This contrasts with the unhappy feeling that critical thinking usually needs to flourish; the discontentment with the way things work provokes deeper considerations of what is and what can be.

### **2.7.2 The Matrix, The Merovingian and Free Choice:**

One of the more important perspectives communicated by the *Matrix* films is on the nature of choice and free will in today's techno-capitalist society. In the second film, Neo, now having developed the ability to defeat the agents and recognise the presence and machinations of the Matrix program, attempts to fulfill the prophecy made in the first film by bringing down the larger power structure of the Machine Empire and freeing humankind. During the film, Neo is taken to meet with a key character named, The Merovingian. Again we see the Wachowski's penchant for using symbolic characters. The name 'Merovingian' is taken from the Merovingian dynasty of kings; a line of Frankish kings who were the earliest kings of France. In the film, The Merovingian's character is French, and he is also referred to as 'the Frenchman'. This alone bears further symbolism as the French monarchs



eventually led down from the Merovingian kings down to King Louis XVI, who was the ruler overthrown and beheaded during the French Revolution, ending almost a thousand years of continuous French monarchy. The Merovingians are also linked to grail legends and mythologies, also possibly referenced in the films by the Merovingian always carrying a goblet, a chalice.

In the film, the Merovingian is a shady character who is a 'trafficker of information'. Neo must seek him out to find the 'Keymaker', a character who is actually a program that will allow Neo to access the Matrix program's source. He is essentially a means for Neo to hack into the mainframe of the program. From there it is believed that Neo will be able to save humankind and fulfill the prophecy by ending the war between man and machine. In his meeting with the Merovingian, the Frenchman shares important information with Neo about the nature of free-will and choice.

***The Merovingian:*** “*Choice is an illusion created between those with power, and those without.*”

(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999)

When Neo makes his way to the source, he instead encounters the architect - a program designed by the machines to design the Matrix program itself. Here, the architect explains to him that the prophecy around Neo's journey to save humankind was another system of manipulation and control. ‘The One’ is the result of the dialectical tension between the forces of order and chaos, represented by the Architect and the Oracle. The ‘she’ that the Architect refers to is the Oracle. The first few attempts to develop the Matrix programs were failures as the human-beings rejected the illusion. The first was designed as a perfect human world, and humankind rejected it. The second was designed to be miserable, this was rejected too. The third was designed in conjunction with another program, the Oracle. While the Architect’s purpose is to design a simulated system that has the human consciousness embedded in it, the Oracle's purpose was to understand humankind and offer insights from this understanding towards the development of the Matrix. The Oracle understood that if the human mind were given a choice, even an artificial choice, even a choice at a subconscious level, humanity will be more likely to accept the program. The Oracle's actions are designed to make it easier for humankind to accept the Matrix, and make it a more suitable simulated environment. This idea also mirrors Marcuse's thinking on One-Dimensional human society; the choices presented through consumer-culture and democracy make it easier to accept the perspectives of the established order without considering to criticize them.

***The Architect:*** “*As I was saying, she stumbled upon a solution whereby nearly*

*ninety-nine percent of the test subjects **accepted the program provided they were given a choice** - even if they were only aware of it at a near-unconscious level”*

(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999).

These quotes represent criticisms of this form of ‘freedom’ that exists in today’s world. Interestingly both the Architect and the Merovingian portray a very ‘bourgeois’ behavioural style (which is a deliberate character-theme decided upon by the film-makers). Choice is an illusion which pacifies us into accepting our conditions and the conditions of society. The viewer of the advertisement is more than just a potential customer, but he/she is also part of the system of production within society. Thus, profit is made on them twice; by their superiors at their workplace who profit from their efforts, and the profit that results from them purchasing a product (Berger, 1972). Great capitalist cities of the world are filled with the bright lights and ‘glamour’ of advertising and publicity; these have come to be recognized as symbols of the ‘free world’ (Berger, 1972). Rather, these represent the systematic controls of the ‘agents’ in our society, ensuring the truth – **that you are not free**.

***Agent Smith:** “We’re not here because we’re free. We’re here because we’re not free.”* (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999).

The pictures used in advertisements are a **language**; they speak of a future-tense version of ourselves wherein we are happy, we are transformed. This ‘transformation’ is the single promise that advertising makes; we will be transformed into someone worthy of admiration and envy, it promises happiness through the envy of others (Berger, 1972). Advertising is never about the product being sold; rather it is about “presenting an image of the future-buyer made enviable by the product” (Berger, 1972).

The buyer then experiences **self-envy**; he/she envies the vision of themselves that confronts them. This self-envy is a learned behaviour which we develop through the socialisation processes of today’s consumer society; through social relationships we develop the capacities to recognise the significance of owning branded and luxury items. We understand that there is a degree of envy and admiration tied to certain items – luxury sports cars, expensive and fashionable clothes. Our feelings towards branded items and the distinctive ‘qualities’ inherent in the names alone reflects this acculturation and social-orientation towards consumption-through-envy. Envy is an emotion that can only be experienced in isolation; to be the object of another's envy is based solely on sharing your experience with that person. It is a “solitary form of comfort.” (Berger, 1972). Sharing it (the

experience of ownership through consumption) will result in not being envied and thus reduce the power achieved through consumption. The widespread presence of this in society makes us more and more separate and apart from those around us. The notion of admiration and glamour that advertising tries to sell us cannot exist without envy being a commonplace emotion in the social environment. Modern post-industrial society is the perfect setting for the development of such an emotion. The unequal social conditions offer consumption as the only mode of empowerment to those without power; it is sold to them as a means to climb the ranks by being a subject of the envy and desires of others (Berger, 1972). The uneasiness, unhappiness and uncertainty we experience when confronted with an advertisement is a result of the contradiction that we as the audience of the advertisements and as consumers of the products advertised are trapped in. We are trapped between two contradictions; the first contradiction being who we are versus the visions of how we want to see ourselves (as presented in the advertisement); and the second being between the illusory promises made by advertising versus what advertising actually offers us. Thus, there is constantly a gap; an empty space which we cannot fill. This is how the system of advertising remains plausible even though it can never fulfill its promises; the two contradictions correspond with each other, forming a single gap. This gap however, is not filled with meaningful actions or fulfilling experiences – but rather it is filled with day-dreams (Berger, 1972). Again, we detect a sense of *alienation*; advertisements seek to manufacture discontentment within ourselves, about ourselves. Thus, we are alienated from the visions of ourselves we desire; we are alienated from appreciating and loving ourselves as we are. It claims our love for ourselves from us and offers it back to us for the price of the product (Berger, 1972). Again, it is a mode of alienation that serves as an understanding of unhappiness and misery in society today. This sense of alienation, that “there is something wrong with the world”, was the splinter that pierced Neo's mind and began his journey of resistance.

Advertising and publicity is the life-blood of Capitalist culture; without it, the capitalist system would fail. Previously this control over the masses was achieved by extensive deprivation; now it is achieved through the control over what is and what is not ‘fashionable’, desirable and enviable.

### **2.8 Neo-Marxism and the Frankfurt School:**

The Frankfurt School was founded by a group of Neo-Marxist thinkers who sought to understand why Marx's vision of revolution had not come to fruition; they also had sought to distance themselves from the use of Marx's theories for political ends, and to attempt to understand the rapid rise, spread and strength of the burgeoning Capitalist system and Capitalist societies in the Western

world. The Frankfurt School theorists are responsible for the development of *critical theory* as we understand it today.

A critical reflective reading of *the Matrix Trilogy* draws many parallels with the work of the Frankfurt School; the movies can be seen as a cautionary tale focusing on the principles of Capitalist ideology as critiqued by the Frankfurt School, including the power of the culture industry, the misuse of reason, and the excesses of capitalism.

### 2.8.1 The Culture Industry:

The diverse forms of popular culture that we encounter today, from the blockbuster Hollywood films, to Manchester United, to pop music – were all collectively conceptualised by the Frankfurt School as the ‘**culture industry**’ – whose purpose is to ensure the continued obedience of the masses through the endless bombardment of ideological signs, symbols and messages (Dodson, [www.urbandharma.org.udharma6/industry.html](http://www.urbandharma.org.udharma6/industry.html)). Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), employ the Marxist conception of ideology in reflecting upon the Capitalist systems development of the culture industry as an ‘iron system’ that completely envelopes an individual’s leisure time with ideologically-loaded entertainment and amusements designed to facilitate and endure the exhaustion and routine boredom of their increasingly ‘mechanised’ lives (Berger, 1972). The individual consumer is seldom given any free space to consider resisting the established order.

Horkheimer and Adorno (1947) see the media of the culture industry as 'a powerful instrument of manipulation and reification within a capitalist society'. They argue that it transmits, through its media (radio and television), “a cultural form of ideology which the audience have no choice but to accept” (Czolacz, 2014, p. 1). The culture industry belongs to the owners of the means of production; the culture industry’s products serve to facilitate the sale of commodities, and disseminate ideologies and discourses which strengthen the dominance of capitalist culture. According to them, the ideology of mass culture is not the product of consumer demand, but rather something created by the industry in order to create more consumer demand for the same products (Czolacz, 2014). As Czolacz (n.d, p. 2) put it: “The effect of this uniform ideology is to induce a docile uniformity in the masses by establishing patterns of speech and behaviour which individuals feel they must conform to in order to avoid feeling like outsiders.”

Thus, the instruments of the culture industry may on the surface seem to simply reflect features of contemporary culture, but they are simultaneously the vehicles which determine these features. From reifying the capitalist economic system, to interpersonal exchanges, to relationship dynamics, to modern forms of communication - all can find their roots in the culture industry.

Horkheimer and Adorno also focus on the particular characteristics of the culture industry's instruments which facilitate the spread of its consumer-culture driven ideology: the one-way communication style of television and radio permit these mediums to transmit ideas to the audience without allowing for a response. Film has the ability to portray items, objects and ideas as desirable and even necessary without actually supplying them to the observing masses, thus facilitating increased consumer demand for these products.

The culture industry serves the need for entertainment; it conceals the way it standardizes those needs, manipulating those it entertains to conform to them – the sitcom, the sports show, and the legal drama – all examples of variations in illusory choice. The pleasure and entertainment achieved from the culture industry serve only as distractions, as a smokescreen, concealing the injustices and inequalities of the market. This media of 'escapism' allows us vicarious ways of living out our fantasies while simultaneously reinforcing ideological doctrines (Berger, 1972). It is designed to placate us, as well as providing a platform to focus on – becomes the central talking point in conversations, the thing we look forward to at the end of our day, thus shifting our focus away from real issues: the inequalities and oppression we face regularly. It also normalizes and naturalises the social system: legal dramas naturalise the current role and form of the law, business shows glamorize the corporate world and the priority of profit over all other things, sitcoms like 'Friends' and 'How I Met Your Mother' dictate (and sometimes create) the acceptable trends and behaviours in society (from interpersonal relationships to consumer behaviours), police shows establish the near-omnipresent power of the police in the audience's consciousness. The notion of labouring under a capitalist master has become naturalized, normalized and inevitable. Thus, the culture industry reinforces the dominant ideology.

*The Matrix Trilogy* realizes the visions of Marx and the Frankfurt School. Humankind being trapped in pods so that their bio-thermal energies can be harvested reflects Marx's vision of the capitalist system. The illusory world of the Matrix programme reflects Marx's vision of ideology. However, according to the Architect's speech (*The Matrix Reloaded*, 2003), many 'crops' were lost – reflecting resistance to ideology and subsequent uprising. Humankind only accepted the program if they were given a **choice**. This reflects Horkheimer and Adorno's stance on the culture industry. According to them; mass culture represents this illusory system of choice and is seen as an industry producing goods designed to manipulate us into passivity.

### **2.8.2 The Century of the Self:**

The most prominent criticism of the Culture Industry model is that the model leaves no

space for human agency and emphasizes a largely deterministic pattern on human behaviour; that is to say that the Culture Industry is responsible for the nature of society today and the people in it. Acclaimed documentary film-maker Adam Curtis explored the rise of consumerism and its relationship with renowned psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud in his series *The Century of The Self* (2005). Curtis shows how Freud's understanding of human nature was employed by his nephew Edward Bernays (known famously as the Father of Public Relations) a Propagandist who used Freud's theories to further political and corporate goals. Freud's psychoanalysis model of understanding human nature saw human behaviour as being the outcome of various internal uncontrollable urges and desires. Edward Bernays sought to tap into these unconscious desires and helped corporate America to understand them and use them as tools in advertising. A famous campaign led by Bernays which is covered in *The Century of the Self* is the 'Torches of Freedom' (1929) campaign. Bernays was employed by the big tobacco corporations to end the taboo against women smoking. He recognized that the taboo was invoked by men against women and reflected the gender power dynamic of the time. He used the slogan 'Torches of Freedom' and had a group of young women light cigarettes at a famous annual parade. He used the cigarettes as a means of women claiming power back from men. This idea caught on successfully and cigarettes had achieved a commercial high till the health-based issues were brought up against them.

Bernay's successes demonstrate Freudian psychoanalysis as a tool used by the Culture Industry to influence society and human behaviour. The ideas of envy and success being attached to items and brand names was also a technique of psychoanalysis.

### **2.8.3 The Dialectic of Enlightenment:**

In the enlightenment era, reason was the means to emancipate thought from religious, mythological and political dogma, creating a more free-thinking society. Horkheimer and Adorno however saw reason as disenchanting the world; overcoming the seemingly uncontrollable forces of nature. Mythology was the narratives of cultures, the origin-stories of the world and people; myth walked hand-in-hand with nature; nature was the unknowable uncontrollable force that humankind was subject to. The enlightenment project, with reason as its tool, conquered mythology. "It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge" (Abrams, 2008. p. 158).

According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the nature of the enlightenment project's desire for absolute knowledge and control necessarily lead to the evolution of absolute control in the form of totalitarianism. This was one of their key lines of inquiry: why did the enlightenment project so rapidly lead to fascism? Another characteristic trait of modern culture is the *misuse of reason*. However, in today's post-industrial settings, reason has become a tool, severed and detached from emancipatory and

enlightened ways of thinking; it exists now as an instrument to be plugged into formulas and equations (Berger, 1972). This has led to the increased *mechanization of thinking*, reducing the capacity to think critically. Reason has experienced devolution, becoming a tool for the wealthy and powerful to constrain the social consciousness, keeping critical thought at bay.

## **2.9 Chapter Summary:**

In this chapter, we explored a number of concepts crucial to developing a foundational understanding of *the Matrix Trilogy*, as well as to the overall purpose of the study – to explicate an understanding of the contemporary human condition under technological capitalism. These concepts will be returned to when exploring other areas of inquiry, particularly using them to relate to theories in the field of psychology.

- Alienation
- Ideology
- Consumer Ideology
- The Language of Advertising
- The Culture Industry

The next chapter will follow on from this foundation that we have developed, and will focus on the social construction of reality. Rather than being distinctly different from the areas explored in this chapter, the next chapter will feature a continuation of the same critical exploration designed to promote a deeper understanding of the human condition in the post-industrial settings of contemporary consumer cultural world.

### Chapter 3:

#### Social Constructionism and *The Matrix Trilogy*

##### 3.1 What is Social Constructionism?:

**Social Constructionism** has arisen within the **postmodern** paradigm. The term postmodernism is very broad and encompasses many ‘new’ stances and ideas, essentially it means ‘beyond modernism’; encompassing a number of changes in contemporary culture. It stretches across artistic, intellectual and academic fields (Featherstone, 2007). **Modernism** and **Modernisation** reflects a social stage based upon technological, scientific, economic, political and industrial growth; encompassing aspects such as the techno-capitalist economic system and the modern nation state. Postmodernism has developed not only beyond modernism, but also in contrast to, and sometimes, inclusive of modernism. It stretches the boundaries of what is considered knowledge by accepting forms other than those produced through the scientific method.

*Postmodernism as an intellectual movement has its centre of gravity not in the social sciences but in art and architecture, literature and cultural studies. It represents a questioning of and rejection of the fundamental assumptions of modernism.*

(Burr, 1995. p. 10)

**Social Constructionism** has become a major topic in the evolving fields of psychology and social theory; it represents a distancing from the traditional, modernistic paradigm that is central to the current practice of psychology and traditional social science. Essentially, it places the locus of reality construction outside the individual; in the **social** and **linguistic spaces** in which the individual operates. A social constructionist position cannot be identified through any single description as not all writers in the field share all of the same views and ideologies. However, there are a number of traits through which this position can be identified.

It advocates for a critical stance towards taken for granted knowledge, especially knowledge about what is real, and what is truth.

*It is therefore in opposition to what are referred to as positivism and empiricism*



*in traditional science—the assumptions that the nature of the world can be revealed by observation, and that what exists is what we perceive to exist.*

(Burr, 1995. p. 2)

This critical stance towards taken-for-granted truths of the world was captured during the famous dialogue scene from the first film wherein Morpheus teaches, trains and prepares Neo for the actualities of life outside of the Matrix. Morpheus criticizes one of Neo's most basic assumptions about the world; *‘what is real?’* This is the same scene in which Morpheus tells Neo about the war between humankind and the machines.

**Morpheus:** *“What is real? How do you define 'real'? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see, then 'real' is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain.”*

(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996).

Social Constructionism sees the locus for the construction of ‘truth’, knowledge, and reality in the social and linguistic spaces shared by people. This emphasizes a focus on language as the root of the construction process. This emphasis on language is related to **Structuralism** and **Post-Structuralism**. **Structuralism** is the idea that language provides the structure for our experiences; though the term holds many different meanings in different fields, this view of structuralism is taken from Ferdinand Saussure’s study of structural linguistics (Saussure, 1857 - 1913). Post-structuralism is an extension of structuralism’s understandings of language. **Language** is central to the Social Constructionist understanding of the human-being; mainstream psychology’s modernist approach to understanding the human being does not place such great importance on language, rather it reflects the view of language as a system of labels which we use to communicate, organize and understand our world – be it things external to us, like objects, or internal states like emotion, language is simply a toolbox to be used, a set of labels for objects and situations we encounter. In contrast, Social Constructionism posits that **language structures thought** – thus if there is no way to express a particular concept in a language, then that concept cannot exist for the people who use that language.

In the beginning of the third film, Neo finds himself in a train-station linking the machine world to the Matrix program. It is a link for programs to travel between the worlds. Neo’s consciousness is trapped here, not his physical body. It is here that Neo encounters Rama-Kandra, a

program traveling to the Matrix to ensure safe passage of his daughter. It seems strange to Neo that programs should have emotions and attachments. The dialogue that ensues between them reflects two positions on knowledge; specifically, knowledge about love – the word love. Rama-Kandra's position reflects a more structuralist approach whereas Neo's position reflects a more modernist taken-for-granted stance, a stance which is certainly echoed amongst the film's audience.

Neo: *"I just have never..."*

Rama-Kandra: *"...heard a program speak of love?"*

Neo: *"It's a... human emotion."*

Rama-Kandra: *"No, it is a word. What matters is the connection the word implies. I see that you are in love. Can you tell me what you would give to hold on to that connection?"*

(Wachowski & Wachowski, 2002).

When a concept has an identifiable word in a language, then the use of that concept (whether verbal or as the subject of thought) is made available only through language. Thus, language provides the foundation to the structure of our experiences and our consciousness. Through knowledge of the concept, Rama-Kandra as a program, can experience the connection implied by the word. This is obviously a purely theoretical part of the film that has more meaning metaphorically than it does literally (machines experiencing love); what it means is that the power of our experiences and reality are situated within language.

There are three aspects of social constructionism to be explored in this chapter, these are central to understanding *the Matrix Trilogy* and the contemporary human condition – they are; **(i) the sign, (ii) discourse, and (iii) power.**

### **3.2 Language, Structuralism and the Sign:**

Social Constructionism's understanding of language's role in the centre of human-dynamics has two implications for understanding the human condition. The first is that, the notion of 'personalities' and of human-beings as bearers of such 'internal states' is not part of natural essential human nature, but rather a form of human-life we have become accustomed to and socialised in through language. The English language in particular, as used today, is laden with a vast array of words for referring to a person's personality; I will refer to this grouping and use of words as the *discourse of*

*individualism*. The existence of these words infers the existence of a certain entity; in this case the personality and all associated ideas. Therefore, these are effects of language that have come to provide the shape and content of our consciousness. As Rama-Kandra said; “*love is a word.*” It is the effect of the word, “*the connection that the word implies,*” that has come to shape the content of our consciousness, our experiences of relationships, of selfhood and more.

These concepts do not pre-date the existence of humans, however they do pre-date our own personal existence; thus, when we are born we learn of and understand ourselves through these concepts. The understanding that human-beings have a particular nature at the centre of their being that governs their actions and moods is central to notion of **essentialism**; which is the basis for modern psychology’s understanding and portrayal of the human-being (Burr, 1995). Thus, explanations and understandings of the individual will be sought from within an understanding of their ‘essential nature’. The *discourse of individualism* corresponds with the idea of essentialism. Social Constructionism however exists in direct contrast to this position. As mentioned earlier, it places the psychological centre of gravity outside the individual; in the social and linguistic spaces within which the person operates in.

The second implication it has is that this way of understanding human-beings can be constructed differently; different language systems offer different ways of being, different ‘truths’; what is real for a people may differ across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

### 3.2.1 The Sign:

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1913) was a Swiss linguist whose ideas laid the foundation for modern linguistics, semiotics, and structural linguistics. Central to his ideas about language was the concept of the ‘**sign**’; rather than referring to signs like road signs, this use of the term ‘sign’ can be understood as the things that populate our mental life, these being the things that we contemplate upon, that we refer to, that we muse upon, converse with others about, and so on (Burr, 1995). All signs are made up of two parts; the thing referred to, and the spoken sound. The thing referred to is the ‘**signified**’ whereas the spoken sound is the ‘**signifier**’. In every case, the use of the signified is referring to a **concept**, rather than something concrete; this is even so in the case of referring to items such as ‘tree’, which can be understood to have a concrete existence different from the existence of ‘emotion’. When we use the term ‘tree’, we are referring to the concept of ‘tree’ – the meaning that the term ‘tree’ embodies. This is how we are able to perceive a thing like ‘emotion’ and ‘intelligence’ as existing entities which we can refer to even though they do not have the same tangible existence as ‘tree’ or ‘horse’; what they share in common is their **concept-hood**, their existence as

concepts. In all instances, these are all signs. Increasingly, our world and our understandings of ourselves are coming to be shaped by more and more abstract signs.

*“The person you are, your experience, your identity, your ‘personality’ are all effects of language.”* (Burr, 1995, p. 26).

In psychology, the term **construct** has come to be used to identify the process of holding a certain position or theory about something which has no tangible existence; intelligence, mind, motivation, and emotion are all examples of constructs. They have no concrete tangible existence, yet all the meanings given to them have established their existence in the social consciousness. This position is relative to the idea of signifiers and signified. However, sign-hood applies to all objects; not just intangible ones. Without a language system bearing these signs, we would not have access to these concepts and therefore we would not be able to think about them or claim to possess them. According to Saussure, we have divided up our world into arbitrary categories; there is nothing inherently ‘apple’ about the word apple, nor is there anything inherently ‘sky-ish’ about the word sky. Different cultures have different words for different things; this is to say that different cultures operate with different **concepts** for understanding the world and their experiences. The concepts we use are tied in with the kind of society we live in; a modern contemporary society will be filled with language-systems bearing technical and scientific terms to understand and communicate observations, whereas the language system of a tribe in a jungle may reflect systems of radically different thought and meaning, such as spirits and ethereal entities.

The meaning of a sign lies not intrinsically in that sign itself (there is nothing inherently ‘apple’ about the word apple), but in its relation to and difference from other signs. The concept of apple can only be identified in its relation to other concepts; it is not a pear, it is a fruit not a vegetable; it is not the signifier that gives it meaning, but its difference from other signifiers. This is what Saussure’s linguistics is trying to say, **language does not reflect a pre-existing pre-determined reality, but rather brings a framework to that reality for us** (Burr, 1995).

To recap; signs are (i) **dyadic** – made up of two parts; signifier and signified. The development of a particular sign is (ii) **arbitrary**, no natural reason for the connection of a particular signifier to a particular signified. The sign is (iii) **relational** – it only makes sense in relation to other signs within the system. The sign is (iv) **differential** – it defines things not by what they are, but by what they are not.

The essentialist view of human-nature which is central to modern psychology’s understanding of the human being reflects a position where human beings are seen as having a central

essential nature at their ‘core’, that the person is a coherent, rational individual. It sees the person’s experiences as originating from within them. Post-structuralism and social constructionism advocate a shift of emphasis from the inner-space into the social and linguistic spaces – language is a social phenomenon, it is something unique to humans, and something that occurs between people. Every time we are engaged in a linguistic exchange, we are in the process of constructing and deconstructing ourselves. Linguistic spaces are not limited to only conversational situations; but when you read a magazine, when you turn on the television, when you text a friend, when you visit the hospital, bank, university, when you drive past billboards and see advertisements in the newspaper – these are all linguistic spaces, and within this view, these are the spaces where reality is constructed, where the ‘person’ emerges.

Returning to the ‘language of advertising’ discussed in the previous chapter, **we can now identify the spaces in which advertising and publicity operate in as linguistic spaces in which people operate**. Similarly, the mall, cinema, and the television set at home, are all linguistic spaces through which contemporary culture is ‘communicated’ to us. **Thus, we become cultural-selves**. Born into these linguistic spaces, we have no choice but to understand our world through these concepts. According to the French post-structuralist thinker, Jean Baudrillard, contemporary culture has become *saturated* with signs, laden with illusory and arbitrary meaning that has reached such an extent as to have the power to separate human consciousness from the real world. Baudrillard’s ideas will be explored further in the next chapter.

### 3.2.2 Signs and Discourse:

The use of language is divided up into a number of discourses; a discourse refers to a set of representations, meanings and ideas that evoke a certain version of events, or paint a particular picture about a phenomenon. Discourses can be understood as frames of reference, they show up in the things that people say and do. The meaning of any signifier is dependent upon the context of the discourse in which it is used. Numerous discourses can exist around a particular object; each striving to present it in a different way. For example, *The Matrix Trilogy* can be examined from the discourse of Hollywood blockbusters, as well as the discourse of Philosophical sciences, each discourse trying to present a particular version of the films. This study itself can be considered as an exploration in the philosophical discourses present in *the Matrix Trilogy*. Another example central to psychology, is how certain cultures may explain 'schizophrenia' and 'psychosis' through demonic possession and spiritual contact, whereas modernist traditional Western psychology will explain it in terms of Western biomedicine, psychiatry and psychopathology. This is reflective of two different discourses presenting

two different variations of the same event. However, the modernist discourse of Western biomedicine and psychopathology has more credibility and truth attached to it in contemporary Western society. This is because discourses are 'selected' for prominence, and are intimately bound up with the way society is organized. Discourses are employed to serve the interests of the powerful in society; **through the mediums of mental production** that we discussed earlier, certain discourses are given the '**stamp of truth**' while other, competing discourses are marginalized. For example, the discourse presenting capitalism as an exploitative form of control will be considered 'conspiracy theory' and thus marginalized and mythologized, whereas the discourse presenting capitalism as a 'democratic' form of freedom will be heralded and marked with the stamp of 'truth'. Prevailing discourses need to be maintained, reinforced and naturalized to ensure their position against competing discourses. Thus, discourses serve to construct the phenomena of our world. The language of advertising discussed in the previous chapter, is a form of discourse. Political and economic powers are not the only discourse-users in society; everyday people employ a variety of discourses attempting to communicate a certain version of themselves, which manifest themselves in the clothes we choose to wear, the cars we desire, the mannerisms we employ. These reflect the 'lived experience' manifestations of ideology that Althusser identified when he asserted that ideology goes beyond simply what people think and manifest in what people do. Our subjective experiences are the result of the discourses in which we are culturally embedded; it is from these available discourses that we construct our identity. Althusser used the term *Interpellation* to refer to the process by which individual subjectivities are developed through the individual interacting with the ideologies in their society, particularly the dominant ones that are empowered through the Ideological State Apparatuses. Althusser's *Ideological State Apparatuses* provide us with knowledge of the particular discourses embedded in our society; they form the cultural parameters and determine which discourses are available for us to use, as well as which discourses are more popular, desirable, acceptable and 'correct' (truth) – these are all forms of power embedded in certain discourses.

In the films, the machines control what is 'real' and what is 'truth'; they are masters of the Matrix illusion and are the unseen masters of humankind's consciousness. They are able to design a society with ideas and a culture that flows away from revealing the truth of their domination over humankind and mask it with any illusion they want; the illusion of a capitalist post-industrial world was the most ideal as it provided the right degree of social turmoil with the right degree of selfish excessiveness to achieve a realistic believable human society.

### **3.2.3 Discourses and Power:**

Prevailing discourses in society generally have political effects and are tied in with power relations. According to Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984), **‘knowledge’ is the version of events given the stamp of truth**. Returning to the example of psychosis, the psychopathological view is regarded as knowledge, whereas the demonic-possession view is regarded as superstition. Superstition is a word implying a particular version of events (illusory, made-up); thus does the mark of superstition cripple the worldview of those cultures believing in ideas existing outside the field of ‘knowledge’. This is disempowering. Any version of events brings with it the potential for social practices, for acting in one way rather than another, and for marginalizing alternate views (Burr; 1995). Therefore, power to act in particular ways depends on the ‘knowledges’ currently prevailing in society. This view of power sees it as a **product of discourse and producing discourse**; and therefore, a resulting effect of **language**. All dominant discourses are subject to resistance; the power inherent in a discourse is only reflected through the resistance implicit in another. The dwindling power of ethno-cultural discourses reflects the dominant power of Western modernist discourses. According to Foucault, absolute power being solely a repressive force is not power at its most effective; he believes that power is at its most effective when it produces **knowledge** (Foucault, 1980). As we have said, knowledge is a version of events marked as ‘truth’, and these ‘truths’ serve the powerful. So, power is at its most effective when it is capable of producing dominant self-serving discourses.

A number of cultural and social practices and discourses have arisen over the last hundred years that have given birth to the modern individual. Science, information technology, political arrangements and dynamics, consumerism, fashion – these are all discourses that have come to power collectively constructing the individual of contemporary society. These discourses exist as **‘controls’** which govern individuals through their conscience; no force is required. This is an example of what Foucault calls **disciplinary power**; this represents a shift from **sovereign power**, power exercised through force (Foucault, 1980). This disciplinary power is the most effective form of social control, it is institutionalized control which people freely subject themselves to (Foucault, 1977). Huxley's 'soft' dystopian vision in *Brave New World* reflects the effectiveness of disciplinary power versus that of Orwell's 'hard' dystopian society in *1984* in which the social order prevailed primarily through physical manifestations of force or sovereign power.

Foucault uses the example of the 'Panopticon' to illustrate the nature of disciplinary power in keeping society regulated according to the needs of the powerful (Foucault, 1977). The Panopticon is an architectural concept for the ideal prison, by the philosopher Jeremy Bentham. The Panopticon gets its name from the mythological Greek giant Panoptes who was regarded as a great

watchman as he possessed 100 eyes. The Panopticon is a cylindrically designed structure with a tower in the centre from which a guard stands watch, and all the cells are situated in a perfect circle around the tower. Furthermore, the cells have back-lighting, which illuminates the cell from the back, shining inwards towards the tower. The light distinguishes the prisoners within their cells, rendering them always visible to the watcher in the tower. Bentham suggests that the effect of the Panopticon on the prisoners would result in them monitoring their own behaviours. They are cut-off from their neighbouring inmates, are always visible to the watcher in the tower, but they cannot see the watcher, so they never truly know if they are being watched or not. Thus, the prisoners monitor their own behaviours as if they were being watched the entire time. They internalise the process of surveillance and begin self-surveillance. Foucault likens this internalised self-surveillance to the process by which we internalise the social norms, rules and laws of our society that have been constructed and communicated to us through discourse. These internalised patterns of monitoring our own behaviour and comparing ourselves to the standards of society is the disciplinary power that Foucault describes.

***Morpheus: "What is the Matrix? Control"***

(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996)

### **3.2.4 Signs, Discourses and *the Matrix Trilogy*:**

The concepts of both the 'sign' and 'discourse' are central to *the Matrix Trilogy*. In the films, the crew of the *Nebuchadnezzar* take the ship to points where they can broadcast their 'pirate signal' and hack into the Matrix program. Onboard the ship, they monitor activity in the Matrix program. However, since it is a computer program, the activity within the Matrix reads as lines of programming code. Cypher explains to Neo that he doesn't see 'signs' or 'symbols' on the monitor, but 'redhead', 'brunette'. These lines of code are metaphors for social programming, through the use of signs and discourse. Collectively, the various threads of discourse and amalgams of signs come to structure our experience in the world. In the films, these signs are lived and experienced as real; this can be read as a metaphor of Althusser's idea about ideologies having a material existence. In the films, the codes and signs are experienced as people, as objects, as dogs and cats; as 'redhead' and 'brunette'. This interpretation has more than just symbolic significance; it is a useful way of seeing how our experiences are constructed through the discourses embedded in our social world.

The discussion with the *Merovingian* is important in understanding the nature of society. The second film explores the concepts of choice and free will. According to the *Merovingian*, choice is an illusion, a position that we have explored earlier. Free choice as we understand it today is but



another function of language, it is embedded in the discourse of ‘democracy’, of choice and selfhood that is pervasive within the English language. The language of western industrialized societies draws heavily upon metaphors for individualism, autonomy and the logic of exhortation and choice. Our understandings of our world, events and experiences draws on the logic of choice and exhortation (Burr, 1995).

The scene with the Architect is another important and deliberate scene. The architect embodies the capitalist modernist ideology; his dress and use of language reflect this. He is the positivistic modernist paradigm in ‘human’ form. The nuances present in the language he uses reflect ‘foresight’, ‘foreknowledge’, the desire to know everything and be in control of everything, as well as the logic of exhortation and choice, placing the human subject at the centre of all things. This is to say that his understandings of causes and their effects are centrally placed upon him – making him responsible, rather than external things happening that were beyond his control. He was ‘*frustrated by failure*’, suggesting that he is solely responsible. He speaks to Neo, and of Neo, in a very condescending tone. He even studies Neo during their conversation. This scene portrays a symbolic criticism of the capitalist system; showing directly how the capitalist masters who endured difficulty in the early post-industrial period, when supply outstripped demand and ‘*entire crops were lost*’, have now modified their schemes by using the idea of **choice**. Choice, as the Architect reveals, was the ‘technique’ the machines used to get humankind to accept the Matrix programme. The endless choices created through the consumption and its surrounding discourses have ‘flattened the dimensions’ as Marcuse put it, creating a society that carries the ideas of the dominant order as their own. The system that the Architect and the Oracle have developed is very similar to this vision. Oracle’s knowledge of humankind inspired the use of ‘choice’ as a means of sealing away the space for critical thought to develop; a space to recognize the dominion of the machines over mankind. As we said in the previous chapter, the initial Matrix programs failed; however, when the machines resorted to an ideological and disciplinary form of control, they succeeded. This success echoes Foucault’s idea of disciplinary power.

Returning to the scene in the third film, when Neo meets Rama-kandra at the train station, Rama-kandra’s responses to Neo’s questions reflect a social constructionist stance towards language. Rama-kandra performs *deconstruction*, a pattern of critical thought popularised by the social theorist Derrida (Burr, 1995). Rama-kandra reflects upon words like love and karma; he criticizes the taken-for-granted stance that Neo has towards understanding what love is (as well as the audience), and he unpacks it. He begins by identifying that love is not an eternal, essential feature of human society but rather, **love is a word**; a word to which significant meaning has become attached. This reflects

Saussure's position on signs, being **concepts** with two parts; signifier and signified (Burr, 1995). Ramakandra performs the same thought process on the idea of 'karma'; once again he says that karma is just a word, but it is the meaning that the word implies that has relevance. This stance suggests that there exists no single 'truths', that language does not exist to communicate fixed and concrete observations of the world.

The loading program used in the films is called the **construct**. The choice of this name symbolically reflects a possible understanding of the operations of constructs and signs in developing our realities. The Construct program allows for the creation of literally anything. It is used for the training room, for Neo's lecture from Morpheus, for the creation of "*guns, lots of guns*".

When examined in the light of the films, the Matrix program as well as the Construct program is not real, they exist solely within the minds of the individuals. Therefore, construct is an appropriate name for the program as it builds any amount of intangibles; even the guns and physical environments it creates are intangibles as they exist within the minds of the individuals trapped inside the Matrix program, not within the real world (outside of the program).

The films use the ideas of discourse through the use of 'programs' that operate within the Matrix program. Politics, legal systems, advertising, fashion – we have identified these as discourses dominant in contemporary society. These discourses can be metaphorically read as the programs that operate within the Matrix world. These programs contribute to the disciplinary power of the machines; they are systems of control.

Foucault's idea that power at its most effective when it produces knowledge is another dynamic which is displayed in *The Matrix Trilogy*. The machines have the power to exist as solely a repressive force, enslaving humankind; however, they bind the human race with the Matrix program, a sustained illusion reflecting the discourses of '21<sup>st</sup> century living', an artificial reality, a version of events presented as 'truth'. The machines **produce 'knowledge'**. The Matrix program itself can be seen as a symbolic *ideological apparatus* as Althusser identified. They are the means through which the machines spread the discourses and ideas that they want amongst humankind. Their superior position over humankind in terms of their capacity for repressive and sovereign power has created a situation of 'leverage' for them (as humankind are now their slaves) wherein they can now produce and sustain the ideas that they want to have amongst the populace. The presence of the Agents is a surety protecting the spread of these ideas within the program itself. All those who reject these ideas are hunted by the Agents. This is truly how Neo's journey began. In this light, the relationship between man and machine in the films symbolically captures the relationship between the powerful (multinational corporations,

politicians, the very wealthy) and the working class.

Also, another metaphor of power (used in the films) as suggested by Foucault, is that power is **tolerable only if it conceals a significant portion of itself; its success is relational to its capacity to remain hidden** (Burr, 1995). This is clearly the operating procedure for the machines as their role as manipulators and puppeteers is entirely hidden. Returning to the notion of ‘Soft Dystopias’, Foucault’s idea about power remaining hidden mirrors this concept; as well as concurring with Althusser’s ideas about the functions of *Ideological State Apparatus*.

### **3.3 Chapter Summary:**

These ideas will be explored further when examining the works of Jean Baudrillard and Plato in the next chapter. The discussions around Alienation and Ideology will be returned to when examining Plato’s work, and the discussions around the nature of language and the role of signs in constructing our realities is necessary to developing a foundation for understanding Jean Baudrillard’s work. Signs and sign-hood is essentially where Baudrillard’s post-structuralist thesis takes off from. The purpose of this chapter was to develop a framework for understanding the **social construction of reality**, and the **role of signs in society**, enabling us to continue on to the theories of Plato and Baudrillard.

- All reality is constructed socially –between people; in the social and linguistic spaces that they occupy and share.
- Language shapes reality. Use of language divided into signs, symbols and discourses
- Signs – the things that populate our mental life. Dyadic – signifier and signified.
- Discourse – set of representations designed to create a certain idea about something.
- Discourses are connected to power relations; discourses with more power have economic and political implications usually.

## Chapter 4

### Plato's Cave and Baudrillard's Desert

*The Matrix Trilogy* uses both Plato's *allegory of the cave* and Baudrillard's *desert of the real* to design the physical and illusory settings of the films; the Matrix program itself is a metaphor of Plato's *allegory of the cave* and the 'real' world that exists outside of the program is called *the desert of the real*. Both relate to the blanketing presence and power of ideology in society. Morpheus refers to the real world as *the desert of the real* in the first film (*The Matrix*, 1999); and the Matrix program itself exists as Plato's cave does – an illusion blinding us from the truth. The purpose of this chapter is not only to explore both theories, but to identify their instrumentality in the film, their relevance to the study of subjectivity, and to develop a foundation for the application of psychological theorems facilitating a better and more complete understanding of the construction of our subjectivities.

#### 4.1 Hyperreality and the Desert of the Real:

In the beginning of Jean Baudrillard's book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), he recalls a fable by Argentinean writer Jean Louis Borges called '*On Exactitude in Science*', in which is told the account of a great empire whose cartographers were tasked with creating an intricately detailed map of the empire. The map they created was so vast and accurate that it corresponded with the surface of the empire at every point. After years and years however, the empire crumbled and fell to ruin, and all that was left of its majesty was the map. Baudrillard adapted this fable and used it as a metaphor for society today, which according to him, lives in the map and not in the empire, in the simulation of the real rather than the actual physical territory. According to Baudrillard, the assortment of **signs** of contemporary culture has come to collectively form the **map**, a simulated artificial reality within which humankind's consciousness is embedded. The real world, represented by the crumbling empire, has become divorced from our conception of reality, and we place our conscious minds firmly in the simulation, the map.

##### **4.1.1 Simulation and the Precession of Simulacra**

The map has **primacy** for us, the map comes before the territory; Baudrillard called this *the Precession of Simulacra* (Baudrillard, 1981). The signs of the real (the map) have been substituted for the real (the territory); it is no longer a question of imitation, but rather one of **simulation**. Simulation is different from representation as representation begins with recognizing equivalence between the sign and the real (Baudrillard, 1981). Representation can be understood as the way in

which we have come to accept our world – based on the modernist conceptions of language; signs represent the real, language accurately communicates what we observe objectively. To simulate is to pretend to have what one does not have. Baudrillard uses an effective example to illustrate this. Simulating is different from pretending, “whoever fakes an illness can simply lie in bed and make everyone believe he is ill, whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms” (Littre, as cited in Baudrillard, 1981. p. 2). The signs of the illness are all there – except the illness itself; thus in this basic example, the signs of the illness become substituted for the illness itself. A simulacrum is typically understood as an image or representation of someone or something. Initially the word simulacrum came to be used to depict images or representations of God and deities. According to Baudrillard, simulacra are negative, and bear no relation to reality whatsoever. They form their own reality, *Hyperreality*.

The range of contemporary media forms has come to create a new (virtual) realm through which individuals experience the world and reality. The danger that Baudrillard saw was that this new realm of experience undermines the audience’s ability to grasp and recognize the truths of the world that exist outside of media culture (Constable, 2009). Electronic media have brought about a world where signs are completely separated from their referents in the real world; thus, they exist in a new form of representation wherein these words, symbols and images establish their existence through media forms without bearing any connection to the real world. Thus they are not representations anymore, but objects themselves. This was the danger Baudrillard envisioned, the coming crisis between reality and image. The traditional distinction between sign and the real was based on the utopian principle of equivalence between the two, wherein the sign attempts to be an accurate representation of the real, but not being the real itself (Constable, 2009). Baudrillard’s vision of simulation sees the distinction between the two vanish – leading to the ‘loss of the real.’

Baudrillard sees four stages to simulation. The simulation (i) **reflects a basic reality**, like a photograph of you. It is not you, but an image of you. (ii) It **masks, denatures and perverts** a basic reality; a doctored image of you, or of a supermodel looking excessively thin when she really is not so thin. (iii) The image/simulation **masks the *absence* of a basic reality**; like a drawing of God, or of a dinosaur. (iv) The image/simulation **bears no relation to reality whatsoever**; it is its own simulacrum – the computer-generated world of the Matrix program; it is an illusory reality, a world loaded with the signs of the real world – but the real world does not exist. This is the final stage, the highest order of simulation, wherein the illusory reality cannot be differentiated from the real and thus it becomes accepted as the real. If the simulated illness is simply the signs of the illness implying the

presence of the illness, then the Matrix program uses the signs of the real from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to imply that the computer-generated world is real.

#### 4.1.2 Hyperreality and the Desert of the Real

Baudrillard's name for the simulated realm is *Hyperreality*, and the term that he uses to describe the real world is *the Desert of the Real*. These concepts were used in constructing the settings of *The Matrix Trilogy*. In the films, the 'map' or simulation of reality that humankind 'lived' in (their consciousness was embedded in) was the Matrix program; clearly a metaphor for *Hyperreality*. During the Construct Sequence where Morpheus educates Neo about the war between man and machine and the current state of humankind, he takes Neo to the 'real world', which he calls '*The Desert of the Real*'. This is one of the more distinct links to Baudrillard's vision as Baudrillard also calls the level of reality that is divorced from hyperreal signs and symbols, *The Desert of the Real*. The initial plan for this scene was to include Baudrillard in the dialogue.

According to the original script, Morpheus was supposed to tell Neo;

*"As in Baudrillard's vision, your whole life has been spent inside the map, not the territory. This is the world as it exists today, the Desert of the Real."*

(Constable, 2009. p. 87)

It is believed that this was changed owing to potentially misunderstanding Baudrillard's 'precession' theory. The final cut of the film, features Morpheus simply saying to Neo:

*"Welcome to the Desert of the Real."*

(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996)

*Simulacra and Simulation* is directly featured in the first film. We are first introduced to Neo asleep at his desk. His computer screen blinks on, and text appears saying "wake up Neo." It is during this scene that he Neo retrieves the contraband hardware he has hidden in a book with its pages hollowed out to create space. The book is *Simulacra and Simulation*; it is a clever irony that by not having pages inside, and resembling a book on the outside, the book itself constitutes a **simulacrum**.

The term Hyperreality implies something more real than the real. Baudrillard also uses the term 'code/s' to describe the signs of the real used in constructing the simulacrum of the real. The simulacrum is programmed using the 'codes' of the real to reflect a reality; this was used as a literal metaphor in the *Matrix Trilogy* as the simulated world of the Matrix program is built with lines of code. When Neo defeats Smith at the end of the first film, it is a result of his ability to differentiate between the real world and the Matrix program completely. Even though he previously knew the world within the program was an illusion, he finally sees the program as it really is - lines of code – and he

differentiates between the real and the codes/signs of the real. Thus, he overcomes the highest order of simulation by being able to differentiate completely between real and hyperreal. In his dialogue with Morpheus in the first film, Agent Smith explains that the first Matrix was designed to be a peaceful harmonious world; but humankind rejected it. This is because the simulation of the first program failed as a substitution of human life as it did not possess the “*programming language*” i.e. the correct set of codes, signs and ‘symptoms’. The correct codes of the real as he describes, would be those reflecting a state of suffering and misery.

*Agent Smith: “Did you know that the first Matrix was designed to be a perfect human world? Where none suffered, where everyone would be happy. It was a disaster. No one would accept the program. Entire crops were lost. Some believed we **lacked the programming language to describe your perfect world.** But I believe that, as a species, human beings define their reality through suffering and misery. The perfect world was a dream that your primitive cerebrum kept trying to wake up from. Which is why the Matrix was redesigned to this: the peak of your civilization.”*

(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996).

In the Borges fable, the empire clings to the map, existing solely as rotting shreds. The Desert of the Real can be seen as the world where atrocities and inhumane crimes are committed, where people are suffering as a result of the status quo – this world has become entirely divorced from the social consciousness. We blindly embrace the simulation. In today’s times, most of us are **born into the simulation**, so much so that any idea of a world outside the simulation is ludicrous. This is an important idea and will be explored further in Chapters Four and Five which focus on modern psychology's understandings of human development and cognition. The idea of being born into the simulation will provide an interesting platform for analyzing subjectivity and simulation from within a psychological perspective.

#### **4.1.3 The Hyperreal Media**

Horkheimer and Adorno’s idea of the culture industry as we explored earlier displays a system which has facilitated the spread and development of the simulation. The media of the culture industry cannot be ignored, we encounter them everyday. The term ‘media’ as used today is excessively broad, but we shall list each medium to punctuate the point of how saturated our daily lives are with

instruments of the culture industry. Movies, television series, news programmes, sports shows, advertisements on television, the radio, billboards, the clothing we (and others) wear, the workplace, schools and universities. A second layer can also be identified, that is the layer of ‘hyperreal-cultured’ behaviour we display; for example, when a person places emphasis on a particular brand it affects the standing of that brand in the eyes of others; or football teams we support based on their popularity in our social spaces. As we explored in the social constructionism chapter, the locus of reality creation is embedded in the social and linguistic spaces we operate in. In this study, the media listed above shall be referred to as *the Hyperreal Media*. They are instruments facilitating social and linguistic exchanges. What separates them from a typical face-to-face, person-to-person exchange is that over time we as receivers of these messages have become conditioned towards the unidirectional flow of the message; from the medium to us. This perspective would seem to discount agency from the interaction, rather it suggests that agency does exist but its presence within this exchange has become dulled down as a result of conditioning towards a monological type of exchange with advertisements. Recognizing it as a dialogical exchange would allow for rejection of the message or for competing messages to challenge the message of the advertisement. This perspective acknowledges media's role in the construction and development of our social reality. In this case, this developed reality is more than just separate from the actual realities of the world; it has reached a state where it is identified as the real, and the real cannot be identified. It is a simulation without an original. Therefore, it is a Hyperreality.

In today's society, ‘real’ has become that which can be simulated. The simulation begins to hold more appeal than the real to the point where we focus on the simulated more; an example, a shark at an aquarium may actually disappoint most people when compared to the sharks from the movie *Jaws* (1975). *Jaws* has entered sharks into the hyperreal sphere, and the fear we have of sharks based on such films is a hyperreal fear. This is not to discount the fact that a Great White Shark can kill you, but so can most other things. The hyperreal has determined the real. Movies, reality-TV, advertisements all collectively claim to represent signs of success, masculinity/femininity, wealth, power, desirability, relationship dynamics and more. However, these mediums are the sources for these ideas in society. Ideas around dress-codes, romance, and patriotism are all loaded in these hyperreal devices. Generally, these features are designed to favour certain political and economic trends. So not only does the hyperreal claim to represent the real, it also determines it.

#### **4.1.4 Facebook, Instagram, and the Era of the Simulated-Self**

With the rise of social networking, people are increasingly losing their ability to have genuine meaningful experiences. Facebook, twitter, and all the other social networking sites have



created a hyperreal world wherein people can construct and shape their profiles. Social networking has established further social and linguistic spaces in which hyperreal personalities exist. The author of the profile can choose and refuse what they want to include and exclude about themselves. Mark Poster, editor and compiler of *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* (1988), says in an article on Baudrillard's vision of simulation and its relationship to virtual reality and computers, that computers and other forms of technology have radically changed the process of perception in which technology has become integrated with the human mind and body, forming a new level of symbiosis (Constable, 2009). This claim is more important today; mobile devices are almost an 'organ' of contemporary modes of communication and socialization. However, we must also remember that Baudrillard's work was done before the advent of the internet; but with the broadening of the reach of media forms, I believe his vision is even more applicable now.

Returning to the claims made by Erving Goffman about self-presentation (chapter 2), we can understand how these new social and linguistic spaces offer people more opportunities to claim certain roles, identities and group membership. The nature of these online exchanges is such that the 'audience' has more difficulty verifying these claims than would be the case in a face-to-face exchange. Using status-updates and pictures, these hyperreal linguistic spaces serve the human concern for self-presentation to the extent that people place more concern on their online presentations than they do for things and experiences in the 'real' world. Interactions on networking sites and instant messaging facilities are also doctored and altered. A message isn't simply spoken, it is prepared, it can be re-written and edited before being sent; this simulation-like dynamic is absent in genuine face-to-face contact.

Thus, these profiles reflect an illusory reality. When shaping a profile, people are constructing simulacrum of themselves; and it is these simulacrum that other people interact with more than the actual person. These 'simulacral-selves' are thus more real than the real self, as it is the one that people encounter more often.

These social-networking simulations have led to the development of a new hyperreal layer of meaning which has come to govern the experience of being human as people are increasingly seeking to 'share' experiences online rather than **having** an experience. This is intertwined with the concern for self-presentation as these shared behaviours are often linked to the claims people are attempting to make about themselves. The act of eating a dessert for example has a secondary layer of meaning that comes from sharing the experience online. This second layer has increasingly become more important than the primary layer of meaning - the actual act of eating the dessert. Thus, not only

are we now living in a world of simulated selves, but of simulated interactions, and simulated experiences.

This is an idea I will attempt to explore using psychological theories of human development, learning and cognition; linking the simulated world to the development of our consciousness.

#### **4.2 The Allegory of the Cave:**

In book VII of Plato's (c. 427 – 347 BC.) *Republic*, he presents a dialogue between his mentor, Socrates, and his brother, Glaucon. In it, Socrates narrates a parable to Glaucon in which a group of prisoners are shackled in a cave from birth. Their hands, feet and neck are chained – thus not only can they not escape the cave, but they also cannot look around freely; their heads are firmly fixed facing the wall before them. Behind the prisoners is a fire, and between the fire and the prisoners pass a procession of men bearing different objects. The fire casts the shadows of the passing men onto the wall before the prisoners and all that they have and can ever behold is the forms that the shadows take. This is their reality. It is all they have known since birth.

*Socrates: "...let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: --Behold! Human beings living in an underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets."*  
(Plato's *The Republic*; translated by Jowlett, 1894).

Socrates further suggests that the prisoners, if they were able to communicate with each other, will communicate about the shadowy forms that they behold on the wall. Also, if the men passing before the fire were to speak or make noise, the prisoners would attribute these sounds as originating from the shadowy forms.

*Socrates: "And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?"*

**Glaucon:** *“Very true.”*

**Socrates:** *“And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?”*

(Plato’s *The Republic*; translated by Jowlett, 1894).

Socrates then asks Glaucon to imagine what would happen if one of the prisoners were to be freed from the cave, and introduced to the real world. The process would constitute a breakdown in all that he believed was real. It would not be immediate, suggests Socrates, as the prisoner’s eyes will have to adapt from the darkness of the real world to the light, beauty and splendour of the world outside.

**Socrates:** *“And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive someone saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision, -what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them, will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?”*

(Plato’s *The Republic*; translated by Jowlett, 1894).

He also suggests that if the cave-dwellers had a system of endowing value and honours upon the person to be first in identifying a shadowy form, then in the light of this revelation, the value system of the cave would become meaningless to the freed prisoner.

**Socrates:** *“And if they were in the habit of conferring honours among themselves on those who were quickest to observe the passing shadows and to remark which of them went before, and which followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think*

*that he would care for such honours and glories, or envy the possessors of them?”*

(Plato's *The Republic*; translated by Jowlett, 1894).

Socrates also suggests that the freed prisoner, upon returning to the cave to free his comrades, will encounter resistance from them, and even the threat of murder.

*Socrates: “...and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.”*

(Plato's *The Republic*; translated by Jowlett, B. 1894).

#### 4.2.1 The Matrix, the Culture Industry and the Cave

Socrates uses this allegory to draw a parallel with the illusory forms that have come to shape our perceptions of the world. Despite being over millennia in age, this tale has crucial importance to today's society. The fire and the shadowy figures it casts exist as a symbolic representation of mass culture which functions as an instrument of the powerful to manipulate us into passivity and compliance. The shadow-forms are metaphors of the products produced by Horkheimer and Adorno's *culture industry*. The *culture industry* is also responsible for the design and control of the value systems which we absorb and aspire to; and, like the value system of the cave, can only be created socially - between people. Therefore, it cannot be established without the participation of human-beings. It appears to us as **eternal and natural** (the primary elements of an ideology which we will explore later); though it is artificial and man-made within social spaces. The difference however is that our imprisonment is more voluntary than that of the cave-dwellers. We fix our own bonds and shackles without knowing they're there. The process of being unchained is a metaphor for the process of enlightenment, freeing us from ideological bondage.

The *allegory of the cave* is a very prominent metaphor used to construct the story of *The Matrix Trilogy*. The cave is The Matrix Program, a simulated illusion manipulating humankind into compliance and passivity, creating a situation wherein the powerful (the machines) can freely feed off humankind. The process of enlightenment is characterised in the film by the action of being 'unplugged', thus releasing one from the program. Neo's enlightenment process reflects that of the freed cave-dweller, initially it is distressing and painful, but soon it is liberating and appreciated. After being unplugged from the Matrix program, when Neo awakens in the real world on board the

Nebuchadnezzar, he asks Morpheus; “*why do my eyes hurt?*”

To which Morpheus replies; “*You’ve never used them before.*”

The distressing feeling that Neo experiences when contemplating the extent to which the illusion of the Matrix programme was illusory, he sums it up saying;

*Neo: “I used to eat there. Really good noodles. I have these memories from my life. None of them happened”* (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996).

Just as the freed cave-dweller faces the threat of death when trying to release his fellow cave-dwellers from their ignorance, so too does Neo, as Morpheus explains to him of the other human-beings still in The Matrix programme:

*Morpheus: “The Matrix is a system, Neo. That system is our enemy. But when you’re inside, you look around, what do you see? Businessmen, teachers, lawyers, carpenters. The very minds of the people we are trying to save. But until we do, these people are still a part of that system and that makes them our enemy. You have to understand, most of these people are not ready to be unplugged. And many of them are so inured, so hopelessly dependent on the system that they will fight to protect it.”*

(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996).

Morpheus’s words here mirror our own society today. Critical insights reflecting cross-paradigmatic thought hoping to create ‘awakenings’ among the consuming masses are dismissed as conspiracy theories. Just as Foucault explained, knowledge and power are intertwined; these forms of knowledge do not possess the power as the mainstream modernist-consumer discourse does. This is the ideology that humankind has become so ‘inured, so hopelessly dependent on’.

Neo’s own story mirrors that of Socrates. Socrates was prophecised to be the wisest man in the world – but this is something he did not accept. So, he journeyed to meet the Oracle at Delphi where he reasoned that he was not the wisest man – it was this awareness that there was so much unknown to him that truly made him wise. So began Socratic Wisdom, that recognizing the limits of your own knowledge is foundational to develop the drive to learn more. When Socrates entered the temple of the Oracle, he passed under a sign which read ‘know thyself’. Neo’s own journey begins with a prophecy of ‘the One’, he journeys to meet the Oracle where he reasons that he is not The One. He passes under a sign which reads, ‘know thyself’.

#### 4.2.2 Plato's Theory of Forms:

The *allegory of the cave* is not only a metaphor for the illusory realities we live in, but also ties in with Plato's **theory of forms**, known also as *Platonic Idealism*, wherein he (Plato) distinguishes between real and illusory forms, particular and ultimate forms (sometimes known as Platonic forms). For example, a table, as we know and identify it, is based on the **use of senses**; we can see the table, we can touch the table – thus we perceive the table as being real. This is the particular form of table. However, the table, over time will be destroyed and reduced to nothingness once more. The quality of its 'table-ness' is eternal and ultimate, and cannot be perceived by our senses, but rather by our mind's grasping of the concept of 'table' and 'table-ness'. Plato attempts to enlighten us as to our misperceptions of what is 'real' purely based on what we can identify through our senses; this to Plato, is less-real than the concepts that our minds grasp. Plato doesn't theorise this position through using physical objects - for example, when explaining the Forms, he generally discusses the virtuous qualities; piety, beauty, goodness, justice – the point he makes is that "we don't grasp the Forms with our bodily senses but rather with our minds" (Conard, 2008, p. 211). He further posits that the less our understandings have to do with our body, with our physical senses, then the stronger and purer the grasp of the Form shall be. Plato says that particulars simply 'participate' in the Forms; and the participatory nature is what credits the particulars with aspects of the ultimate forms (beauty, justice) (Conard, 2008). Particulars are transient, destined to fade away, but the Forms are everlasting – thus constituting the ultimate reality. We have been socialised into the belief that what is **real** is what we can identify through our senses; "Plato, on the contrary, thinks this is exactly wrong. What you can touch, taste, or smell is - for that very reason - less real" (Conard, 2008, p. 211). The following quote from the first film can also be read as an allusion to Plato's theory of forms.

***Morpheus** (asking Neo): "What is real? How do you define 'real'? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see - then 'real' is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain."*

(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996).

Saussure's ideas of signification discussed earlier (Chapter 3) bear certain similarities to Plato's. More importantly however it shows a heritage of this type of inquiry into the relationship between language and society. Plato's focus seems to be more on the implied concept-hood of every sign. This idea of 'concept-hood', when returning to Baudrillard, helps us understand *Hyperreality* better. The signs and codes that populate our consciousness are simulacra, thus the concepts that are real to us, are *hyperreal*. Thus, constructs like patriotism, masculinity and honour are sold to us through

advertisements and we easily and eagerly eat them up because our knowledge about our own knowledge regarding these concepts is not complete.

*“It’s what you grasp with your intellect, removed from the body, that’s ultimately real.”*

(Conard, 2008, p. 211).

### **4.3 Chapter Summary:**

In this chapter, we explored the ideas of Baudrillard and Plato. Though there are other great thinkers whose works are employed in the trilogy; it is my belief that Baudrillard’s and Plato’s vision are necessary for the study as they are used to design the settings of the film and they are necessary in continuing the line of enquiry into the human condition that we have established. Other thinkers whose works are central to the trilogy and who will be explored later in this study are Friedrich Nietzsche and Robert Nozick. Hyperreality, ideology (as discussed in the second chapter), as well as social constructionism (chapter three) will feature heavily in the discussions in the following chapter on Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model of Human Development – the first of the prominent psychological theories to be explored.

# **Part Two: The** **Psychological Perspectives**



The previous chapters explored a number of philosophical perspectives that conceptualize the role of particular sociological and ideological forces in society today; from Plato's concern with ignorance and enlightenment, to the Marxist conceptions of ideology and the Neo-Marxist thinkers of the Frankfurt School, the Structuralist and Social Constructionist perspectives on language, Baudrillard's vision of a *hyperreality*, Foucault's ideas about ideology and power, and Althusser's conception of the *ideological state apparatus*.

These discussions however have so far been situated within the discourse of philosophy. The initial argument of this study was to explore philosophical, social constructionist and post-structuralist perspectives on society; and to see whether science-fiction could be a means to communicate these perspectives and ideas by critiquing society and the societies featured in their narratives. The next part of this study shall attempt to explore whether these philosophical ideas can be situated within psychological understandings of human development, learning and cognition. The next two chapters shall introduce discussions from within the discourse of psychology and attempt to bridge both philosophical and psychological discourse to elucidate a clearer understanding of what constitutes subjectivity in society today.

Though it has much in common with the field of philosophy, the field of psychology lends itself more to the biomedical field; that is to say it has been a field that develops its understandings of human-beings so as to treat them. In this sense, psychology has established itself as a more practical field. The philosophical discussions made earlier are more focused on epistemological understandings of society whereas the discussions to be covered from psychology are more focused on understandings of development and learning at the level of the individual.

Having developed a critical perspective on society using the previous discussions (Plato's cave, Baudrillard's Desert, the perspectives of Karl Marx, Social Constructionism and others); we will now explore these ideas further and move closer towards developing a more complete model of subjectivity by placing them within these established psychological frameworks on development and cognition. The purpose of this theoretical exercise will be to critically examine these theories; ones that have been called on time and again in the fields of psychology and education. These theories have been important in contributing to mainstream psychology's understanding of the individual and has subsequently influenced the fields of education, sociology, politics and others. This perspective on these theories recognises their importance in contributing to the dominant discourses in society. According to Foucault's perspectives on power and knowledge, these theories would both be significant elements within society as they support the dominant power structure. The discourse of education for

instance is not free from communicating a biased perspective on the world and encouraging a view that supports the larger capitalist framework. By critically exploring these theories using the discussions we made earlier, we may provide an alternate view to the dominant understandings of development and cognition.

Psychology observes behaviour and makes certain assertions based on those observations which it then attempts to put into practice. However, psychology tends to work with an understanding of what is 'normal' behaviour and most forms of psychological practice seek to bring the individual back in line with what is considered 'normal'. A criticism of this approach recognizes that what is considered normal is usually determined by the status quo and the needs and expectations of society upon the individual. Some of these expectations however, like being a good parent and spouse, are vital to the life of the individual. The use of the perspectives of psychology in this study acknowledges this criticism of its practise; however, for this study we shall focus on psychology's perspectives on human development, cognition and learning and shall attempt to situate the earlier philosophical discussions within these psychological frameworks.

The thrust of this chapter (5) shall look to situate the discussions on ideology as well as Buadrillard's *Hyperreality* within the Ecological Model of Human Development as conceptualized by Urie Broffenbrenner. Chapter 6 shall focus on the work of Jean Piaget, a pioneer of the Cognitive Perspective in psychology. Piaget worked extensively with children and attempted to understand how they grow, particularly focusing on the development of their capacities to learn, think and do. Piaget's ideas are used in many preschool and academic environments.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **Broffenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory**

Urie Broffenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory of Human Development has played a central role in modern psychology's understanding of the human-being. Broffenbrenner's work inspired many great psychological thinkers including Kurt Lewin (the founder of social psychology) and Lev Vygotsky. This study shall use the 'mature' version of Broffenbrenner's theory; the post-1990 version. Broffenbrenner was a very self-reflective theorist; the changes made to the theory after its initial conception in the late 70's featured the inclusion of the 'Person Process Context Time' feature, shifting the focus from only contextual factors to include individual characteristics, time, and further understandings of contextual factors.

### **5.1 Broffebrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development:**

Urie Broffebrenner conceptualised human development as being a function of many forces impacting upon the individual – not just biological, but forces from the larger environment. He saw these forces as existing at many levels, being embedded in 'systems' which the individual is situated within. According to Broffebrenner, in order to understand human development, one must focus on the entire ecological system in which human beings are embedded. Broffebrenner's ecological system is made up of five systems; ranging from the microsystem (developing person's immediate environment) to the macrosystem (culture, bodies of knowledge present in society) (Broffebrenner, 1994).

Broffebrenner's theory has great importance to this study. Broffebrenner saw development as being much more than an intrinsic essentialistic process. Like Plato, Marx and Baudrillard, he envisioned the effect of larger social forces acting upon the individual. However, unlike Plato, Marx and Baudrillard, Broffebrenner relegated the forces of ideology and culture to what he called the 'macrosystem'; the larger external system in which the other systems are embedded. It is my opinion that these forces of socialisation should be brought to the fore of human development and should be conceptualised as being 'microsystem' interactions. I shall review Broffebrenner's theory and attempt to understand what constitutes a microsystem interaction, and how ideology and Hyperreality can exist at the microsystem level.

### **5.2 Broffebrenner's Propositions:**

The model can be broken down into: Process; Person; Context and Time (PPCT). *Process* refers to the proximal processes, considered the engines of development. This was one of the main differences between the 90's version of the model and the initial 70's version – the earlier versions were more focused on ecological factors solely and gradually, Broffebrenner looked to establish a connection between aspects of the context of the individual, and some developmental outcome. Proximal processes help the developing individual understand their world and their place in it. Broffebrenner formulated two propositions to introduce the Process Person Context Time factors:

- Human development takes place through processes called 'proximal processes'. These are made up of reciprocal interactions between an active bio-psychological human organism and the **persons, objects and symbols** in its **immediate environment** (Broffebrenner, 1994). These processes must occur **regularly** and over **extended periods** of time in order to be effective in the development process

(Broffebrenner, 1994). As development furthers, the processes become progressively more complex. Some examples of proximal processes cited in the literature are: parent-child and child-child interactions, learning new skills, reading, group or solitary play, studying, athletic activities and performing complex tasks (Broffebrenner, 1994).

- The second proposition states that the power of these processes varies as a function of the characteristics of the individual and the environmental contexts. This is where the *Person*, *Context* and *Time* factors come in.

*Person*: Broffebrenner recognised the role of individual characteristics affecting proximal processes. He broke these down into; (a) demand, (b) resource and (c) force.

1. Demand refers to those characteristics that play out as immediate stimulus to another person influencing interaction because of the ‘meanings’ read through these characteristics. Age, race, gender – these are examples of *demand* characteristics as they facilitate certain immediate assumptions and expectations about the developing individual.
2. Resource characteristics cannot be immediately ‘read’ but can be induced based on demand characteristics. Past experiences, emotional states, social class, wealth and background are examples of resource characteristics.
3. Force characteristics have to do with variations of temperament, motivation, compassion and resistance.

### **5. 3 Broffebrenner and the Ecological Environment:**

*Context* relates to the environment of the developing individual. Broffebrenner conceptualised the developing individual’s environment as being made up of a number of systems embedded within each other. The innermost system is the microsystem and the farthest system is the macrosystem.

- (i) **The Microsystem:** The microsystem is made up of the immediate environments that the individual operates in; as the person grows, they operate in more and more microsystems. The microsystem is comprised of patterns of activities, roles and interpersonal relationships. These interactions are regular, predictable and repetitive. Microsystem patterns are face-to-

face, and bear particular symbolic or physical features that invite, permit or inhibit further engagement. The proximal processes operating within the microsystem function to produce and sustain development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The home is the primary microsystem, other examples include the classroom and peer groups. As an individual grows they will operate in more microsystems, like the workplace. Bronfenbrenner conceptualised the microsystem as being the most influential in shaping stable aspects of the developing person; these features are likely to develop into repetitive and predictable patterns.

- (ii) **The Mesosystem:** This 'middle' system is comprised of linkages between settings that feature the developing person; mesosystems are made up of a number of microsystems. A common example is the relationship between the home and the school, parents and teachers, or the home and the workplace.
- (iii) **The Exosystem:** This system is comprised of linkages between two or more settings with at least one setting not featuring the developing individual. These are patterns of activities and relationships that indirectly affect the developing individual; example, certain decisions and movements at the parent's workplace may impact on the developing person.
- (iv) **The Macrosystem:** The macrosystem is the larger outer-system which has the three previous systems embedded in it. The macrosystem is the level in which cultural patterns are rooted. This includes religion and belief-systems, life-styles, bodies of knowledge and ideology. Bronfenbrenner conceptualised many of the patterns embedded within the inner-systems as having their roots in the macrosystem. It is comprised of the 'overarching pattern of micro-, meso- and exosystems characteristic of a particular culture or subculture with particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources...' (Bronfenbrenner, 1994. p. 40).
- (v) **The Chronosystem:** This final system extends the model to include the influence of *Time*. This includes changes in cultural, social, material and technological modes; these are all seen as having an effect on the environment, on the proximal processes, and thus on the developing individual. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) also wrote about micro-time and meso-time; micro-time refers to what is occurring during a particular interaction or activity, and meso-time refers to the regularity and consistency of certain interactions and activities within the individual's environment. The term macro-time has also been used; however this refers to the *chronosystem*.

#### **5. 4 Media as a Proximal Process:**

The inclusion of the Chronosystem recognises the effects of changing cultural dynamics on the development of the individual. Examples relevant to this study that we have covered are the increasing power of the hyperreal mediums and the culture industry; the spread of consumerism; the rise of social networking forms which have enabled interactions that were not possible a decade ago; the ever-increasing presence of advertising's symbols and signs in our micro-, meso- and exosystems.

According to Broffenbrenner, a proximal process occurring within the microsystem is not limited only to other people in the immediate environment only, but also to **objects** and **symbols**. These processes are reciprocal and need to occur regularly for them to impact upon the developing person. Microsystem patterns are face-to-face, and offer either physical or symbolic inhibitions or invitations for further engagement. Group or solitary play, learning and reading are examples cited in the literature of proximal processes. Having examined this, let us consider the nature of television-viewing in the average household. There have been numerous studies into the effects of television on children; however, for the purpose of this study the focus will be on the rate of television-viewing so as to establish the possibility of television-viewing being a proximal process.

The following is a set of statistics on television-viewing taken from the University of Michigan Health System's webpage on '*Your Child - Development and Behaviour Resource*' (Boyse, 2010).

- On average, children ages 2-5 spend 32 hours a week in front of a television.
- Kids ages 6-11 spend about 28 hours a week in front of the television. The vast majority of this viewing (97%) is of live broadcasts.
- 71% of 8- to 18-year-olds have a television in their bedroom; 54% have a DVD/VCR player, 37% have cable/satellite, and 20% have premium channels.
- Media technology now offers more ways to access television content, such as on the Internet, cell phones and iPods. This has led to an increase in time spent viewing television-content, even as TV-set viewing has declined. 41% of television-viewing is now online, time-shifted, DVD or mobile.
- In about two-thirds of households, the television is "usually" on during meals.
- In 53% of households of 7th- to 12th-graders, there are no rules about television watching.
- Kids with a TV in their bedroom spend an average of almost 1.5 hours more per day

watching TV than kids without a TV in the bedroom.  
(Boyse, 2010).

Television-viewing occurs within the microsystem. It is a regular activity and, as a mode of entertainment, bears symbols and features that invite further engagement. Its reciprocal nature is based on its content being tailored for particular audiences through age-group programming, various genres, sports and more. It is direct and face-to-face and very often competes with other interactions within the microsystem, for example: parent-child interaction and child-child interaction. Television-viewing can be considered a solitary form of play: it entertains, enthralls and invites. By Broffenbrenner's descriptions of the microsystem and proximal processes, I believe television-viewing constitutes a proximal process and thus has a strong influence on the developing individual.

This understanding of television-viewing as a proximal process has several implications for this study. The most important being that television is a primary mode of cultural and ideological dissemination; it is one of the hyperreal mediums as we suggested earlier. As a proximal process situated within the microsystem, television has the power to strongly influence the most stable aspects of a child's development. Many studies have looked into the effects of the violent and sexual content of television shows, but this study is focused on the spread of consumerism, capitalist ideology and the entrenching of the social consciousness within Hyperreal-domains. Through television, the signs and symbols of hyperreal consumer culture are flooded into our microsystems regularly.

A second implication of television-viewing as a proximal process is that other forms of cultural change (as recognised by the chronosystem), particularly technological advancements, may have brought along new proximal processes. The internet, mobile communications, instant messaging and the many social networking platforms enable people come into regular contact with other people. However, as we discussed earlier, these are disingenuous forms of interactions. They are simulated interactions. In recent years, a wave of social networking forms has washed over the globe and it has sparked many studies into the effects of Facebook and social networking usage. According to Emil Protalinski (2012), 38% of children on Facebook are under the age of 13 with 4% being under the age of 6. According to Statistic Brain (2014), there are 1.4 billion social networking users; the average amount of time spent on Facebook ranges between 15-20 hours a month; 70 billion pieces of content are shared each month; and the average amount of tweets a day are between 190-200 million.

## **5. 5. Cultivation Theory:**

Having established the premise that hyperreal mediums function within our microsystems and some (television) constitute proximal processes, it may be too simplistic to then suggest necessarily that Hyperreality (communicated through the media) is a feature of human development. Media and communications research avoid making such simplistic unidirectional ideas about effects of television and media. Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, 1969), was the first idea proposed to facilitate the development of an understanding of television's impact in a more concrete, less-vague fashion. In the mid-1960's, Professor George Gerbner (1969) began the 'Cultural Indicators' research project which focused on the effect of television on the perception of people's views of the world. In 1976 (Gerbner & Gross), as part of the Cultural Indicators project, he published a piece called *Living with Television* within which he formulated a theory called **Cultivation Theory** or **the Cultivation Hypothesis**. Gerbner posits that television viewing has a gradual and indirect effect on its viewers; it portrays an inaccurate social reality which exposure to, over time, begins to *cultivate* the same version of social reality within the minds of its viewers. The effects have a collective impact, shaping not just individual, but cultural perceptions of social reality. Gerbner argues that the media cultivate particular ideas, attitudes and values creating a 'mainstream' form of social thought and social reality which over time, brings the social consciousness into congruence and alignment with these perceptions. Gerbner sees television as being the common symbolic environment of our age; an instrument of mass communication, socialisation and information-spreading as entertainment (Gerbner, 1976).

Cultivation Theory is considered a *stalagmite* theory; it occurs gradually, over time. It is not an immediate effect. The social reality present on the television is not injected into the social consciousness; rather it is *cultivated* gradually.

"One viewing of a hip-hop music video will not change how an individual views women, but a decade of exposure to this genre of music videos may have a profound effect on how a person thinks of the female sex." (Kenix, 2012. p. 139)

According to Gerbner, television-viewing is not a wholly unidirectional and deterministic practice; but there is an interaction between the medium and the viewing public. Gerbner (1976) says that the 'elements of cultivation' do not originate with television solely, but rather combine with layers of contextual elements (personal, demographic, social variables) that collectively determine the effect and shape of the cultivation process. However, Gerbner also posits that it is television that helps to cultivate the 'meaning' of these contextual elements. While a viewer's age, gender, or social status may make a difference in the cultivation process, it is television and the cultivation process that define what it means, for example, to be an adolescent male in high school from a working class family



(Gerbner, 1976). Gerbner also says that this is so because children are born into a symbolic environment with television as its mainstream. Children begin viewing before they begin to read or speak. The cultivation process has its roots in early childhood (Gerbner, 1976). Similarly, following Gerbner's research, many other studies were done to prove that Gerbner's portrayal of the absorption of televised ideologies was not so deterministic; that there are other variables which work with, or deny, the cultivation process. Collectively, these studies achieved only to bring certain variables to light which affect the degree of the cultivation process, but none so far can deny the process. Gerbner himself addressed certain mitigating issues; he discovered that **lived experience**, and levels of **personal interaction** make a difference (Gerbner, 1976). When the medium is the only source of information, then the cultivation process is stronger.

According to Kenix (2014, p. 1): "Since Gerbner's breakthrough research, there have been countless studies arguing for mitigating factors against the cultivation of beliefs through the media, but **none have found that the cultivation effect does not exist.**"

According to Gerbner, for many people television offers not just entertainment, but a complex system of ideas, values, opinions that is engrossing and compelling. It has become a major vehicle of cultural participation (Gerbner, 1976). It is the central hub for the communication of ideologies and values. Returning to Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of the Culture Industry, we see much in common with Gerbner's Cultivation Theory. However, unlike Gerbner, Horkheimer and Adorno's work focused on the effects and on the nature of the content rather than the actual dynamics of the process. Gerbner's work answers the 'how' question. Using Message System Analysis (Gerbner, 1976), a tool used for making "systematic reliable and cumulative observations about television content" (Gerbner, 1976, p. 16), Gerbner is able to plot the difference between on-screen social reality and actual social reality. Message System Analysis, he says, was used to assess the "most representative, stable and recurrent aggregate patterns of messages which total communities are exposed to over long periods of time" (Gerbner, 1976, p. 16-17). Gerbner says that this type of information though it cannot be "taken at face value as evidence of 'impact'", is a critical component in understanding the influence of television in plotting the trajectory of the growth and development of social reality within the broader social consciousness.

An extract from Gerbner's work cites such examples:

*The myth of the middle class as the all-American norm pervades the world of television. Nearly seven out of 10 television characters (nearly 70 percent)*

*appear in the "middle-middle" of a five-way classification system. Most of them are professionals and managers. Blue collar and service work occupies 67 percent of all Americans but only 10 percent of television characters. In the world of prime time the state acts mostly to fend off threats to law and order in a mean and dangerous world. Enforcing the law of that world takes nearly three times as many characters as the number of all blue collar and service workers. The typical viewer of an average week's prime time programs encounters seemingly realistic and intimate (but usually false) representations of the life and work of 30 police officers, seven lawyers, and three judges, but only one engineer or scientist and very few blue-collar workers. Again, nearly everybody appears to be comfortably managing on an 'average' income of the mythical norm of 'middle class.*

(Gerbner, 1976. p. 18-19)

Gerbner's Cultivation Hypothesis is of particular importance to this study as it deals with the 'how' question. It provides a framework with which we can better understand the adoption of televised ideologies; and by extension, ideas communicated through all forms of media. Gerbner's study was done before the internet held the lofty position that it holds today. The 'common symbolic environment' now has other outlets and extensions and governs more space and power than it did when Gerbner's initial study was done.

#### **5. 6. Cultivation Theory, Hyperreality and the Culture Industry:**

Gerbner's work has provided us with useful tools for understanding the connection between televised ideas, and the adoption of these ideas by the broader society. Horkheimer, Adorno and Baudrillard's ideas reflect similar stances on media. For Horkheimer and Adorno, media is an instrument through which the Culture Industry operates; serving the needs of the powerful, it disseminates consumer ideologies and serves us 'products' which placate and manipulate us into passivity. Horkheimer and Adorno point out that the media is governed by corporations and politicians who seek to further their own interests by propagating a culture of consumerism laden with values like lavishness, fetishism, and wastefulness. Similarly, Gerbner (1976, p. 14) says: "Institutional needs and objectives influence the creation and distribution of mass-produced messages which create, fit into, exploit, and sustain the needs, values and ideologies of mass publics."

For Baudrillard, media forms communicate a version of reality that draws codes from

the actual reality, but collectively constructing an illusion. Gerbner's ideas reflected this; recall the example of law-men, of the pervasive middle-class, of comfortable and luxurious living on average incomes - these are the signs and codes of the real. Over-amplified in the media, these ideas are grown and *cultivated* in the social consciousness. Thus, the social consciousness accepts a version of reality based on the signs and codes of the actual reality, but ultimately, a version of reality without any original, one of the medium's own making; a *Hyperreality*. The social reality 'cultivated' in the minds of the viewers is the *Hyperreality* that Baudrillard describes. Gerbner's assertion is that the televised social reality is the social reality we have come to accept as truth mirrors Baudrillard's claim that the simulated social reality has become the world we live in, and the reality left behind is the *desert of the real*.

*Cultivation analysis concentrates on the enduring and common consequences of growing up and living with television: the cultivation of stable, resistant, and widely shared assumptions, images, and conceptions reflecting the institutional characteristics and interests of the medium itself.*

(Gerbner, 1976. p. 34)

What we have now is a way of seeing the relationship between exposure to television – a proximal process affecting human development; the cultivation process that this exposure facilitates; and the ideologies of the *Culture Industry* and *Hyperreality* transmitted through the cultivation process. The cultivation process serves as 'the missing link' in the chain between human development in contemporary society, and postmodern philosophical perspectives like Hyperreality and the culture industry. By connecting Gerbner to the work of Broffenbrenner, Baudrillard, Horkeimer and Adorno, we may facilitate a more concrete examination of the connection between human development, *Hyperreality* and the *Culture Industry*.

### **5. 7 Broffenbrenner's Model, Cultivation Theory, Hyperreality and the Culture Industry**

Recapping our discussion earlier in this chapter, according to Broffenbrenner, the most influential system in the ecology of human development is the microsystem, responsible for the creation of the most stable traits of the developing person's personality. Broffenbrenner also proposes that development occurs through 'proximal processes' within the immediate environment. These are made up of reciprocal interactions between an active bio-psychological human organism and the **persons, objects and symbols** in its **immediate environment** (Broffenbrenner, 1994, p. 38). These processes must occur **regularly** and over **extended periods** of time. Having examined the nature of

media interaction in contemporary society, we have concluded and proposed, that television viewing, and other media interactions, constitute proximal processes.

Taking off from this point, we will now explore what implications cultivation theory has for this understanding of human development. Cultivation theory proposes that television viewing is responsible for determining or ‘cultivating’ viewer’s perceptions and beliefs of social reality. Television-viewing, as we have said, is a proximal process. Therefore, it can be understood that the cultivated ideas and values transmitted within this proximal process are central to the development of the individual’s most stable traits and characteristics.

However, Gerbner has also recognised other mitigating factors which we, having examined Broffebrenner’s model, understand as the factors which Broffebrenner himself said would affect the proximal process and the outcome under consideration (cultivated television perceptions of social reality). Gerbner cited lived experience, and interactions with cohesive peer groups or parental guidance (Gerbner, 1976) as influencing levels of cultivated television-perspectives. Gerbner sees these three factors as influencing the outcome between amount of television viewed, and level of adoption of televised perspectives of social reality. Broffebrenner’s *Person* factors may also play a role here; *demand*, *resources* and *force*. According to Gerbner, television itself cultivates the ‘meaning’ of the *demand* and the *resource* characteristics as well, when he says that television helps cultivate the ‘meaning’ of certain contextual factors. The force characteristics however, vary according to the individual and can either further the level of cultivation or reduce it. It must be noted that essentially, Gerbner’s mitigating influences all relate to information sources. Information can be gained through lived experience, peer groups, and parental interaction; where these fail, media forms usually step in. A simple example of hyperreal knowledge for instance, is the widely ‘known’ symbolism of Paris as a romantic place, the city of love. However, most people who carry this belief have never been to Paris, and this symbolism has been transmitted through media forms over time. This is very similar to the cultivation experience as described by Gerbner (1976). The perspective of Paris’s romantic symbolism has been featured in many movies, advertisements and the sort over many generations. Peer groups and parental relations may also be information sources, but their information may have also been cultivated through media, thus reinforcing the media perspective.

Lived experience, parents and peer groups cannot match the level of information disseminated, or the degree of immersion invited through the wide array of televised content. This dynamic leaves us with multiple sources of hyperreal information; if the media are the primary cultivators, then parental relations or peer groups that reinforce such cultivated information, can be

considered as secondary sources. As more and more generations are exposed to the ever-developing scope and reach of media, our information sources are likely to become increasingly saturated with hyperreal information.

The nature of the content televised was not the focus of Gerbner's study; his focus was on examining the dynamic of inaccurate content transmitted manifesting in inaccurate perceptions received. The nature of televised content was well conceptualised by Horkheimer and Adorno, as well as by post-structuralist thinker Jean Baudrillard. We now have a framework that positions television viewing as a proximal process in human development; we have a way of seeing that television is not solely entertainment, but the cultivated values therein constitute the proximal process affecting development. The content – consumer ideologies, the culture industry and *Hyperreality*, is cultivated within the individual and the broader social consciousness through this proximal process.

### **5.8 Chapter Summary:**

The aim of this chapter was firstly, to explore human development as conceptualised by Urie Broffenbrenner; and secondly, to attempt to take Hyperreal, ideological values out of the macrosystem, and into the microsystem. From a psychological perspective, the implications of this 'switch' on the way we see human development are huge. Cultivation Theory helped facilitate a better view of cultural values being cultivated through television and media. Having established television-viewing as a proximal process within the microsystem, Cultivation Theory provides the link to help concretize this new understanding of ideological values being transmitted to and cultivated within the microsystem.

## Chapter 6

### Piaget, Learning and Cognition

#### 6.1. Jean Piaget:

Jean Piaget (1896 – 1980) was a Swiss psychologist who focused on how children develop the capacities to think and learn. He became intrigued by the reasons children gave for their wrong answers during his time at the Binet Institute where he worked developing French versions of questions on English intelligence tests.

#### **Piaget's Theory of Cognition:**

Piaget saw humankind's ability to think as being part of their genetic natural inheritance; just as birds can fly and fish can swim. Piaget's basic idea was that our senses take in information from our environment which our brains then process; this information has the ability to maintain or alter our behaviour. This process of information obtainment, organisation and behaviour is called **Cognition**. Piaget's theory has three basic components; (i) schemas, the foundational 'structures' of knowledge; (ii) the adaptation process; and (iii) the three stages of development.

- Schemas (plural schemata) are the building blocks of any individual's knowledge base. It is useful to consider schemas to be 'units' of knowledge, organised groupings of information each relating to certain aspect of the world. The first schemas children develop are reflexes; these are involuntary, for example, breathing, or blinking when something irritates your eye. Every individual has different life experiences from the next, resulting in different individuals developing different schemas. Piaget called these variant structures. The second type of schema is called operations; this refers to the combination of a set of schemata to achieve a particular goal/task. Schemas and operations occur as we interact with people and our environment – **they are mostly learned** (Davenport, 1994).
- The process of adaptation involves the following; **assimilation** – when the existing schemas are capable of processing information from a new object or stimulus; and **accommodation** – this is when existing schemas do not work and need to be changed to deal with new situation/stimulus. **Equilibration** and **Disequilibration** are the processes that move or hamper learning and development. When accommodation successfully adjusts schemas to deal with new objects/stimulus, equilibration is achieved and development moves forward. However, when the

current schemas cannot be adequately adjusted, the result is disequilibrium – this is an unpleasant distressing feeling that disrupts the process of cognition (Davenport, 1994).

- Piaget conceptualised the developing child as moving from one stage of development through to the next. The first stage is the **Sensory-motor** stage; the second is the **Pre-Operations** stage. The Third and Fourth are the **Concrete** and **Formal Operations** stage (Davenport, 1994). Piaget conceptualised these stages as occurring between certain age groups; however, a number of studies have arisen refuting this claim and have demonstrated that there are no such age-parameters to the stages of development. These studies however do not deny the existence of the stages.
- **Sensory-motor Stage (birth – 2 years old):** This stage is characterised by egocentric behaviours (focused only on the baby's needs and interests – unable to take others needs into account) and reflexive schemas that Piaget believed human beings are born with; such as the suckling reflex, or the reflex action of turning the head towards a sound or sensation. According to Piaget, after a few weeks babies learn to use certain muscles, achieve certain movements and begin to interpret certain sensory inputs. He termed these first ideas that babies develop to function and deal with their world, **action schemas** (Davenport, 1994). He said that babies used these schemas to further their explorations and understandings by interacting with various objects and stimulus through touch, sucking and shaking. He believed that the varied and diverse use of action schemas to discover functions and uses was evidence of intelligence in babies.
- **Pre-Operations Stage (2 – 7 years):** One of the most important features of this developmental stage as conceptualised by Piaget is **Symbolisation**. This refers to the growing ability of children to understand and begin to use symbols; whereby something can represent something else (Davenport, 1994). Words are symbols, gestures are symbols, expressions are symbols – the increased repertoire of symbols that the child can manipulate is linked to the imaginative capacities of the child. The development of language-use by the child sees the birth of 'meaning' in the child's life. Exploration and discovery furthers this search for meaning. In this sense, however, meaning is not used to refer to questions about the meaning of life, but of

the meaning of symbols. The use of symbols is central to structuralist, post-structuralist and social-constructionist interpretations of the world and of society; this stage of symbolisation is of great importance to this study. **Egocentrism**, **Animism**, and **Moral Realism** are other features of this stage (Davenport, 1994). Egocentrism refers to the solipsistic view of the world that the child has; they cannot think of other people's needs, interests and points of view. **Decentering** is the ability of a child to begin to be able to consider other people's needs and interests. Piaget said that children over the age of seven can begin to decentre, however this was a point of contention among many other thinkers who argued that the age-parameters are not fixed and that younger children can decentre. **Animism** is the view held by children that all objects have a form of consciousness – this is linked to Egocentrism, as they cannot see things from other perspectives, they assume that everyone and everything is like themselves. **Moral Realism** refers to the child's beliefs that their ways of seeing right and wrong is shared by everyone else. Again, this is linked to Egocentrism.

- **Concrete-Operations Stage (7 – 11):** Thinking is now becoming more adult-like, children are developing the capacity to link various schemas together to achieve certain tasks – this is called *operations* (Davenport, 1994). In this stage, children's thinking is becoming less and less egocentric, their abilities to perform operations are developing but it requires manipulation of the objects they are thinking about. For example, children in this stage use abacus to perform arithmetic whereas older children past this stage can manipulate their thoughts and don't need the object (abacus).
- **Formal-Operations stage (11-16):** Children in this stage possess the capacities to think abstractly, much like adults. They can manipulate ideas and objects with their thoughts rather than physically manipulating them. Their thinking is also markedly decentred compared to the egocentric thinking of previous stages. Also, their ability to manipulate ideas opens up wider, more abstract concepts for them to think about. Issues like morality, honesty and purpose are now cognitively 'available'.



## **6.2. Symbolisation and Social Constructionism:**

The pre-operations stage sees the birth of the ability to understand and use signs and symbols. For Piaget, symbolisation is the ability to think in ideas and communicate those ideas through use of symbols. It would seem then, that Piaget's understandings of language reflect the modernistic view, wherein language is a 'system of labels which we use to communicate, organize and understand our world' (Chapter 3). Social Constructionism however, views language as the key determinant of thought. Thus, if there is no way to express a particular concept in a language, then that concept cannot exist for the people who use that language. Returning to the discussions of discourse, if we accept that the symbolisation 'ability' begins the accrual of signs and symbols in the child, then it also begins the process of 'discourse-hood'. Early in life we see evidence of children accepting or rejecting certain ideas based on their relevance to certain discourses. For example, little boys will often reject wearing pink or playing with dolls because it's for girls. Though this example is very basic and is based on gendered ideals, it is evidence of 'discourse-hood'.

In Chapter 3, we said that; "These concepts do not pre-date the existence of humans, however they do pre-date our own personal existence; **thus, when we are born we are forced to learn of and understand ourselves through these concepts**". This statement refers to this symbolisation process. Our use of signs, symbols, concepts and constructs begins in early childhood – though the signs and concepts themselves pre-date us. We are born into a world of established signs and symbols. Piaget said that 'thinking' is our unique genetic inheritance as human beings; however, so is the use of language – and the use of language is intimately tied up with 'thinking'. H.G Wells recognized this significance; and in his brilliant book, *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896), the Doctor stimulates the larynx of the animals in his experiments so that they can form coherent sound-symbols. This was the foundation for their developing ability to think. Dr Moreau's experiments with the larynx could be read as an attempt to induce symbolisation in the animals.

Thus, the symbolisation process on the surface sees the beginning of the use of symbols by children, but, from a social constructionist perspective, it sees the beginning of the use of pre-determined signs and symbols to structure our patterns of thought and our views of the world. In the literature on Piaget, many examples used to explain the process of **adaptation** in children mirror many of the examples used in literature on social constructionism to explain how we acquire our knowledge of and use of signs and symbols. McLeod (2009) describes the adaptation process using the example of dog and cat. A child, having learnt to identify a dog, thus has a schema about dogs. When this child encounters a cat, they will incorrectly identify it as a dog as they will try to assimilate it initially with

existing schema based on familiar stimuli – four legs, furry, tail. Then they will modify their schema through *accommodation*, and develop a schema for cat. Similarly, Vivian Burr (1995) uses the same example of dog and cat when explaining how a child acquires language and knowledge of concepts. Having learnt of the concept of dog, if a child then encounters a cat (for the first time) they will incorrectly identify it as a dog, based on their knowledge of the concept of dog. Saussure asserted that there is nothing inherently ‘dog’ about the word ‘dog’. Rather it is a concept that we have given certain meanings and ideas to. The child now attempts to work out what ideas and features are different between the concept of ‘dog’ and the concept of ‘cat’, and comes to understand them as separate concepts. Citing this similarity only seeks to empower the social constructionist perspective by finding points of congruency with the cognitive perspective. The difference with regards to this point of congruence is the emphasis of social constructionism on the importance of language in shaping reality. We must remember though, that being anti-essentialist, social constructionism places the psychological centre of gravity in the social and linguistic spaces in which the individual operates. The cognitive perspective rather sees the locus of the psychological centre of gravity as being rooted in the cognitive structures of the mind. This would mean that these two perspectives are likely to conflict in some areas; however, the points of congruency between the two are necessary to develop a complete understanding of the human condition. If we can accept the social constructionist assertion that language determines reality, and language structures thought, then we can extend this into the cognitive domain as well. Without words to describe a particular concept in a language, that concept cannot exist for people who speak that language. Therefore, without language, signs and symbols, how would we develop our schema? Signs are the things that populate our mental life; therefore, signs are necessarily involved in establishing our schemas about the world.

Returning to the child’s process of adaptation, he may have a disequilibrative experience based on the differing features of the cat versus those of the dog; but without a word to describe either animal, without a concept to group these features and ideas together, what would the state of his schema be? Would they not be loose and unformed? Symbolisation acknowledges this assertion; **language is central to the development of our schemas**. The cognitive perspective recognizes the role of language in structuring thought.

If the nature of the signs that come to structure our cognitive schemas are hyperreal, then the resulting schemas would be hyperreal in nature too. That is to say that the schemas we develop about the world would be schemas about *Hyperreality* and not *The Desert of the Real*; they would be schemas about the map and not of the territory.

### **6.3 Cognitive Perspective in Huxley's *Brave New World*:**

In the Soft Dystopia of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the process of *Hypnopedia* is used to inculcate a type of morality (moral framework designed by the state) into the infant-populace as they slept. “*End not mend,*” (*Brave New World*, 1932) is an example of a statement repeated constantly to the infants; meaning if something is broken or damaged, discard it and buy a new one rather than attempting to fix it. These infants grow into beings bearing knowledge of these symbols. Though they may not fully understand the statement as children, the cognitive framework for certain modes of knowledge and behaviour is already established which they will eventually grow into. I.e. Wastefulness and boundless consumption. Though Huxley's concept of *Hypnopedia* is fictional, it is a clear example of the use of the cognitive perspective in science-fiction as the sleep-learning process seeks to establish certain frameworks within the infant's mind. In the second chapter of the novel, the Director explains that the research into *Hypnopedia* was not meant for intellectual purposes as the children would have knowledge of the statements repeated to them, but have no knowledge of what it meant. The principle behind *Hypnopedia*'s prominence and importance is that it facilitated **moral training**. *Hypnopedia* is used to teach lessons such as ‘Elementary Sex’ and ‘Elementary Class-Consciousness’ thus establishing a pre-determined moral framework of accepted promiscuity and widespread prejudice – both which function to maintain the status quo.

*Neo-Pavlovian Conditioning* is a pseudo-psychological technique based on actual psychological theory of learning and conditioning by Ivan Pavlov whose experiment became famously known as ‘Pavlov's Dogs’. This conditioning technique is used to teach children to dislike nature and books. Infants are kept in a nursery where lovely flowers and books are offered to them in an enticing fashion with all the necessary features to create a desire in infants to try to reach for these objects. When the infants draw near to them, a series of electric shocks is administered to the babies. The infants are then offered books and flowers by the nurses whom they turn away from in terror, crying. This procedure is repeated 200 times to ensure absolute conditioning against books and the absence of a love for nature. This was to prevent the children from leaving the cities unnecessarily or reading books – anything that may *decondition* them from the established morality – a clear danger to the status quo.

### **6.4 Piaget's Theory and Cultivation Theory:**

For this study, we will accept the criticisms about the age-parameters and not force them upon our inquiry into cognition and the development of cognitive structures through media forms

resulting in the creation of schemas based on information of a hyperreal nature. The question this study intends to ask, using Piaget's theory of cognition, is 'Do interactions with media forms in today's society contribute to the development of schemata?' According to Piaget, we are born in possession of certain **basic** schemas; we acquire the rest as we progress through life. The more information we encounter (through interaction with others, objects), the more our mind seeks to organise this information – this is the process of **adaptation** (Davenport, 1994). Piaget noted that this process was 'invariant'; that all human beings are in possession of the adaptation and organisation process, whereas the particular schemas one may possess are 'variant' (Davenport, 1994). As we discussed in the previous chapter, media forms (particularly television) provide us with a multitude of information delivered in an entertaining form that invites regular sustained interaction. This is not to say that we are learning to shoot guns and how to talk to girls; but we are introduced to systems of being and thinking that are reified through the media. For instance, the high value placed on fashion is a media-transmitted ideal; we are not learning in particular what to wear or where to shop from, but what is transmitted is the value of fashion, the discourse of fashion. The development of schemas is based on the receiving of information. Information transmitted through the media generally carries ideological and political undercurrents favouring consumerism and reifying and naturalising Western capitalist hegemony. Althusser identified the media as an *Ideological State Apparatus*.

According to Piaget (1958), assimilation and accommodation require a state of active learning and discovery, not a passive state. Piaget believed that the more the child furthers their adaptation process, the more intelligent they become. Television-viewing is generally a passive activity; however, the information received is generally congruent to the broader cultural range of ideas that has been embedded within the society. Therefore, not inciting 'disequilibrative-experiences'. Also, as we mentioned earlier, the information received is not knowledge of particulars, but usually is information that, with certain degrees of repetition, reifies certain ideas and discourses. Media interactions are also not once-off exchanges, but are all around us offering us regular encounters that we mostly cannot ignore, combined with the excitement of desire and the enchantment of play for children, and escapism for adults.

Gerbner's Cultivation Theory (1979) is useful in understanding this dynamic. It must be noted that Gerbner said the cultivation process is one that **occurs over time**, so we cannot pin-point a particular developmental stage where Cultivation 'occurs', however we can understand better how over time, these schemas become reinforced and solidified. New ideas that cannot adequately be assimilated into these long-standing entrenched schemas will create a major disruption in the cognition process,

resulting in disequilibrium and distressing feelings.

According to Gerbner (1979), prolonged exposure over time to television results in the ‘cultivation’ of televised perceptions of the world (with the exception of the mitigating factors that are also related to information sources). The more sustained interactions we have with media forms, the more we develop ‘media-cultivated’ schemas about the world. These schemas are long entrenched within us and by the time we are adults, it is with these schemas that we decide what is real and what is truth. Disruption of these schemas at an adult-stage will result in distress and possibly denial, making it much easier to look away and abandon the new stimulus. This is because these schemas have come to establish the most fundamental beliefs of the world: the individual’s position in the world, religion and cultural traditions, the meaning of regular activity, of cultural and societal modes of interrelationships.

According to Judith Herman (1992), our most basic cognitive structures relating to our position in the world and society are intimately related to our structures of trust. It is this trust that is foundational to the development of a relationship between ourselves and the world. This sense of trust is established in early childhood, in the relationship with the primary caregiver (Herman, 1992). “The belief in a meaningful world is formed in relation to others and begins in earliest life. Basic trust, acquired in the primary intimate relationship, is the foundation of faith” (Herman, 1994. p. 54).

According to Piaget, early childhood – particularly the pre-operations stage - is where a lot of development through discovery takes place. This sense of discovery is foundational on the ability to trust in others and in the world. The trust placed in others is not solely related to their power over the child, but in the power of their views and beliefs over the child’s developing views and beliefs. This sense of trust in the world is demonstrated in the passive absorption of televised content, the trusting enchantment of entertainment. Television shows are designed to be extensions of the home and family; many of the characters in children’s programs bear inviting parental features in an attempt to facilitate a bond and trust with the viewer, thus simulating the relationship with the primary caregiver. It is my belief that this trust is not a once-off bond and does not belong to the particular character, but rather develops with time into a schema about television; a sense of ‘trust’ of televised content through comfort, repetition, entertainment and familiarity. We do not ‘trust’ that what is shown to us through computer graphic is real; we accept that it is not. However, this trust has to do with trusting the world displayed to us on television as being an accurate representation of the world ‘out there’ beyond our homes, beyond our peer groups and beyond our lived experiences. Media forms are constant means of culture-transmission; it is this culture that we begin to trust. As we grow, it is this communication with the outside world that we use to answer the questions about the meaning of life, our place in the

community; this cultural-transmission provides us with the information to establish a schema about the nature and order of society and the world – and our place in it. It is this link with culture that we use to define our ‘personalities’ in relation to what is ‘trending’ and ‘desired’. The ever-changing standards of society’s ideals for what is acceptable and what is taboo; the evolving frameworks laid out for modes of interrelationships between men and women – all of these are communicated to us through television; and are based on the extension of our sense of trust into the televised domain. Our cognitive frameworks about television permit the transmission of these cultural ideas and ideals to us; this is what we accept as real, as accurate – rather than the ideas of the director sitting behind the camera. Thus, not only do we have a cognitive framework about television, but it is television that helps create the cognitive framework through which we perceive the world.

Messages and ideas that disrupt these beliefs are scorned. Returning to Foucault’s ideas about knowledge and power (chapter 3), these counter-cultural influences and ideas are given taboo names, thus placing them in particular categories of discourses which have no power; or not enough power to be considered true knowledge. These discourses would be considered ‘conspiratorial’, or ‘anti-democratic’. They go against the beliefs that carry contemporary globalised society. In the first *Matrix* (1999) film, when Morpheus takes Neo into a version of the construct program designed to replicate the Matrix program to train him, he cautions Neo about the dangers of the people around them, the ‘very minds we are trying to save’. The world of the Matrix has become so deeply formed in their inner-most schemas that disruption of these schemas will lead to excessive levels of distress; their most fundamental beliefs of the world and their position in it will crumble, and they will turn enemy against Neo.

***Morpheus:*** “*The Matrix is a system, Neo. That system is our enemy. But when you're inside, you look around, what do you see? Businessmen, teachers, lawyers, carpenters. The very minds of the people we are trying to save. But until we do, these people are still a part of that system and that makes them our enemy. You have to understand, most of these people are not ready to be unplugged. And many of them are so inured, so hopelessly dependent on the system, that they will fight to protect it.*”  
(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996).

This is also the reason why minds beyond a certain age are not unplugged. The rebels

find it easier to unplug a younger mind; it is easier for them to accept their new reality as the artificial reality has not deeply established itself in their minds. From the cognitive perspective, we understand that the younger mind is still developing its capacities; the structures of the mind are not fully developed yet and can undergo change and alterations more easily than those of an adult mind.

### **6.5 Piaget's Cognitive Theory, Plato's Prisoner, and Neo's Freedom:**

Let us examine Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* and Neo's process of being unplugged from Piaget's cognitive perspective. This would allow us a better insight into understanding ideology from a cognitive perspective and hopefully address the issue of 'red-pill' administering in children to prevent them from growing into 'blue-pill' adults.

The tale of Plato's prisoner reflects the process of adaptation clearly. When he is first unshackled and made to look towards the fire which created the shadows, his mind was in a state of shock and confusion, "*he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him.*" (Plato's *The Republic*; translated by Jowlett, 1894).

The schema that had come to establish reality for him was now incompatible with the information he was receiving. All he had once accepted as real, were merely shadows on a wall.

The feeling of disequilibrium pervades the tale of the prisoner. Once he is unshackled, the process of adaptation begins. What cannot be assimilated must be accommodated to achieve equilibrium. However, this is a distressing and painful process, shattering all the assumptions of truth and reality. Similarly, as seen in the first film, Neo's own disequilibrium is so distressing that it causes him to vomit aboard the *Nebuchadnezzar* as he struggles to accept his 'new' reality. His schema about the world are so firmly developed that Morpheus's implorations to Neo to 'free his mind' is not as simple as Morpheus makes it seem. The 'jump program' scene and the 'sparring program' scene both show Neo's cognitive structures holding out against Morpheus' implorations.

**Morpheus:** "*This is a sparring program, similar to the programmed reality of the Matrix. It has the same basic rules, rules like gravity. What you must learn is that these rules are no different than the rules of a computer system...some of them can be bent. Others...can be broken. Understand?*"  
(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996).

In the sparring program, Morpheus rhetorically asks Neo, "*You think that's air you're*

*breathing now?”* This is effective because Neo’s cognitive structures would lead to the assumption of ‘yes, *I believe it is air*’. Whereas we, and Neo, are aware that it is not air – he is inside a computer system. It cannot be air. His cognitive structures limit his ability as he is still unable to ‘free his mind’. When Neo first visits the Oracle, he encounters the young boy who is staring at a spoon intensely, and then the spoon bends. Neo tries this feat as well but is unsuccessful until the boy advises him.

Boy: *“Do not try and bend the spoon. That's impossible. Instead... only try to realize the truth.”*

Neo: *“What truth?”*

Boy: *“There is no spoon.”*

Neo: *“There is no spoon?”*

Boy: *“Then you'll see that it is not the spoon that bends, it is only yourself.”*

(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996).

The meaning of this perplexing piece of dialogue is that it is not the spoon that needs to be bent, it is your mind. It is your belief about the spoon in your hand that needs adjusting. One of the many ways to interpret this dialogue is that the boy’s advice mirrors the process of accommodation; since the mind requires ‘bending’ and not the spoon, then the cognitive structures of the mind require accommodation and adjustment. The lesson taught here is not that spoons can be physically bent with our minds, but that for Neo, the spoon is an illusion of the Matrix program, and when his mind accepts that what is before him is not real (assimilation), he will be able to bend the spoon. The lesson for us is that though objects in our world are real in the sense that they have a form of physical, tangible existence, the meanings and ideas they have attached to them only exist within our minds. This view sees ‘reality’ as being the result of the interplay between the external world (stimulus) and the existing internal structures of our mind. The spoon is similar to the shadows on the wall. The prisoner, upon seeing the light understands that there are no ‘shadows’ – rather it is the result of the light from the fire shining down upon the objects that pass before it. The form of shadows that the prisoners based their reality upon is different from our understanding of shadows; for them the shadows were symbols with meanings and ideas attached to them. Once he recognises that they are just illusions, he is able to free himself of the resultant mental bondage. He cannot bend the shadow as he is not in an interactive-neural simulation; my belief is that the ‘bending’ can only occur in such a situation. However, the principle of the mind bending holds true in this situation. The prisoner’s ability to bend the shadows



manifests itself in a different form: that is, he is able to break the shackles of meaning and ideology that his cognitive structures about the shadows once held him to. Neo's ability to fly in the Matrix program is based upon this lesson. Whenever he attempts to fly, the ground beneath him and objects around him **bend**. This is indicative of his mental structures bending; utilising the belief that it is not real, he is able to bend the rules which constrain us, rules like gravity, physics and breathing air; that do not apply within the Matrix program.

### **6.6 Chapter Summary:**

This chapter explored Piaget's theory of cognition and attempted to identify points of ideological genesis in the developing person. The process of symbolisation was identified as the beginning of the accrual of the use of signs and symbols from society. Gerbner's Cultivation Theory (1979) was also identified as a prominent process facilitating the development of our cognitive structures. Using Gerbner's ideas, we were able to plot the cultivation of televised ideas and perspectives as necessarily shaping our cognitive structures about society and the world.

## **Part Three:**

# **Social Resistance**

The focus of this part of the study shall be on human agency and the potential for social resistance. The discussions made in the previous chapters provide understandings of language and ideology as powerful social influences collectively influencing consciousness. However, that does not imply that this study does not recognise the potential for social resistance and the utilization of human agency.

One way of understanding human agency in today's society is to recognise it as being engaged in a struggle against the previously mentioned forces of influence. There are two sets of struggles that face human agency. The first is to recognise the limits placed upon agency by the existence of 'repressive' forces in society today, such as the government, the police, the military and the legal system (Althusser's Repressive State Apparatus). Typically, these forces seek to constrain exercises of agency that harm the community, like violent crime. However, they also provide a deterrent against the spread of ideas that flow in opposition to the ideas of the ruling class. The second is to recognise the further level of constraints placed upon agency by the mechanisms of ideology (Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses), the spread of globalization and capitalist consumer culture (Marcuse's One- Dimensional Man), and Foucault's understandings of power and discourse collectively producing subjects. This chapter shall explore theories of agency in relation to the discussions made earlier about society, discourses and social influences.

## **Chapter 7:**

### **The Superman and the Experience Machine**

The works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Robert Nozick can both be read alongside *The Matrix Trilogy*. Their theories about the *Übermensch* and the *Experience Machine* relate to the topic of Social Resistance that we will explore in this part of the study. We will simultaneously call upon discussions made in the previous chapter and work towards a vision of human agency in what has so far been a totalitarian picture of social determinism through media, ideology and language.

#### **7.1 Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch*:**

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) was a German scholar and philosopher whose ideas influenced great thinkers like Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud. It is important to keep in mind that Nietzsche's philosophies were often contradictory and confusing. For this study, our focus will be on his *Übermensch* theory; more specifically it will be based upon a particular interpretation of this theory which sees the *Übermensch* as an individual capable of defying the status quo which governs society. Nietzsche's view of the myth was one where he saw it both as a social illusion, as well as providing

necessary structure and order to society.

### 7.1.1 The *Herd Morality* and the *Übermensch*:

Nietzsche's original conception of these 'myths' was the dominant Christian ideology of the time: the Christian view of sin, repentance and the afterlife. He called this the '*herd morality*' which refers to the status quo of society (Reyburn, 2007). The *Übermensch* was an individual who, like everyone else lives within the illusion (myth), but is simultaneously aware of the illusion and its relation to himself. He is conscious of its existence, its mechanisations and its purposes (Reyburn, 2007). Equipped with this knowledge, he can change and alter the 'rules' of the illusion. For Nietzsche, it was the moral framework of reality that the *Übermensch* can alter, the *herd morality* that governs everyone else. Neo's heroic abilities are born from the same wisdom - that he is living within an illusion. In the first film, during the scene where Neo first encounters Morpheus, we are given more insights into Neo's awareness of the illusion – although at the time it is not a complete awareness, but it exists as Morpheus says, as '*a splinter in your mind*' - the unexplainable idea that Neo had, that '*there is something wrong with the world*' (Morpheus; Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996).

For Neo, it is the 'physical' world of the Matrix program that he is able to alter. Once his consciousness firmly accepts that the Matrix program is not real, he is able to alter and change the rules. Neo failed his first attempt to jump between the two buildings in the jump programme because he still had not completely developed his capacity for 'freeing his mind' of the illusion. The *Übermensch* metaphor of bending the *herd morality* to their own will can also be read in the scene between Neo and the young boy bending spoons at the Oracle's apartment. Neo was able to bend the spoon once he accepted that it was not real, and that there is a relation between himself and the spoon; thus, it was not the spoon that bent, only the perception of the spoon. The truth that the young boy asks Neo to realise is that "*there is no spoon*". Similarly, when Morpheus is educating Neo about the Agents, Neo asks him if he truly frees his mind and achieves his potential will he be able to dodge bullets. Morpheus says no, that if Neo does truly free his mind he won't need to dodge bullets. By this we can infer that the spoon-bending and bullet-dodging which Neo performs are steps along the way to enlightenment, but are not indicators of his total potential being reached. This we see in the final scenes of the movie, where Neo can completely *see* the Matrix program as it is, he can see the illusion as it is, as lines of codes and signs and symbols. This to me is the indication of Neo achieving his complete awareness of the illusion, a state of enlightenment.

**Morpheus:** “I’ve seen an agent punch through a concrete wall. Men emptied entire clips at them and hit nothing but air. Yet, their strength and speed is based on a world built on rules. Because of that, they will never be as strong or as fast as you can be.”

**Neo:** “What are you trying to tell me? That I can dodge bullets?”

**Morpheus:** “No Neo. I’m trying to tell you, that when you’re ready, you won’t have to.”

(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996).

The term *Übermensch* as Nietzsche seemingly intended, means ‘Man Overcoming Self’ or ‘Self-overcoming Man’. Freed from the *herd morality*, the *Übermensch* is able to construct an identity for himself; he is able to define himself through ‘experiments in experience’ (Reyburn, 2007). In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche, 1883), Nietzsche’s protagonist Zarathustra hailed the *Übermensch* as the goal humanity should set for itself. The *Übermensch*, as Zarathustra explains, is of this world; whereas the *herd morality* governing society is of an ‘other-worldly’ (divine, religious) nature leading humankind away from this world, leading his goals and concerns away (Reyburn, 2007). Zarathustra explains that this is due to unhappiness with the state of affairs and humankind’s perceived inabilities to alter them; thus, the *herd morality* effectively shifts the locus of unhappiness away from the status quo, and places it in the realm of divine other-worldly thought where their good deeds can ensure a blissful afterlife. This study will not share in Zarathustra’s focus on the divine; but rather on the new ‘religion’ of the world, the contemporary *herd morality* – consumerism, materialism and the Culture Industry.

For the purpose of this study, two important things must be clarified. Firstly, the use of the term ‘man’ when describing Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* is solely to reflect Nietzsche’s own use of the term. However, this study recognizes the potential for *ubermenschian* qualities between men and women to be equal. Also, the term ‘enlightenment’ used to describe the *ubermensch*’s freedom from the *herd morality* as well as Neo’s ability to see the matrix program, does not reflect enlightenment-era attitudes and ways of thinking. It rather refers to conscious emancipation from the dominant discourses.

### **7.1.2 Herd Morality and Consumer Culture:**

Corporations and governments are the ruling powers of today’s society. Through our earlier discussions, we can identify the burgeoning growth and spread of a new *herd morality* - that of consumerism. As the *herd morality* of Zarathustra’s time shifted the locus of discontentment to the

divine realm, so too does advertising and the media shift the locus of discontentment away from the status quo, and places it in the realm of consumerism where happiness can be ‘bought’.

Returning to chapter two, we discussed the growth of the consumer ideology, how the commoditisation of status was a deliberate ‘technique’ used by the advertisers and corporations to manufacture ‘wants’. Consumerism as it exists today is the *herd morality*. Whereas the Judaeo-Christian *herd morality* nurtured values and qualities like purity, humility, honesty and submission to divine power (Reyburn, 2007), the *herd morality* of today nurtures values like wastefulness, greed, aestheticisation, and artificial obsolescence (Beder, S; 2001).

### 7.1.3 The *Übermensch* as Discourse-user:

In the chapter on social constructionism (chapter three), we discussed the roles of discourses in collectively providing the structure of society. We also said that our identities are constructed out of the discourses made available to us by society; and that these ‘available’ discourses each had a degree of power. The more power embedded in a discourse, the greater their prominence in structuring the status quo. The *Übermensch* however, has the ability to encounter new forms of experience through his absolution from the constraints of social convention. It is my argument that, having recognised the illusion, the *Übermensch* is capable of recognising discourses in society that are given power by the illusion. The *Übermensch* is capable of accessing discourses that are marginalised in society. He/she has the freedom to broaden the range of discourses available to him/her, and construct their identity out of them. The moral universe is constructed through discourses; certain ones are given more power than others. These power-relations generally have economic and political consequences. The *Übermensch* can alter the moral universe for themselves by giving power to other discourses that are marginalised, and choosing to construct their world out of those discourses. However, it must be mentioned that the power given to other discourses is not the same broad reaching power as the power that is embedded in the dominant discourses. Rather it is power that is connected to the individual, shaping his/her world as he/she needs it. Discourses are communicated to us constantly, and though we may not be aware of it, but through our dress, behaviours and mannerisms, we too are conveying and communicating certain discourses. Discourses can be accepted or rejected by the discourse-user, but more powerful discourses offer little or no space for rejections or counteractions. For example, the discourses of attractiveness as employed by the Culture Industry, the media, and advertising seemingly dictate to us what is attractive, what is in fashion, what is popular – and it is through the use of such discourses that people seek to construct their own identities as being ‘fashionable’, ‘stylish’, ‘statused’, and trendy. Rejection of this discourse can result in marginalising

attitudes towards the discourse-user; ‘no sense of style’, ‘so-yesterday’. These attitudes are part and parcel of this discourse and they themselves are nurtured through the media, celebrity pop culture, and advertising. The *Übermensch* can see the machinations of the illusion working through these discourses; he has the power and ability to reject them as well as to reject the social outcast status attributed to rejection of these discourses. This does not necessarily mean that they will reject all discourses, but they have the ability to **be the manipulators** of the discourses rather than being the manipulated.

Our interactions with advertisements, radio, television and other media forms are played out in such a way that they seem **monological**. However, since it is a linguistic space, it is actually **dialogical**. We have become so accustomed to the monological style of interaction with these media forms that the second voice in the interaction - which is our **own voice** - we fail to recognise. Thereby everything that happens in these linguistic spaces is being **told** to us, resulting in a **unidirectional** exercise. We see the world as the director wants us to see the world; we interpret events in the world as the news corporation determines they should be interpreted. What the director communicates to us and what the news corporations determine we see are discourses that are communicated to us in a one-way, unidirectional pattern. The *Übermensch* recognise the power of their voices in this dialogue, and are capable of accepting, rejecting or altering the discourse to their needs.

#### 7.1.4 Self-overcoming Man:

In chapter three we discussed Foucault’s conception of *disciplinary power*, the **internalised controls** of society that govern us. Over the past century, certain discourses have been accorded more power than others and have shaped not only contemporary society, but also the contemporary human-being living in such a society. In Nietzsche’s time, there were other discourses that held sway over society, resulting in a different set of internalised controls. These were mainly religious discourses, resulting in a religious form of disciplinary power. Zarathustra’s vision saw the *Übermensch* as an individual capable of overcoming these internalised controls. Applied to contemporary society, the *Übermensch* can use or reject the discourses that determine these controls – science, consumerism, fashion. This is not to say that by rejecting science, the *Übermensch* can defy gravity or physics; rather he can decide for himself what he wants to believe – and what he believes in will shape his reality and his experience. In the example from chapter three, we had two competing discourses attempting to construct a certain phenomenon in a particular way: psychosis (science) versus possession (‘traditional’ knowledge). The *Übermensch* can determine for themselves which discourses to employ to understand the phenomena of their world, thus shaping their experiences as they want.

Neo's heroism plays out in ways necessary for the success of a blockbuster action film; the heroism of the *Übermensch* in contemporary society I believe is much subtler. By selecting which discourses they want to use, they can shape their life's experiences as they want to, by rejecting the 'reality' of the Matrix program, Neo is able to access a set of discourses which establish himself as a human-being conscious of the artificiality of the Matrix world; through using these discourses he is able to bend and alter the reality of the Matrix program.

#### **7.1.5 The *Übermensch* in Science-Fiction:**

Some of the greatest science-fiction tales bear protagonists that have some 'Übermensch-ian' qualities; they are able to recognise the myth, the illusion, or at least part of it. They understand and accept that the prevailing discourses may not be the only 'truths', though they may not have a firm grasp of other competing discourses. Essentially, they are characters who, like Neo, are aware that the naturalised state of the status quo is the problem; they attempt to construct the phenomena of their world outside of the prevailing discourses of their society. Neo is a character who, as he develops through the films, becomes a more complete metaphor of the *Übermensch*. Other examples are Bernard Marx from Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1933), who attempts to be soma-free in order to authentically 'feel' and experience, even if those feelings are unpleasant. He became aware through his role in psychological programming, his comments reflect him recognising the instilment and empowering of particular discourses through the process of Hypnopedia. Winston Smith, the protagonist in George Orwell's *1984* (1948), was another similar figure who sought out competing discourses and ideas which were more restricted through the restrictions on language in the novel. His awareness was fostered through his role in destroying literature and historical notes that contained competing ideas and discourses. In Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), both Batman and Bane represent two competing forms of the *Übermensch*. Batman arose in *Batman Begins* (2005) as an *Übermensch*-like figure defying the status quo of the city which was determined through widespread corruption (politicians, policemen and the legal system), fear, and the mob. Bane however, arose to bring down the new social order that Batman helped establish, with the downfall of the capitalist '1%' and the disruption of the discourses of democracy and freedom. Cyberpunk science-fiction is popular for featuring technology employed in different ways that would never have been anticipated by the inventor of said technology; this is an *Übermensch*-metaphor as the *Übermensch* uses and manipulates discourses to match their needs.

#### **7.1.6 The *Übermensch* of Today:**

As we discussed in this chapter, our interpretation of Zarathustra's prophecy rests on the



following premises:

- The *Übermensch* is capable of recognising the myth, the illusion, that society lives under
- The *Übermensch* is capable of recognising the discourses that the illusion employs, and how they function in structuring society. They are able to recognise the discourses that are ‘culturally available’ and are able to understand the impact of the availability of these discourses in maintaining the status quo
- The *Übermensch* seeks competing discourses to construct the phenomena of their world as they want to, as well as constructing their identities as they want to by being able to access a wider repertoire of ‘available’ discourses

For this study, our aim in using Nietzsche’s vision is to understand how to inculcate the qualities of the *Übermensch* in the wider social consciousness. Gerbner’s Cultivation Theory (1979) showed us a means by which the illusion is cultivated in the social consciousness. The *Übermensch* too lives within the illusion; however, he/she is **aware of it**. I believe that material containing *Übermensch*-like characters is necessary to cultivate a legion of protagonists whose ambitions are not love, wealth, fame, but who seek competing discourses, like Bernard Marx (Huxley, 1933) or Winston Smith (Orwell, 1948). Using cultivation theory, we can cultivate the awareness of the illusion, and awareness of the search for competing ideologies and discourses. The Culture Industry is responsible for the genesis of the prevailing discourses in society. The myths around governments, politicians and other political and economic institutions may be disrupted through certain political and economic crises that have occurred in the past decade, but the illusion of the Culture Industry remains as firm as ever, and is only increasing.

## **7.2 Robert Nozick and the *Experience Machine*:**

One of the central characters of the first film, Cypher, portrays a Judas figure. However scorned Cypher’s actions may be, his perspective is important and necessary to discuss as it provides insights into human consciousness. In *the Matrix* (1999), the character Cypher is a fellow crewman of the Nebuchadnezzar. Cypher first gives us an indication of his thoughts when he tells Neo that all he thinks about is, “why oh why didn’t I take the blue pill”. The blue pill is a reference to Morpheus’s invitation to the truth; he presents a choice between red pill and blue pill. The blue pill leaves you in

your current state of ignorance within the Matrix program, whereas the red pill shows you ‘how far down the rabbit hole goes’ (a reference to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*); meaning that it shows you the true reality, relinquishing you from the artificial reality of the program. In a later scene, we see Cypher plotting to betray his crew when he sits in a restaurant in the artificial reality of the Matrix program, having dinner with Agent Smith. Cypher agrees to betray Morpheus by allowing for the Agents to capture him. In return, he demands to be plugged back into the Matrix without any memory of his time in the real world and without any knowledge that it is an illusion. He also demands that he wants to be ‘someone important, like an actor’, someone with wealth, status and power. **This is very significant in understanding desire in relation to truth.** He wants to be famous and wealthy, the idealised version of happiness, but he does not want to have any knowledge of the truth (that the Matrix is not real); as it will make this happiness meaningless knowing that it is all an illusion. The film’s narrative argues that knowing the truth, one would not choose the riches and fame, but the life of strife in the *Desert of the real*.

### 7.2.1 Robert Nozick’s *Experience Machine*:

Robert Nozick is an American political philosopher who conducted a thought experiment known as *the Experience Machine* in his book *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974). According to Nozick, the experience machine is a hypothetical construct; machines that one can ‘plug’ oneself into and have neuro-psychologists stimulate your brain allowing you to live out any experience you want to. You would be akin to humankind in the matrix trilogy - bodies enclosed in a machine with plugs connected all over you – but you will be able to experience all of life’s desires.

**Morpheus:** “*This is the world as you know. The world as it was at the end of the twentieth century. It exists now only as a neural-interactive simulation, that we call The Matrix. You’ve been living in a dream world Neo.*”

(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996).

The question that Nozick puts across is “**would you plug into the machine for life pre-programming all your life’s experiences?**” (Nozick, 1974). You would hypothetically be able to experience and achieve all life’s desires. However, you will be aware that it is not real. That it is an artificial, pre-programmed experience - a *simulation*.

Nozick argues that after reflecting upon it, we would refuse to spend our lives in the experience machine. He bases this refusal on three premises about human nature:

- Firstly, that **actually doing** something is fundamentally central to owning that experience, rather than just having knowledge about the experience (Nozick, 1974). We want to **do** certain things, not just have experiences about them.
- Secondly, we want to **be** certain kinds of people. We want to really be a kind person, or an active person, or a strong person. The experience machine only allows us to really be a person inside a machine (Nozick, 1974).
- Thirdly, he says that real life offers us an infinite array of possibilities. Our imaginings about our futures are limitless. The experience machine however, limits us only to that which has been pre-programmed by the neuropsychologists (Nozick, 1974).

In the literature on Nozick's relationship with the Matrix trilogy, Boetkke (2003) cites an example used by David Schmidtz who asks us to call upon recollections of visits to the zoo and observe the almost-bored reactions of the children at seeing lions and tigers. Yet these same children will squeal delightfully at seeing a squirrel running freely in the yard. The animals at the zoo reflect a controlled and pre-determined experience whereas the squirrel in the yard is a much more genuine and authentic interaction. "Neither the experience machine nor the Matrix program allows for any genuine meaningful interactions" (Boetkke, 2003, p. 179).

### 7.2.2 Nozick and the Culture Industry:

In the chapter on social constructionism we discussed how our realities are created and experienced in the social and linguistic spaces that we operate in. If we were to plug into the experience machine for life, all of the social and linguistic spaces we would encounter would be artificial and pre-determined, and we would be aware of its artificiality. In fact, our realities would be shaped by the neuro-psychologists; and the longer we stay in the machine, **we** would become shaped by the neuropsychologists. All the available discourses would be decided by them, our identities would be constructed through what they give us. The Culture Industry is similar to the experience machine. It provides us with the facility of *escapism* which we seek refuge within to help us bear the unpleasantness of our lives. We 'plug' in to **have** experiences of things we would not be able to actually experience; things we can't **do**. We **have** experiences of heroism without us ourselves being heroes and heroines. We purchase status through items without ourselves actually being people of 'rank' and status. The difference between the two is that the experience machine involves explicit knowledge of the artificiality of the experience, whereas the culture industry reifies patterns of experience that we

seek to encounter in our real lives. Thus, making certain discourses available to us, the culture industry determines who we are and what we do. As we said earlier, the culture industry is the source of the genesis of the prevailing discourses in society. Just as Nietzsche's *Übermensch* has awareness of the illusion, and the person in the experience machine has an awareness of being in the machine – so too must we develop an awareness of the Culture Industry's blanketing presence.

### 7.2.3 What do Nozick's ideas mean for Humankind?

The problem with society today is that the mechanisms of ideology present various discourses as 'truth'; thus, we blindly ascribe to these truths owing to that part of human nature that Nozick describes, that part that seeks out and desires contact with the truth. Certain discourses are heralded as truth while others are marginalised and suppressed. Our faith in the set of discourses that society has deemed as 'truth' has favourable economic and political implications for those in power. Our ideas of truth are merely a set of convenient beliefs that alienates us from our power, our life-essence as human beings as we completely commit our wills to the service of those in power.

Nozick's ideas suggest that we are fundamentally concerned with being in touch with the truth; it is of a fundamental importance to us. If we are made aware of the implications that our faith in certain discourses has for the powerful, that our belief in these heralded modes of thinking and behaving only increases the dominion over us; and if we are made aware of the artificiality of the very things that are central to this capitalist consumer culture, of the codes, signs and symbols that deceive us – we would begin to reject them. Our concern for truth will facilitate an *Übermensch*-like exploration like Bernard Marx's or Winston Smith's – or Neo's. Cypher's choice was to return to the illusion provided he was free from all knowledge that would disrupt the illusory life of wealth and fame.

*“Remember... all I'm offering is the truth – nothing more.”* - Morpheus  
(Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996).

## **7.3 Chapter Summary:**

In this chapter, we explored an interpretation of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* theory and related it to the discussions made in the previous chapters. We established that for humankind to move beyond the deterministic forces of the prevailing discourses, competing discourses need to be reached for and empowered so that they can also be viable modes of identity construction. The *Übermensch* is capable of going beyond the parameters of society's selected discourses, as well as being capable of overcoming the disciplinary power enforced by these discourses. Robert Nozick's experience machine

provided us with a hypothesis on truth, that is that humankind has a natural fundamental concern with being in touch with the truth. Though we may seek modes of escapism, it is only because the locus of our unhappiness is being shifted away. All the experiences that we imagine would provide contentment come with a price tag, forcing us to be consumers.

## **Chapter 8:**

### **Agency, Consciousness Raising and the Red Pill**

#### **8.1 Agency in Society Today:**

At the beginning of the previous chapter, we began by conceptualizing human agency as being engaged in a struggle against forces of social and psychological influence. These forces exist in both repressive and ideological forms, as discussed in Althusser's *Ideological State Apparatuses*. They exist to fashion society in the *One-Dimensional* forms that Marcuse identified, by producing knowledge and subjects, as Foucault identified. At the centre of the *Matrix Trilogy*, is a story of human agency. We see it in the struggle of the rebels against the machines – a traditional Marxist-like struggle by the worker against the master and oppressor - and in Neo's special abilities within the program – a more Foucauldian struggle where resistance emerges from within. These struggles seem to mirror the struggles that face human agency in society today: the struggle against repressive forces (the machines), and the struggle against ideological forces (the Matrix program). Both Huxley's and Orwell's tales recognize agency, and sees the efforts of the government aimed at shaping and controlling this agency. These Science-Fiction narratives necessarily acknowledge the existence of agency in society today – especially the *cyberpunk* ones as they always feature a form of social resistance. It is the form in which this agency is exercised that matters.

In Chapter Two, we discussed Marx's concept of humankind's *life-essence*, which he borrowed from Hegel's concept of '*geist*' meaning mind or spirit. Marx recognised this life essence as humankind's ability to labour, to produce for itself the means for its survival. Marx's position on the subject has been included in philosophical and sociological discussions on human agency. Though Marx's idea refers to humankind as a whole and doesn't focus at the level of the individual, it is vital to this study as it supports the perspective of agency in society discussed earlier, that it faces numerous challenges. Marx sees the life essence of humankind turned against them, enslaving them. Our facilities of agency and action have been reduced mostly to efforts towards a salary/wage. Rather than supporting us, the primary result of our action and agency sees it supporting the ambitions of our political and corporate superiors. The secondary result is our wages, which further alienates us from our sense of agency as it is being claimed from us through pay - our agency is now legally owned by our superiors. As we discussed earlier, this dynamic is suggested in the power of the machines over humankind in *the Matrix trilogy*. The machines are the end result of human agency being channeled in the wrong directions, just as Frankenstein's monster was the result of Frankenstein's agency being

channeled towards selfish ambitions rather than the needs of the collective. Althusser's *Ideological State Apparatus* is important here as it describes the 'controls' in society which govern the directions in which human agency is exercised. Wages are of necessary importance here as it must not be imagined that human agency submits itself to these controls for no reason. Huxley's *Brave New World* depicts a society where the spirit of freedom is exercised in a watered-down version through consumption. Orwell's *1984* sees human agency imprisoned in a totalitarian dictatorship. Both of these stories bear a protagonist that separates themselves from the 'herd morality' of their society and fights towards a true state of freedom, free from systems of control. These narratives support the idea of human agency existing, yet being challenged and controlled by the repressive and ideological mechanisms of society, as well as support for human agency being victorious when being exercised in the right directions. Our society is characterized by extremely powerful controls. The government, the police and the military are pervasively powerful over the people; surveillance technology is so powerful that privacy is a thing of the past. Television and advertising media are everywhere. Consumer culture and social media have arisen to be amongst the most powerful of these controls, they coerce and entice the spirit of agency in society. Most people succumb to the 'herd morality' as they see no other way; as we discussed earlier in the study, the discourses of the 'herd morality' have been intimately involved in the individual's psychological development. As a result, these controls are not simply repressive or coercive, but psychological. These controls are a feature of the cognitive schemata the individual has about society and his/her place in it. The presence and effects of these controls can be located within the developing individual's ecological environment. As a result, the individual's sense of agency is then subject to these controls.

## **8.2 Cypher's Perspective:**

The character of Cypher in the *Matrix trilogy* feels simply like an antagonist on the surface, a villain from within the ranks of the 'good guys' that adds intrigue to a plot. However, Cypher's perspective is the most natural and realistic response to the discovery that the world he believed in was an illusion. Cypher regrets taking the red pill, he regrets the journey of enlightenment and sees it only as being sent from his comfortable illusion out into a much darker world. The dialogue between Cypher and Agent Smith is a very important scene as it communicates Cypher's perspective; one which as audience members we disagree with, but if we were to examine our own lives, it is a perspective that perhaps we too adopt. Cypher recognizes the bliss of ignorance. He does not simply want to be reinserted into the program, but he wants to have no knowledge about it being an illusion.

Like the steak, he eats during the scene, he knows he will not be able to enjoy it if he knows that it is not real. Also, he asks to be inserted into the illusion as someone famous, like a film star, opting for a more comfortable form of alienation, a station within the illusion from where he should be protected from the 'splinters' that pierced the minds of others, like Neo and Morpheus.

Cypher's perspective therefore mirrors the mindset of most of us. Although our attention is often drawn to tragedies, to dark facts about society and the world, the pleasure that we experience through popular culture and entertainment media is enough to insulate ourselves from the splinters of truth. A brief examination of news-media shows a clear pattern of juxtaposition wherein pieces of tragedy are placed directly alongside pieces of popular culture and often arranged in ways which draws attention away from the pain; this juxtaposition numbs us against their effects. This view of popular culture mirrors sees it functioning as a drug that inoculates us in the same way Huxley's *soma* was used to 'protect' people from experiencing unpleasant emotions. The opposite of this inoculation would be to symbolically consume the 'red-pill'.

### **8.3 Foucault and Consciousness Raising:**

According to Foucault, every discourse contains one or more truth claims, and these are often politically and economically motivated and developed (Burr; 1995). Furthermore, he adds that all discourses exist within a group of other often competing discourses (Burr; 1995). No discourse is put forth in isolation. Given the scope of human society, it is very likely that counter-discourses will emerge especially since these discourses are situated within systems of power. For example, the discourses which collectively construct the society and the individual of today's techno-capitalist society have the support of the media, politicians, and corporations in establishing themselves as the prevailing forms of truth in today's society. It is important to note that Foucault, unlike other thinkers within this field, rejected the debate of agency versus determinism. Rather Foucault's perspectives were shaped through power and the resistance that power creates. Instead of a dichotomy between agency and determinism, Foucault saw only power, and that through the application of power, resistance emerges. Power is only power if there is something that it is being willed and used against. Unlike Marx, Foucault did not see ideology and false-consciousness as a systematic means of leading the people astray and away from 'true' versions of themselves – in fact Foucault did not believe in a true version of the self. Rather he saw the pervasive existence of power. Power enabled different truths from different discourses to arise within a given society and develop the structures of that society around those truths. For Foucault, there were no invalid forms of truth, only ones that had lesser power. As we



discussed in Chapter 3, Foucault said that power is at its most effective when it produces knowledge – creating and empowering discourses that provide the structure and order for society; this he called disciplinary power. This form of power is different from sovereign power and allows the power to remain hidden while the subject upon which power is being wielded is unconscious of the power dynamic he/she is involved in. This was the case with Neo in *the Matrix Trilogy*. Unlike Morpheus and his crew who were born in Zion to a Marxist-like struggle, aware of the oppression, dominion and tyranny of the machines, Neo was an unknowing and unwilling subject of the power of the machines through the Matrix program. His resistance began from within; his position within the program was one where power was acted upon him not only by the program but by his human superiors at his workplace. As a constant subject of the mechanisations of power, Neo's resistance began.

In our discussion of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, we determined that the special ability of the *Übermensch* that allowed him/her to be free of the herd morality lay in their ability to access various discourses; marginalised ones as well as those empowered by society. Thus, those who are not free of the herd morality are subject to developing their psychological structures based on the 'truths' that construct their experiences. Social Constructionism's emphasis on there being no essential or transcendental truths provides a platform to embrace a variety of discourses, each being respected as its own form of truth. Western culture has driven the 'melting pot' ideology as being necessary to establish equality and solidarity; however, this ideology dissolves all cultures into one, and dismisses the discourses carried by marginalised cultures while permitting the establishment and maintenance of the discourses of the dominant culture.

Foucault also stated that human beings are capable of critically working within and against the dominant discourses and accessing alternate and marginalised discourses with which to fashion their identities from. Sawicki (1991) argued that the idea of Foucault lying solely at the deterministic end of the agency-determinism debate is not completely correct. Her understanding of Foucault's work suggests that Foucault believed that human beings were capable of 'critical historical reflection' and were able to exercise a degree of choice with regards to which discourses they employed to construct their identities and frame their experiences (Burr; 1995). This view saw change and the potential for human agency as existing within the abilities of human beings to critically analyse the various discourses which structure their experiences, and then accepting or rejecting them and the effects they have on their experience. As we can see, this potential for human agency envisioned by Foucault mirrors our discussion on Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. Foucault suggested that this potential can be accessed by 'opening-up' marginalised discourses and making them available as alternatives to the

dominant discourses; As discussed in the chapter on Social Constructionism (chapter 3), our identities and experiences are constructed out of the discourses that are culturally available to us (Burr; 1995). This is called **consciousness-raising**. Though this term was not directly used by Foucault, it is implied in his suggestion of 'opening-up' alternate discourses. The idealistic *Übermensch* is conscious of the various alternate discourses; however, in the less-ideal world wherein the social consciousness lay embedded, marginalised discourses need to be 'opened-up' to make them accessible. Consciousness-raising is the solution to the problem of ignorance and passivity. It is the tool that will thrust marginalised discourses into the light, facilitating critical reflexivity and liberation.

The red pill is featured in the first film. Morpheus offers Neo a choice between two paths, the red pill will reveal to him the truth, whereas the blue pill will return him to his usual life, where he can believe whatever he wants to believe. The red pill represents the tool that 'opened-up' the reality of the real world to Neo; it presented Neo with an alternate state of affairs. Along with Morpheus' guidance, the red pill constituted the process of consciousness-raising for Neo, equipping him with knowledge of alternate versions of reality. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight existing red pills within society today, as well as suggest what effects these red pills can have on the individual and on society as a whole.

## **8.4 Culture Jamming**

Culture Jamming is a form of social resistance in today's media saturated environment. It is a reaction to the unavoidable presence of advertising campaigns in today's society and attempts to reclaim the public's voice in the linguistic exchange facilitated by adverts. Culture Jamming makes use of existing advertisements and alters them to send a different, often ironic and satirical message (Klein; 2000). The word 'jamming' was birthed from the illegal activity where pirate radio-hackers would illegally interrupt radio broadcasts with various, mostly comical, noises and sounds. Today, Culture jamming has grown towards a more mature directive: to interrupt the manufacturing of consent and passivity in society. As a form of consciousness-raising, culture-jamming uses the discourses of advertising as well as the discourses employed within the advertisements themselves to send a radically different message; this usually involves parodying the dominant discourse to bring marginalised ideas to light thus almost facilitating a power exchange between the dominant and the marginalised discourse.

### **8.4.1 Culture Jamming, Naomi Klein and *No Space*:**

Acclaimed writer Naomi Klein explores Culture Jamming in her book *No Logo* (2000);

according to Klein, “Culture jamming baldly rejects the idea that marketing, because it buys its way into our public spaces, must be passively accepted as a one-way information flow” (Klein; 2000, p. 281). Culture Jamming often exists as a social response to the one-way monological exchanges we are so used to receiving from advertisements. In *No Logo* (2000), Klein uses the concept of ‘no space’ to describe the state of society today in terms of being completely saturated by advertisements. Klein examines the shifting currents of corporate spending over the last few decades noting a major shift from spending money on production and manufacturing to branding, marketing and advertising; so much so that many of these corporations outsource the tasks of manufacturing and producing goods.

*According to Naomi Klein, the cultural influence of multinational corporations has increased significantly over the last 15 years due to the corporate emphasis on primarily producing brands instead of products. It used to be that corporations focused on making things. But now the focus of successful corporations is not on manufacturing but on marketing.*

(Segerstrom, P; 2010. p. 3).

This shift in corporate spending has shaped society into a pool of billboards and adverts, with messages jumping at us from every corner, on every television screen, and in every page of a magazine. Over time, we the public, the receivers of these messages, have become numb to their presence and the ideas that they spread. We accept what they tell us without questioning their authority on the matter or considering our own opinion as a worthy rebuttal to the message of the adverts.

Culture Jammers seek to reclaim their voice in the linguistic exchange and return it to a dialogical fashion where they can challenge the message of the advertisers (Klein; 2000). Klein says that the public must realise that public space belongs to them. A successful Culture Jam is one that has the look and feel of the original advert, but succeeds in making the viewer question certain assumptions about society to uncover particular economic and political arrangements that depend upon those assumptions (Klein; 2000). According to Klein, the best culture-jams can be viewed as successful advertising ‘hacks’ – as described earlier in discussions on cyberpunk literature. Hackers use technology in ways never anticipated by the creators. Similarly, Klein says:

*The most sophisticated culture jams are not stand-alone ad parodies but interceptions-counter-messages that hack into a corporation's own method of communication to send a message starkly at odds with the one that was intended.*

*The process forces the company to foot the bill for its own subversion, either literally because the company is the one that paid for the billboard, or figuratively because anytime people mess with a logo, they are tapping into the vast resources spent to make that logo meaningful.*

(Klein; 2000. *No Logo*, p. 281).

Culture Jamming is an attempt to reclaim public space and make the public aware that public space does not belong to the corporations. We have become desensitized to the presence of brands and adverts in our everyday life. It is now an accepted form of society and public spaces. Returning to the discussion about *No Space* from Klein's book *No Logo* (2000), we see how the corporations have bought over the public domain. Advertising spaces are sold in magazines, on television shows, on billboards, in parking lots, on streetlamps, on building walls, in public toilets, in gymnasiums, in schools – literally every type of public area or facility has advertisements and branding all over it. Returning to Foucault's view of power and the resistance it creates. the counter-discourse of Culture-Jamming and the system of counter-discourses that it itself is trying to propogate is made possible only by the existence of the dominant discourses.

#### **8.4.2 Mark Dery and Culture Jamming:**

Mark Dery's essay on Culture Jamming; *Culture Jamming - Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of the Signs* (Dery; 1993); is one of the most comprehensive analysis of Culture Jamming as well as of contemporary culture and serves well as a concluding piece as it features the works of hyperreality-theorists Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco, as well as seeing culture-jamming as a form of consciousness-raising and its role as a possible solution to the problem of blind obedience and consumerism. Dery quotes famous author and hyperreality-theorist Umberto Eco who suggests that the solution to opening up the minds of the public who are typically passive receivers of corporate messages lies in '*semiological guerrilla warfare*' (Eco, as cited in Dery; 1993); Eco urges the audience (the receivers) to control the message itself as well as the multitude of ways in which it can be interpreted.

*The receiver of the message seems to have a residual freedom: the freedom to read it in a different way...I am proposing an action to urge the audience to control the message and its multiple possibilities of interpretation, one medium*

*can be employed to communicate a series of opinions on another medium... The universe of Technological Communication would then be patrolled by groups of communications guerrillas, who would restore a critical dimension to passive reception.*

(Eco, U; 1986, *Travels in Hyperreality*; as cited in Dery; 1993).

Similar to Klein's view on the current state of corporate hegemony, Dery says that the corporate ownership of most news media forms coupled with the growth of the multinational – a broad far-reaching umbrella corporation that owns both television media and publishing media forms - and the “increased privatization of truth by an information-rich technocratic elite” (Dery; 1993), are the forces that collectively determine the nature of information, signs and symbols within society. This idea is congruent with those of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault. The dominant powers within society have control over the flow of discourses thus shaping consciousness within that society. Dery quotes Neal Gabler:

*Everywhere the fabricated, the inauthentic and the theatrical have gradually driven out the natural, the genuine and the spontaneous until there is no distinction between real life and stagecraft. In fact, one could argue that the theatricalization of American life is the major cultural transformation of this century.*

(Gabler, N; 1991, *Now Playing, Real Life, The Movie*. p. 32).

These ideas are synonymous with those of Jean Baudrillard, whose essay *The Precession of Simulacra* (1975), we covered earlier. These words echo the concept of *hyperreality*; a domain of signs and symbols, divorced from the real world, that has come to constitute our consciousness.

*Baudrillard put forth the notion that we inhabit a “hyperreality,” a hall of media mirrors in which reality has been lost in an infinity of reflections. We 'experience' events, first and foremost, as electronic reproductions of rumored phenomena many times removed, he maintains; originals, invariably compared to their digitally-enhanced representations, inevitably fall short. In the “desert of the real,” asserts Baudrillard, mirages outnumber oases and are more alluring to the thirsty eye. Moreover, he argues, signs that once pointed toward distant realities*

*now refer only to themselves.*

(Dery, M; 1993, *Culture-Jamming; Hacking, Slashing, Sniping in the Empire of the Signs*. Part 1 *The Empire of Signs*).

Dery speaks about 'guerilla semiotics', a notion he developed from Eco's 'semiological guerilla warfare'. He believes that semiotics is society's defence against *hyperreality*. Dery quotes Marshall Blonsky, author of *American Mythologies* (1992), who called semiotics "a defense against information sickness, the 'too-muchness' of the world" (Blonsky, 1992). Furthermore, he says that semiotics fulfills the fate of media-fallout that Marshall McLuhan prophecised in his work *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964) wherein he said that the effects of the media-fallout will one day have to be contended with in the same way the world had to contend with the atom-bomb fallout. Semiotics is a method of analysis similar to those used by academics to "decipher the signs and symbols that constitute a culture's secret language." According to semiotician Roland Barthes (1964) who calls languages of cultures 'systems of signification', these systems are made up of various modes of communication: nonverbal as well as verbal, images, symbols, sounds, items and objects, and the "complex associations of all these." (Barthes; 1964). Written in 1993, Dery's article predicts the trajectory of human culture into a future where we inhabit, work and interact through cyberspace more than we do in face-to-face exchanges. He predicts the impact that mobile and computer technology have on human culture as they are more interactive media than television.

*Much of this media may one day be connected to a high-capacity, high-speed fiber optic network of "information superhighways" linking as many homes as are currently serviced by the telephone network. This network, predicts computer journalist John Markoff, "could do for the flow of information — words, music, movies, medical images, manufacturing blueprints and much more — what the transcontinental railroad did for the flow of goods a century ago and the interstate highway system did in this century.*

(Dery, M; 1993, *Culture-Jamming; Hacking, Slashing, Sniping in the Empire of the Signs*).

This statement predicts the movement into the 'information-age' that we currently live in. He even predicts the issue we are currently faced with: that the information-age, rather than providing

us with tools that make us a more informed, well-educated public, influences better consumer practices as we are up to date with various sales, new products, new movies and television shows. Dery's article tracks the potential trajectory for Culture Jammers; as the technology evolves, so too do the techniques employed by the corporations evolve, as so must the responses to these techniques evolve too. Can Culture Jamming grow beyond altering advertisements and aspire to jam political messages, to broadcast their own messages that counter the ideological messages of the corporations and the state? Dery issues a journalistic call-to-arms by saying; *“Will cyberpunk telejournalists equipped with Hi-8 video cameras, digital scanners, and PC-based editing facilities hack their way into legitimate broadcasts?”* (Dery, 1993).

The answer to this statement has been taken up by Julian Assange and Wikileaks, by the various members of Anonymous, and recently by NSA whistle-blower Edward Snowden. This journalistic call-to-arms mirrors Foucault's solution of 'opening-up' marginalised discourses. Calling on people to actively disrupt the flow of information and discourse, 'to control the message', is necessary to providing alternate discourses and empowering marginalised ways of thinking.

Culture Jamming is another example of consciousness-raising within today's media dominated society, providing alternate views on advertisements, on the product being advertised, and the brand or corporation behind the advert. Not only does it attempt to send an alternate message, but also it shows society that public space does not belong solely to the corporations, that the public have a voice with which they can respond to these advertisements as well as to the corporations themselves. This is very important as it provides us with an important platform with which we can engage in the exchange of ideas rather than simply being passive receivers of these messages. Returning to the discussions on Social Constructionism, we understand that reality and meaning are created through linguistic exchanges. If we continue to allow these exchanges to proceed in a monological fashion, then we surrender our claim to the generation of meaning in society and in our lives. Culture Jamming is an expression of the right to engage in a dialogical exchange.

### **8.5 Whistle-Blowers, Wikileaks and Anonymous**

Following the call for 'cyberpunk-telejournalists', the last decade has seen a number of whistle-blowers, hacktivists and social radicals emerge with the intention of distributing classified information and broadcasting real news to the world. The motivation behind most of these 'leaks' and expositions has been to spread the truth, to create awakenings and facilitate enlightenment – rather than to create an entertaining documentary piece, or earn high ratings and reviews: educating the public,

removing the falsities and deceptions and revealing the smoke and mirrors that conceal the purpose behind certain events and government actions. This is a direct form of consciousness-raising and discourse-empowerment: these 'cyberpunk-telejournalists' are employing the institutions within society that carry social power, as conceptualised by Foucault and Althusser. They are controlling the message as encouraged by Eco, controlling and influencing the flow of discourse as well as presenting alternate ways to interpret the messages given to us by society. Not only do they promote counter-discourses, but they create awareness of the existence of the dominant discourse **as** a discourse. That is to say that they bring to attention the nature of the dominant discourse: that it is a discourse – a system of ideas presenting a particular concept in a particular way. They simultaneously offer you an alternate view on the concept, while making you realise that your initial view was a popular social construction, a view that was developed and reinforced. The actions of these whistle-blowers and activists are strongly similar to the heroism of Neo in *the Matrix Trilogy*. He attempted to clear away the smoke and mirrors of the program. Neo was an agent of counter-discourse, so too are the whistle-blowers, culture-jammers and hacktivists. Neo's final words at the end of the first film echo the ambitions of counter-discourses and change.

*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.*  
(Neo, Wachowski & Wachowski, 1996).

### **8.5.1 Wikileaks**

Wikileaks is a controversial non-profit website aimed at changing the world by obtaining and publishing classified information of various governments and making this information accessible to the public. Founded by Julian Assange (1971), a hacker once known by the alias 'Mendax', Wikileaks has leaked classified information from the war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, and exposed corruption in various countries. Assange was the first online radical hacktivist who generated massive worldwide controversy with Wikileaks. Wikileaks was the first massive publicly-accessible



vehicle through which people could find alternate reports on certain issues that differed greatly from the reports given through CNN and other major news sources. It revealed to many the extent to which governments keep secrets from their citizens. Essentially, Assange provided the world with one of the most honest news sources.

Wikileaks received many awards and is celebrated as a step towards free information, increasing transparency between governments and their people, and revealing to the world the true state of affairs. Many of Assange's critics cited that he does not care about who can get hurt as a result of the classified documents that he leaks. Some of them revealed the identities of informants and undercover operatives. Some of Wikileaks more famous leaks have been the video called 'collateral murder' (2010) in which Iraqi journalists were gunned down by an Apache helicopter during the 2007 Baghdad air strike; the 'Afghan War Diary' (2010), a collection of almost 80 000 documents on the war in Afghanistan that was originally kept hidden from the public; a collection of around 400 000 documents from the war in Iraq called the 'Iraq War Logs' (2010); and almost 800 secret files about prisoners detained in Guantanamo Bay (2011). These alone give credence to Wikileaks as a powerful counter-measure to the one-way flow of discourse from the governments and big news-media corporations of the world. Using the internet as a far-reaching tool of mass communication, Assange has developed a notorious online source of readily available counter-discourse material, and with it, the potential for change through accessing alternate discourses. The presence of Wikileaks engenders a reverse Panopticon-like effect upon the powerful; no longer can they simply spin-doctor issues and blanket the truth with their convenient versions of certain events. Rather, it can grow to facilitate a situation where the government behaves as if they are being surveilled, and just as the prisoner in the Panopticon, they will behave as if though their every move is being watched.

### **8.5.2 Chelsea Manning**

The story of Chelsea Manning is powerful and sad tale of sacrifice for the sake of humankind. Manning can be considered a real-life Neo figure. Once part of the system itself, Chelsea Elizabeth Manning (born Bradley Edward Manning) was a soldier in the United States army and served as an intelligence analyst during the war in Iraq. There she had access to classified documents, the knowledge of which burdened her greatly. It was Manning who gave Julian Assange the 'Iraq War Logs' and the 'Afghan War Diaries' along with access to cables full of classified government intelligence, which according to Manning, explains how the First world states exploit the Third world – in detail. Manning faced a total of 22 charges, among them were violating the Espionage Act and aiding the

enemy – a charge that could have seen her face the death penalty. She is currently serving a 35-year prison sentence and recently celebrated her 6<sup>th</sup> birthday behind bars. Her case highlights the vulnerability of whistle-blowers in society today as well as highlights the deceptive nature of political rhetoric fed through the media to justify war and to hide war crimes. It also is an example of competing discourses being embedded in systems of power. The power in this situation rests with the military so their discourses would overrule Manning and her ideas and messages. It is ironic that Manning is charged with severe criminality when she attempted to point out the government's crimes against the people of Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the crime of lying and fooling its own people. Manning's case is a powerful demonstration of heroism and sacrifice for the betterment and liberation of humankind. Her vision was so strong that she sacrificed her freedom to promote counter-discourses.

### **8.5.3 The Shock Doctrine:**

Naomi Klein's (author of *No Logo* discussed earlier) *Shock Doctrine* details the activities of the first world governments which are flowered over with propaganda and political rhetoric in the media. The 'shock doctrine' refers to a system of 'shock and awe' torture tactics employed by the first world governments to destabilize the communities and societies being targeted in the war. By breaking down their wills and their sense of identity, they will more easily accept new changes, new regulations, and even new governments. Most of these shock and awe tactics would be considered war crimes but they are kept clear from the media and the public – this is why whistle-blowers like Chelsea Manning are so important. Klein tracks the progress of 'disaster capitalism' around the world and its feature in the many wars and crises that have happened over the last few decades. According to her, Disaster Capitalism is the intervention in and the management of various crises around the world by the first world states; these crises end up being very profitable opportunities for the intervening states. Klein goes a step further to expose how many of these crises are generated by the first world states to create the ideal conditions for a spin-doctored media frenzy which soon makes their intervention in the crisis necessary. The society suffering the crisis are treated to the shock and awe tactics and respond to the interventions and the subsequent new policies and new governments without resistance as their wills have been broken down. The war in Iraq was made necessary by the stories and allegations of Weapons of Mass Destruction, by the media demonising Saddam Hussein, by the claims that democracy needed to be brought to Iraq. During the war, soldiers were ordered not to stop looters from stealing cultural artifacts, from sacking schools, or stealing airline equipment. These actions would create post-war opportunities for foreign companies and investors, as well as 'wipe the slate clean' of

any cultural heritage.

#### **8.5.4 Anonymous**

Anonymous is a leaderless social activist group founded over the internet in the chat forum '4chan'. Their aim is to ensure freedom of speech and information over the internet. Their symbol has become the infamous Guy Fawkes mask as used by the character 'V' from the Wachowski's movie *V for Vendetta* (2005); they also wear the mask whenever appearing in public, ensuring their anonymity. Over the last decade, Anonymous has grown tremendously with members from all over the world. 4chan is an internet forum where anyone can post to the various threads and conversations anonymously. All posts are therefore posted as 'Anonymous'. Though all may not share in the hacker-savvy ways of the original members, Anonymous prides itself on its leaderlessness, and encourages support from anyone and everyone. Known as 'hacktivists', Anonymous is infamous for conducting raids on political servers and leaking classified information to the public. They believe firmly that people should not fear their governments and thus embark on a Robin Hood-esque quest where they steal the secrets of the powerful and leak them to the public. Anonymous discovered their strength during their 'Project Chanology' (2008) where they went head-to-head with the church of Scientology after the church tried to censor a video online; this outraged Anonymous as it was seen as an attempt to censor the internet. A series of global protests was planned and communicated over 4chan and the massive response and success of these protests really showed the power of the idea behind Anonymous.

The controversy around Julian Assange and Wikileaks led Mastercard and Paypal to pull their services from the site thus not allowing any funding to go towards the site. This was seen as an attempt to restrict the free flow of information on the internet and Anonymous responded by taking down the websites of both Mastercard and Paypal. This was seen as an act of cyber-terrorism. Anonymous took further political strides with 'Operation Tunisia' during the Tunisian Revolution (2011), and 'Operation Egypt' during the Egyptian Revolution (2011) which saw Hosni Mubarak step down from office. After the Egyptian government shut down access to the internet, Anonymous sent thousands of faxes to the Egyptian people, keeping them up to date with unbiased unfiltered news reports as well as providing guides for safety during violence and how to setup their own servers and stay connected to the online world - allowing them to broadcast footage of violence committed by the state against the people. The Tunisian and Egyptian crisis showed the world the true power of Anonymous. It must also be noted that not all members of Anonymous share the social activist ideology, as some are purely hackers who are out to cause chaos. Anonymous has now established itself

as a 'hactivist' organisation with members from all over the world. They attempt to root out and expose corruption and broadcast to the world any atrocities that the major news organisations won't broadcast.

### **8.5.5 Edward Snowden**

Following in the footsteps of Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden was a former employee contracted to both the CIA and the NSA; Snowden gained international notoriety after leaking multiple classified documents from the NSA to the media. The NSA's internal audit revealed that Snowden handled around 1.7 million documents. Snowden leaked information about various surveillance programs run by various governments around the world, most notably PRISM, Tempora and Xkeyscore. These programs allowed for the monitoring of Google and Yahoo email accounts; the tracking of cellular activity – both phone calls and messages as well as instant messaging contact lists; and analysing web-based activity. Snowden was quoted as saying that he could tap anyone's cellphone just by having their personal email address. These documents revealed startling and controversial information on government surveillance and sparked debate around the threat that national security, when taken to this degree, poses to individual privacy. The NSA were shown to be far exceeding their mandate, creating fake accounts on *Second Life* and *World of Warcraft* to spy on users; even establishing LOVEINT, an espionage program wherein NSA agents spied on their romantic partners. Snowden revealed that the NSA were analysing millions of emails, instant messages, and contact lists from millions of Google and Yahoo users, as well as tracking the online sexual inclinations of various citizens they viewed as 'radicals' or threats so as to obtain information to discredit them. The NSA monitored the activity of various other governments and citizens of other governments as well as about 120 international world leaders. Other discoveries by Snowden include the development of an autonomous cyberwarfare programme called 'MonsterMind'. The program would:

*Automate the process of hunting for the beginnings of a foreign cyberattack. Software would constantly be on the lookout for traffic patterns indicating known or suspected attacks. When it detected an attack, MonsterMind would automatically block it from entering the country—a “kill” in cyber terminology. Programs like this had existed for decades, but MonsterMind software would add a unique new capability: Instead of simply detecting and killing the malware at the point of entry, MonsterMind would automatically fire back, with no human involvement. That’s a problem, Snowden says, because the initial attacks are often*

*routed through computers in innocent third countries. "These attacks can be spoofed," he says. "You could have someone sitting in China, for example, making it appear that one of these attacks is originating in Russia. And then we end up shooting back at a Russian hospital. What happens next?"*

(Snowden, E. 2014; as cited in *The Most Wanted Man in the World*. 2015, p. 6).

MonsterMind shows us our progress towards 'The Matrix Possibility'; the potential actualisation of the scenario in the film. Snowden's revelations throw into harsh relief the actual degree to which we live in a Big Brother state, it also correlates with Orwell's hard dystopian vision of society. Snowden is now wanted by the American government and is currently living in an undisclosed site in Moscow as the Russian Government have given him temporary citizenship.

*"Remember, I didn't want to change society. I wanted to give society a chance to determine if it should change itself. All I wanted was for the public to be able to have a say in how they are governed."*

(Snowden, E; as cited in Takhar, S. 2014. *If I Was... Analysing Edward Snowden*).

This quote reflects the essential purpose of consciousness-raising; Snowden wanted to reveal the 'shadowy forms' to the public and let them determine whether the ignorance of the cave is better for them, or the light of the outside world. All consciousness-raising efforts should be directed toward such a purpose: to equip society with the knowledge to determine if it should want to change.

### **The Happiness Industry and Edward Snowden:**

William Davies, author of *the Happiness Industry*, reveals in his book a number of startling allegations that are strongly supported by Edward Snowden's revelations on government monitoring and surveillance. Davies says that the government, in co-operation with big business, has developed systems of surveillance and monitoring with particular focus on people's moods and patterns of unhappiness. However, the aim of this monitoring is to provide insights for corporations to make profit by stepping in with products and services aimed at easing these tensions. The focus here is not on providing a solution to unhappiness, but rather to facilitate a relationship between these tensions and a product or service to temporarily ease them. He refers to this as "*The Happiness Industry*"- a profit-generating scheme that uses people as unwitting pawns, making money directly from their misery. This type of surveillance involves the crossing of ethical lines for the sake of market research. It is evidence of a massive power shift between the rights of people, and the drive for profit among corporations. It is also evidence of the political power of corporations as their data is provided through the various

government surveillance projects that monitor email accounts, Facebook accounts, Instagram, Twitter and other social media networks. Davies quotes John B Watson, the former head of the American Psychological Association, who says that “consumers could be conditioned to do or feel anything advertisers wanted.” This paints a dark Orwellian portrait of society in terms of surveillance, but also recalls Huxley's ideas about extreme levels of consumerism, wherein the public were conditioned to consume excessively.

Anonymous, Wikileaks and the revelations of Edward Snowden demonstrate powerful modes of consciousness-raising as encouraged by Foucault. They open up alternate views of looking at politics and the machinations of governments and corporations. They disrupt the passivity of the 'normal' state of the world and expose the 'smoke and mirrors' used by the governments of the world to keep the population passive. Both Wikileaks and Anonymous share the idea of bringing the world to an information-based revolution, where freely sharing ideas and exposing secrets can liberate people. It is also worth noting that both Wikileaks and Anonymous success rests on the hacker-creed, similar to *the Matrix Trilogy* and other cyberpunk media. A traditional aspect of cyberpunk fiction is hacking, using technology in ways never anticipated by the creator. This is what we see with both Anonymous and Wikileaks. They both reflect the cyberpunk culture. The 'cyber' aspect is embodied in their use of high forms of computer and online technology - predominantly in the form of 'hacking' - using the technology in ways never anticipated by its creators. The 'punk' aspect is reflected in their intention to defy the system and the powers that be; to generate mass awakenings and create social resistance, striking out against the dominant regimes and free themselves and their fellow human-beings from the control of the powerful groups in society.

### **8.6 Consciousness-Raising in Literature and Film:**

In the first chapter, we discussed the tradition of philosophy through science-fiction, all were examples of consciousness-raising through the mediums of books and film. *The Matrix Trilogy* itself is a classic example of consciousness-raising through film. Though it does exist primarily as a piece of entertainment, it opens up ideas and questions to the audience; questions about control, power and ideology, questions about what is real; ideas about our beliefs in the 'shadowy forms' contributing to our own imprisonment. These mediums may not contain the power that is possessed by the Culture Jammers, Wikileaks, Anonymous and whistle-blowers like Edward Snowden; however, because of their existence as pieces of entertainment they can capture and influence the ideas and imaginations of those reluctant to engage critically with 'hard' journalistic sources and other news media. The medium

of film is able to influence the 'casual' citizen who is simply seeking entertainment. The last decade has seen an increase in consciousness-raising activities around the world. The combination of the internet and the increased availability of computer and mobile technology has led to the development of a global society that can be more well-informed. Journalistic pieces are shared across the internet through Email, Facebook, Twitter and other social-networking websites. Anonymous, Wikileaks and whistle-blowers like Edward Snowden have also increased their popularity as well as their audience groups through these social-networking sites. These efforts attempt to pierce the social consciousness with the splinter of truth; and as discussed in the chapter on Robert Nozick, people are fundamentally concerned with being in touch with the truth, being connected immediately to what is real. Once the smokescreen is revealed to them, they will attempt to reconnect with truth. It must be noted that this reconnection is not a simple and straightforward process, some may abandon it altogether – like Cypher. The example of Plato's prisoner showed us how difficult a struggle it can be, and that urging others to follow may be a disaster – but all it takes is one 'splinter in the mind' to urge you to seek out more.

Returning to the discussion of Bentham's Panopticon; a similar dynamic may be facilitated between critically-minded citizens and the government, especially now with the impact that Wikileaks, Anonymous and whistle-blowers like Edward Snowden have had. It could be possible that now that the governments, politicians and corporations know that they are being surveilled, they may change their behaviours as the prisoners within the Panopticon did – behaving as if they were constantly being watched. Or they may just employ further measures to conceal their activities by introducing new laws and policies; some would deter whistle-blowers with punishment while others would promote secrecy by providing new avenues for classified communications.

### **8.7 Development of Reflective Culture:**

The desired goal of consciousness-raising efforts should be to achieve a society and a culture that is cognisant of its absorption within itself; a culture of reflection, one which develops the capacity to critically reflect upon choices and actions, particularly those choices and actions in the realms of consumption, advertising and entertainment. This type of culture would not see the abolishment of all advertising and consumer products, rather it would be one that permits such things according to necessity (consumer choices guided by needs rather than wants), as we reflect on our consumer choices and decide whether we are really making a choice that is necessary, or are we being manipulated into making such choices. We should become aware of the ways in which advertising manipulates us, plays on our emotions and desires, fills our head with fantasies of how we can better

ourselves through consumption. We should be aware of the ways in which film and television media communicate to us various perspectives on life and the world which may not be true, perspectives which become embedded in our consciousness. Ideally, we should develop a culture that does not just absorb, but critically reflects upon the subject of absorption as well as being reflective upon oneself as the target of the grand ideological and cultural absorption scheme.

The number of blue-pill materials situated within the various ecological levels of our developmental environment as conceptualised by Broffenbrenner plots the trajectory for the development of our consciousness and leads it down the path of the blue pill. The more red-pill materials we have embedded in the various ecological levels of our social-environment will surely lead to the development of such a culture. Films like *the Matrix Trilogy* and *V for Vendetta* (2006), books like *1984* (1948) and *A Brave New World* (1932) are equipped with consciousness-raising potential. They pierce the social-consciousness and create openings to ask questions, to look further than what you're always being shown. Authentic, unfiltered journalistic sources like Wikileaks, Anonymous and Edward Snowden are helping to provide answers to such questions. They remove the smoke and mirrors set up by the corporations and the governments of the world and produce a counter-discourse about how this system works.

### **8.8 Subjectivity and Social Resistance:**

The following is a review of previous discussions to collectively present the idea of consciousness-raising as the solution to the problem of subjectivity in society today.

#### **Alienation and Ideology:**

- Alienation is a central feature of contemporary human society. We are living in an alienated state. We are blind to it. The various machinations of ideology blind us and suppress our will by satiating our appetites for true freedom with the idea of democracy and freedom through consumption.
- The Culture Industry is a system that pacifies us by providing endless arrays of 'products' which have symbolic meaning and provide the structure that organises our society. We consume not only products, but ideas and symbols.

#### **Social Constructionism:**

- Language shapes reality. Our realities are created in the social and linguistic spaces that we operate in.



- The ideologies that govern us are comprised of various discourses that comply with and reinforce one another. Discourses that work in a counter-direction to the aims of the governing ideology are marginalised, suppressed and scorned.
- Language is made up of ‘signs’; these are the things that populate our mental life. They are the things we use to facilitate thinking within our minds. Without a certain sign in a particular language, that concept will not be available to those who use that language. A sign is a concept; made up of signifier and signified. The spoken-word and the thing referred to. The meaning of any sign is simply a reference to other signs. The linkage between signifier and signified is arbitrary.
- Signs provide the programming for social reality. The social realities of different language-users may vary; each has its own sign-system; each contains its own truths implicit within the language.
- The English language is loaded with signs around autonomy, independence, exhortation.

#### **Broffebrenner’s Ecological Model of Human Development:**

- (vi) Media forms (particularly television) constitute Proximal Processes; interactions embedded within the Microsystem are central to human development.
- (vii) Cultivation Theory asserts that the patterns of social reality depicted on television are firstly inaccurate, and secondly are being cultivated into the audience’s perceptions of the world and social reality. The social reality in the minds of the audience reflects the inaccurate social reality depicted on television.
- (viii) The Culture Industry therefore necessarily impacts on our development – its presence in the microsystem; the process of cultivation; and the signs and symbols it transmits to the developing person.

#### **Piaget’s Theory of Cognition:**

- The Pre-Operations phase sees the birth of the Symbolisation process. It is this process that sees the accrual of the use of signs and symbols in the developing individual.
- Trust is born in relationship with first caregiver; children’s programmes facilitate such relationships by trying to be a simulacrum of the home, the pre-school, the early peer group. The insidiousness of this technique is in the fostering of a trusting relationship with the content about the world displayed on television.
- Cultivation theory is a useful tool to understand the cultivation of our schema through

television

### **Social Resistance:**

#### **Nietzsche's *Übermensch*:**

- The *Übermensch* is an individual capable of thinking and acting beyond the status quo; the deterministic powers of the status quo (the *herd morality*) do not determine the *Übermensch*.
- The *Übermensch*, though capable of resisting the *herd morality*, still lives within the illusion as the rest of society does; the *Übermensch* is still subject to the ideological machinations of the *herd morality*.
- Examining the *Übermensch*'s resistance to the status quo provides important and useful ideas for social resistance. Conceptualising the *Übermensch* as a discourse-user, one who manipulates discourses, who seeks out marginalised discourses, who attempts to construct their reality, their identity and their experiences from whichever set of discourses they see fit.

#### **Nozick's *Experience Machine*:**

- The thought-experiment about the *Experience Machine* reveals a key insight into the relationship between human nature and 'truth'. At a basic and fundamental level, human-beings want to be in touch with the truth.
- Nozick suggests that if we were given the choice to spend our lives in the *experience machine*, experiencing the greatest delights of life, we will reject such an offer based purely on the belief that it is not real. Our awareness of being plugged into the machine would reduce the meaning of any of these experiences – making them simply '*shadows on the wall*'.
- Society selects a set of discourses and empowers them, heralds them as 'truth'; and our nature to seek out truth results in these discourses manifesting themselves in our ways of thinking and being. Like the awareness we have of being connected to the experience machine, Nozick's suggestions say that if we developed an awareness of ideology, of the Culture Industry, of other discourses as options to construct our world – we would reject living in the bubble of the *experience machine* and seek out truth.

Nozick's suggestion that human-beings are fundamentally concerned with being in touch with the truth is a good foundation for the beginning of enlightenment; this concern is the primary tool

for a self-driven conscious search for answers. Once the individual's beliefs are revealed to be no more than 'shadowy forms', they will search for the truth just like Plato's prisoner did. Foucault recognised that counter-discourse and consciousness-raising were the keys to open-up marginalised discourses; by opening these discourses up, people will be more capable of choosing which discourses they allow to structure their experiences, which discourses they choose to empower by believing in them; creating *Übermensch*-like beings who are not controlled by any particular set of ideas but can rather manipulate the ideas and discourses around them to construct their experiences. However, the process of consciousness-raising and enlightenment will not be immediate, there will be resistance from the cognitive structures which have been developed and reinforced through the dominant discourses over time; just as Plato's prisoner took time adjusting to the 'new' reality outside of the cave; and just as Neo took adjusting to the *Desert of the Real*, so too will the process of change and enlightenment need reinforcing and support as it will take time to adjust.

### **Bridge between Cultural and Theoretical texts**

One of the goals of this study, was to bridge the gap between cultural texts, like Plato's *The Republic* or George Orwell's *1984* (1948), and theoretical texts, like Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* and Broffenbrenner's *Ecological Model of Human Development*. This study also served the ambition of bridging the divide between philosophical and psychological ideas. Usually, philosophical inspections into society and subjectivity are exercised free from psychological theories about learning and development. It was the ambition of this study to bring these two together to create a better framework to understand the development of the individual in late Capitalist society. Broffenbrenner's propositions about the developing individual's ecological environment necessarily hold that systems of ideological influence disseminated within the *Microsystem* will have a large and lasting impact on the individual. Piaget's observations of developing children provide us with the concepts of schemata, of inner-structures that collectively form the consciousness, the mind. These structures, as we discussed, can be formed through ideological influences and create a cognitive system based on ideological structures. Applying Baudrillard's *hyperreality* to this psychological equation suggests that our development can be profoundly affected by the *hyperreal*. With the multiple connections we make with the *hyperreal* media within our *microsystems*, we can develop cognitive structures based on *hyperreal* experiences. Our consciousness would inhabit a *hyperreal* domain, our cognitive framework which we understand the world with would be developed through *hyperreal* building-blocks, resulting in an illusory vision and understanding of the world.

### Conclusion:

The enigmatic *Matrix Trilogy* has provided us with a portrait of a likely trajectory for human culture; slaves to our own creations. Perhaps not a future where we are slaves to the machines we've built, but rather slaves to the industries, brands, and technology that we've developed. We have reached a point in our time where we are entirely dependent on technology and the systems and services it provides. Science-Fiction literature has many symbolic representations of various dark futures for humankind. Most of them involve our relationships with technology, consumerism, and the human desires for love, wealth, greed and power.

This study has pushed the fields of philosophy and psychology together to create a synergy of social ideas that are extremely relevant to today's techno-capitalist society. It is my belief that these findings are of crucial significance. These discussions have established the pervasive presence of ideology in society through a psychological lens, and very importantly, has shown how we are increasingly developing towards a society where Baudrillard's ideas about simulation and *hyperreality* exists across all facets of human life: in human development, cognition and even in human interaction. This idea concurs strongly with *the Matrix Trilogy* which is essentially an action movie with a plot based on Baudrillard's *hyperreality*.

Urie Broffebrenner's *Ecological Model for Human Development* and Jean Piaget's *Cognitive Model* are amongst the most widely recognised and used models on human development; so much so that they are taught to teachers of all levels, even at the preschool level. Using these models in the study allowed us to use a psychological perspective on the relationships with technology and consumerism. Broffebrenner conceptualises various spaces within the developing individual's environment. This study used Baudrillard's thesis on *hyperreality* to analyse the ecological environment of the modern individual. We concluded that not only is there a presence of *hyperreal* media in the immediate environment, the microsystem, but they match Broffebrenner's requirements for a *proximal process* – these processes, according to Broffebrenner, that contribute to the development of the most stable and long lasting personality traits in the individual. Therefore, *hyperreality* in modern society is a regular feature of child development. This perspective on child development has tremendous implications for the way we perceive the environment of the developing individual and is especially critical now in a time where a growing number of children are being introduced to mobile devices and the internet at a very young age.

Our discussions around Piaget's cognitive structures (*schema*) which provide us with our building-blocks for understanding the world has a tremendous and worrying impact when we simultaneously examine Piaget's beliefs about the accrual of language in the child and the nature of signs and discourses in society. These findings would suggest that at a young age children are not only introduced to language, but also to discourse-hood. They gradually become aware of the power vested in various discourses and the relation of this power to themselves – thus they become discourse-users. Children of increasingly younger ages are becoming aware of the Foucauldian power-significance of brands, celebrities, money and other discourses. These discourses are so well situated within the relations of power within society that they are able to reach out to young children. Althusser spoke of interpellation, wherein discourses and ideologies hail people towards them. This 'hailing' is happening to younger and younger children each day.

This type of culture creates adults that are firmly rooted to their positions within Plato's cave, or to their pods within *the Matrix*. Experiences are increasingly being simulated rather than simply being experienced. The secondary layer has growing primacy over the initial layer; we are situating our experiences in the map from Buadrillard's essay rather than within the territory – within the illusory Matrix program rather than within the world. However, as a result of our *hyperreal* development, this all seems normal and natural to us. We have been programmed into becoming consuming adults, and are gradually becoming a society of human-beings that care only about the material.

I believe the findings of this study can exist as an eye-opening protective measure against the forces of the *hyperreal* seeking to claim space within our ecological environments, and seeking to shape and inhabit our cognitive schemata. Importantly, the study also suggests changes to the psychological significance given to discourses and ideologies and their impact on child development. This is something that it is not given enough weight in mainstream psychology and is itself an example of various competing discourses being embedded within relations of power. The discussions in this study have challenged that by using psychological theories that rest at the centre of mainstream Western psychology: Broffenbrenner and Piaget. By doing that we have drawn on the Foucauldian power that is imbued into those theories from the field of psychology and have used them to 'open-up' philosophical discourses. This perspective would see this study itself as an alternate discourse on human psychological development.

This study itself has become a dystopian reading of the future of human culture and society. It has established the necessity of 'opening-up' alternate discourses and movements like Culture Jamming, the activities of Anonymous, Wikileaks, Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden. These whistle-blowers have revealed more than damning classified information; they have exposed the true nature of society – one that is far more like a harrowing Orwellian imagining than the world we think we live in – the world we see on Facebook and in advertisements. The findings of the study suggest that the perpetuation of this techno-consumerist culture will lead us to a world of simulated human-beings with simulated human interactions, emotions and experiences – a world that we almost already inhabit, a world much like the one in *the Matrix Trilogy*.



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