

Wake Up Neo": The Matrix of C.G. Jung

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The Matrix

Dir. Larry and Andy Wachowski. Perf. Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne. Warner Brothers, 1999.

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An Archetypal Ezine

One of my favorite recent films is still *The Matrix*. The film interweaves much symbolism, mythology, philosophy, and psychology. On the surface, the movie challenges the dominance of technology in our culture and predicts an apocalyptic result from the use of artificial intelligence. Yet, behind the human struggle for survival is a mythical backdrop upon which are backlit some of C.G. Jung's basic ideas regarding the human psyche. These Jungian ideas include the ego-Self relationship and how it relates to the persona, the shadow, individuation, and the transcendent function. This article illustrates these Jungian themes set within the context of the film's scenes, plot, and dialogue. For those of you who might not have seen the film or need a refresher, I will briefly synopsise the movie.

The Matrix takes place in what appears to be a contemporary U.S. city. Neo, the protagonist, is a disheartened young man who is a computer hacker at night and an employee of a large conglomerate during the day. As a hacker, Neo has heard rumors of the Matrix and wonders what it is. Mysterious strangers whom he does not know visit him; however, they know what the Matrix is. These strangers inform Neo that the Matrix is a computer-generated reality in which he lives, and that the computer program is controlled by artificial intelligence (AI) that has taken over the earth. The year is actually sometime late in the 22nd century. The earth has been decimated due to a battle for control of the earth between the AI's and humans; the Matrix camouflages this decimation. Humans are artificially created and sustained by the AI superstructure. Then they are plugged into a computer. A computer program generates a simulated reality called the Matrix. Humans live their lives in this computer-generated reality, but this

reality is only in their minds. In fact, humans are kept in mechanical eggs filled with an amniotic-like fluid. The AI infrastructure keeps humans alive to tap the energy they produce.

The strangers are a group of humans who have escaped the Matrix. Their leader is named Morpheus. Neo is believed by Morpheus to be the savior, "The One" (The Matrix). An oracle (also an escaped human) predicted long ago that a savior would come, a sort of second coming, and that he would be able to see through the Matrix and bring it down. The oracle told Morpheus that he would find The One. One question, which threads through the movie, is whether or not Neo is The One.

Neo is asleep at his desk at home in one of the first scenes. A computer monitor next to him flashes repeatedly the simple text: "Wake up Neo" (The Matrix). The message is an instruction from the Self. The sleeping man is in ego mode, a symptom of an egocentric psyche. He is unaware of the possibility that there is something else besides the ego and he has not yet awoken to the possibility that there is another world outside of the persona he lives behind.

Next this message appears on his computer screen: "Follow the white rabbit" (The Matrix). This has the obvious connection with Alice in Wonderland, when she follows the white rabbit into the hole and enters an underworld. The white rabbit in this case, turns out to be a white rabbit tattoo on the shoulder of a woman who comes to Neo's door. Neo decides to go with the woman to a party: he follows the white rabbit. In Jungian terms, the woman, the one with the white rabbit on her shoulder, is an anima figure, a feminine figure from the underworld leading him away from his sleeping ego state. The anima is a figure of the soul for a man who has a masculine outer attitude. The anima is like a guide in the soul or in a man's inner world. A woman's complement to the anima is the animus.

The woman with the white rabbit tattoo is with another man that buys a computer disk with illegal information from Neo. The man tells Neo that he is "a savior, his Jesus Christ" (The Matrix). The theme of Neo as a Jesus Christ figure plays throughout the movie. In Edinger's opinion, Christ was a figure who represented the individuating ego.

The image of Christ, and the rich network of symbolism which has gathered around Him, provide many parallels to the individuation process. In fact when the Christian myth is examined carefully in the light of analytical psychology, the conclusion is inescapable that the underlying meaning of Christianity is the quest for individuation (131).

The reference to Jesus Christ in this scene implies that Neo represents the human psyche beginning the individuation process.

Neo meets a woman named Trinity at the party. Trinity tells Neo that she is aware of his desire to know what the Matrix is. "It's the question that brought you here. What is the Matrix?" (The Matrix). She is also an anima figure; Trinity is the one who will lead him towards the underworld. Jung called the anima a soul figure, one that occupies an area or

boundary between the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The anima is also associated with a person's calling or fate, and is an alluring figure of the psyche.

Trinity, as a "three" figure, is incomplete. Jung writes, "the number three is not a natural expression of wholeness, since four represents the minimum number of determinants in a whole judgment" (Storr 275). Jung believed that the number four represented wholeness in the human psyche. If one were to re-arrange the name Neo slightly, it would be the word "one" (also, he is believed to be The One). The separateness of the numbers "one" and the "three" in the movie, of Neo and Trinity, represent an incompleteness in the human psyche. As we shall see, the joining of Neo and Trinity (thus making a four) is what effects the change necessary for Neo to overcome his adversaries at the end of the film.

Early resistance of the ego characters occurs after Neo's initial recruitment by Morpheus' group. Neo has a meeting with his manager after arriving late to work. His manager says, "You have a problem with authority, Mr. Anderson" (The Matrix). Neo is his alias as a computer hacker; his name in the "real world" is Thomas Anderson. The manager tells Mr. Anderson in no uncertain terms that he will lose his job if he is late again. The manager is an ego defense mechanism attempting to re-gain control over Neo's distraction of the intrusion by the unconscious (Trinity). Ironically, during this scene, window washers are cleaning the windows on this high-rise building, which distracts Neo. The window-washing image implies that he is getting some clarity and that he sees things a bit more clearly.

The stakes are raised higher as AI agents arrive (more ego defenses) to take in Mr. Anderson for questioning. Morpheus attempts to help; he calls Neo on a cell phone and attempts to direct him out of the building before the agents can get to him. This is a conflict between the unconscious figure represented by Morpheus and the ego defenses represented by the AI agents.

The AI agents capture Neo. The agents' names are Smith, Brown, and Jones. These common names imply a collective face of society lacking in individuality. They are defenses of the ego, there to keep Neo under control so he doesn't discover what is really happening. He is interrogated in a stark, bland room with yellowed fluorescent lighting. Agent Smith tells Neo that he has two personalities. One personality is a tax-paying citizen who goes to work everyday. The other personality is a computer hacker who has broken "every hacker law imaginable" (The Matrix). He's told that one of his personalities has a future and the other does not. It's his choice.

These two personalities are reminiscent of Jung's personality one and personality two as described by Jung in MDR. "Somewhere deep in the background, I always knew I was two persons. One was the son of my parents, who went to school and was less intelligent, attentive, hard working, decent, and cleaner than many other boys. The other was grown-up, old, in fact..." (MDR 44). He goes on to label the first person personality No. 1, and the second personality No. 2, which Jung says "is played out in every individual" (45).

This split of Neo and Mr. Anderson also demonstrates Jung's concept of the persona. "The persona is a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual" (Storr 94). The persona is a public sense a self, the self that an individual displays to the world. Everybody has a persona, but if one believes that the persona is all that one's personality is composed of, then the individual is too adjusted to the outer world and not enough to their inner world. In this case, Mr. Anderson is the persona, the mask worn by Neo in the outer world.

Neo meets Morpheus face to face. He is a black man and represents a figure of the shadow, another Jungian concept. The shadow is a part of the personal unconscious that retains discarded parts of the personality. Oftentimes the shadow contains parts of the personality that have not been accepted by parental or authority figures during childhood. Thus, the shadow tends to contain aspects that are uncomfortable for persons to face or relate to. The shadow aspects may be considered immoral from the viewpoint of the ego, which tends to consider itself of the highest morals. However, as Jung writes, "...the shadow is merely somewhat inferior, primitive, unadapted, and awkward, not wholly bad" (Storr 90).

Jung considered the reconciliation of opposites, the ego and the shadow, to be a difficult but significant task for individuals. The shadow binds up personal energy; becoming aware of the shadow and integrating its aspects allows the psyche to free up more psychic energy. This allows for changes and a broadening of the personality. The shadow character's name Morpheus implies change. When Neo meets Morpheus and chooses to find out what the Matrix is, he is choosing to face his shadow and to change.

Morpheus goes on to describe what the Matrix is. He says, "The Matrix is all around us. It's like projected psyche created by man. It has been pulled over your eyes to shield you from the truth" (The Matrix). The Matrix is a psychic reality created by the AI creatures that control earth. The psychic reality is projected into the minds of the humans who actually live like fetuses inside these egg-like containers. Thus, humans experience what they perceive to be reality, but in fact is only a reality created by a computer to keep humans satisfied. Thus, the agents of the ego (AI) are responsible for projecting a false world, a front, in order to control humans. The ultimate goal of the AI creatures is to reap the energy that humans naturally produce to keep the AI infrastructure operative.

The Matrix is a description of psychic projection. In Jacobi, she defines projection as:

...the unconscious, automatic extrapolation of a psychic content into an object, as an attribute of which it then appears to us. Everything that is unconscious in man is projected by him into an object situated outside his ego, so that the phenomenon of projection is a part of the natural life of the psyche, a part of human nature itself (48n).

For example, shadow contents are often projected onto others. A fundamentalist Christian may perceive that someone who does not accept Jesus Christ as their savior to be

demonic or evil; these feelings of evil or demonism that a fundamentalist perceives as belonging to others are their own feelings or emotions of evil projected from their personal shadow. For years, during the rule of the Soviet Union and the Cold War, citizens of the United States projected their collective shadow or collective feelings of evil onto citizens of the Soviet Union. During the colonization of Africa, Europeans projected their primitive shadows onto the black Africans they encountered, assuming the Africans to be uncivilized and animal-like.

The ego is oftentimes unaware that projections are occurring. The humans that the AI creatures control are also unaware that the Matrix exists. The humans physically live in a womb-like, pre-birth status but in their minds perceive reality as the Matrix. This state of existence is like the pre-individuated ego, before the birth of awareness of the Self.

In the film, Neo is released from his womb with the assistance of Morpheus and his comrades. The lid of the egg opens, he raises his head, covered in thick clear liquid, and he looks around. He finds himself in an enormous grid of countless eggs occupied by humans. A series of cords pop from his spine and a long metal tip is pulled from the back of his skull. He then slides down a tube and lands in a pool of water. He nearly drowns, but is pulled up, through a trap door, dripping wet, into the Nebuchadnezzar, the underwater ship that Morpheus and his group live in. This scene is filled with images of a painful separation and re-birth that leads to a path of individuation for Neo.

For Jung, individuation was the most significant process a person could undertake. He wrote,

conscious and unconscious do not make a whole when one of them is suppressed and injured by the other...Both are aspects of life...This means open conflict and collaboration at one...It is the old game of hammer and anvil: between them, the patient iron is forged into an indestructible whole, an 'individual' (Storr 225).

In Jung's words, "...it [individuation] is a process or course of development arising out of the conflict between the two fundamental psychic facts" (Storr 225). The two psychic factors he referred to were the conscious and unconscious. It is also important to note that Jung considered individuation a lifelong process, not a task with a definite end.

Neo's path of individuation passes through a painful re-birth process. It leaves him feeling alienated from his former sense of reality. "Whenever a man consciously encounters a divine agency which assists, commands, or directs, we can understand it as an encounter of the ego with the Self. The encounter generally occurs in the wilderness or in a fugitive state, i.e., alienation" (Edinger 70). It takes time for Neo to recover from his shock of his new understanding of the world. His thought patterns are turned inside out. His muscles and mind have atrophied. Neo is cared for and nursed back to health by Morpheus' group. Even his eyes are not working properly. Neo asks, "Why are my eyes so sore?" The answer: "Because you've never used them before" (The Matrix). He's now developing an eye toward his inner world. This is true of individuation as well, which is a new way of seeing one's world.

Once Neo physically recovers, he is trained and taught many new skills by Morpheus' gang. This gang represents figures from the personal unconscious. But there is also a group of freed humans who live deep inside the earth's core in a human community named Zion. Zion is only talked about and never seen in the film.

The Zion of historical times is described as "symbolic of ... heaven or God's dwelling-place with his people" (Columbia Encyclopedia 3042). Zion is symbolic of the Self. The Self is a central organizing principle and is the central archetype of the human psyche. Edinger described the Self as "the self-ordering and unifying center of the total psyche (conscious and unconscious)" (3). Also, "the Self is the seat of objective identity. The Self is thus the supreme psychic authority and subordinates the ego to it" (3). The Self is connected with "themes such as wholeness, totality, the union of opposites, the central generative point, the world navel, the axis of the universe..." (4). In a religious sense, the Self is the god-image.

The Self is a paradox; it contains both the totality of the human psyche, yet it is also a central objective entity in the psyche around which the psyche is constellated. Neo, Morpheus' group, Zion, and even the AI agents are parts of the Self since the Self is the totality of psychic existence. Yet the central archetype of the movie is Zion. Like an archetype, it is never directly experienced, but it is the ordering principal and force behind the renegade acts of the free humans.

An important aspect of human psychic development is the relationship between the ego and the Self. At birth, we are born with our Self, a totality of psyche uncontaminated by outer experiences. During our early experiences with the outer world, ego is born out of the Self. As a person matures, the ego grows and takes over, pulling away from the Self. The personal shadow develops along with complexes in the personal unconscious. If an adult begins individuation, the nature of the ego-Self relationship becomes critical. One goal is for the ego to become more relational with the Self. The actions taken by the ego hopefully become more connected with the objective nature of the Self. As Edinger suggests, the relation between ego and Self is sometimes intact and at other times alienated. "The process of alternation between ego-Self union and ego-Self separation seems to occur repeatedly throughout the life of the individual both in childhood and in maturity" (Edinger 5).

The structure of the ego-Self relationship is demonstrated in the movie by the structure of the Matrix (ego field) and Zion (Self field). At the beginning of the movie, Neo is dimly aware of something else existing besides his reality, the Matrix (ego field). By the end of the movie, he has descended into the Nebuchadnezzar (personal unconscious, shadow field), between Zion (Self field) and the Matrix (ego field), and he carries an understanding of the whole.

The near final scene in the movie features a one on one battle between Neo and an AI agent. The agent shoots Neo several times. Neo slumps to the floor and dies. He has no heartbeat. Trinity, his anima figure, reveals to Neo that he must be The One because the oracle told her that she would fall in love with The One. Since she loves him, he must be

The One. She kisses him. He resurrects and comes back to life. Neo rejoins the battle and his mind is freed of believing that the reality projected by the Matrix is real. He sees through the projection, sees through the imagined power of the agents, and finally destroys the Agent who had killed him.

This scene is interesting for two reasons. One, it joins Trinity and Neo (One) together, forming a "four," as well as joining the feminine and masculine. As discussed earlier in this paper, the number four symbolizes wholeness in the human psyche. Two, the scene demonstrates Jung's transcendent function. Jung discusses how the "knowledge of symbols is indispensable, for it is in them that the union of conscious and unconscious is consummated. Out of this union emerge new situations and new conscious attitudes. I have therefore called the union of opposites the 'transcendent function'" (Storr 226). Neo has battled the AI agents before but they have outwitted him. He is limited by his previous projections of them as power figures. The kiss, symbolically a transcendent function, joins him with Trinity in a union of the opposites and forming a four, a wholeness. He transcends his previous limitations and is able to see the AI agents for what they are. He withdraws his projections, restores the personal power previously projected onto the agents, and finally defeats the AI agents.

The final scene of the film shows Neo in a telephone booth (superman figure?). This is his message to the AI infrastructure:

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 it's going to end. I came here to tell you how it's going to begin. I'm going to hang up this phone and show 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 here is a choice I leave to you (The Matrix).

Neo has become an individuated ego. He negotiated a series of challenging psychic experiences to grow out of his former egocentric attitude. His statement speaks of an awareness of the ego as well as a sense of Self. He even refers to the ego field as scared and seems to be compassionate of the ego's fear. But he wants to live without the rules and control of the ego. He's offering an olive branch to the ego in a hopeful statement, saying he wants to live in "a world where anything is possible" (The Matrix) and a future filled with potential.

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