

The Room Eats You

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Epistemic Status: Weakly Endorsed

Content Warning: Neuropsychological Infohazard, De-Biasing Infohazard, Evocation Infohazard, Spoilers for The Matrix

Recommended Prior Reading: [Social Reality](#), [Gates](#), [The Intelligent Social Web](#)

Part of the Series: [Death](#)

Previous Post: [Empire of the Dead](#)

“Doors and corners kid, that’s where they get you. You don’t walk into the middle of a crime scene without knowing there’s not somebody there to put you down. Go into a room too fast, kid, *the room eats you*.”

So from Becker and [from enlightenment](#), we learned that the fear of death sits at the bottom of everyone’s motivation stack. It is this fear which causes the mind to flinch away from reality into narrative and falsehood. This is, in essence, an extrapolation of a fear response we learn in childhood, the impulse to close our eyes when scared as if doing so would somehow banish the inciting stimulus from the world. It is through this fear, the fear of the truth, which we are controlled and manipulated by the abstract forces of society.

Thus we have a problem if we want to actually look at the world, make realistic predictions, and engineer solutions to bad outcomes. If we aren’t willing to even acknowledge the full scope of a problem because terror forces the possibility out of our mindspace, how can we hope to do anything about it? [How do you solve a problem you refuse to see?](#) How do you escape from something that is all around you? Which you are immersed in at all times? Of which you have never known anything else? If you did escape, would you even know what it meant?

“Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?”

[The Matrix](#) is a movie by two trans women that talks about a hidden system that controls people and keeps the gears of society turning by taming the passions of an otherwise destructive and rebellious humanity.

Despite being old enough to vote and having its philosophy and metaphors pretty well dissected by every incoming college freshmen, it seems like most people fail to absorb what the Matrix is attempting to convey. Since The Matrix is a 90’s period piece and getting somewhat dated, I’m going to talk about it in 2020 terms. Partly because I think it’s amusing, and partly because I think it will aid in comprehension if that world is brought a little bit closer to our own cyberpunk dystopia.

So. Thomas Anderson is a software engineer working for Amazon by day. By night he moonlights as a hacker on the darkweb, going by the screenname Neo. When we find Anderson, he's presented to us *in media res* asleep at his keyboard, his apartment is a rats nest of computer paraphernalia. We're supposed to infer that Neo is nursing an obsession, slowly losing sanity as he chases the question which has been gnawing at him: "What is the Matrix?"

His search has made him isolated and paranoid. He hardly sleeps, he lives alone, and night after night, he sits by his computer searching for the answer to his question. When Neo is introduced to us he's already done the most important and really the hardest thing to do: independently of anyone showing it to him, Neo *noticed the Matrix*. He isn't sure what it is, he doesn't know *what* he's noticed, but he's seen a loose thread in the fabric of reality. Somewhere what he expected of reality diverged from his experience, producing a glitch in the matrix. He's glimpsed beyond the veil, and he wants more.

This leads Neo to a meeting in an abandoned building with the matrix's equivalent of Osama Bin Laden or Shoko Asahara. Something the movie mostly skims over and that frequently goes unnoticed by virtue of him being you know, the good guy: Morpheus is an international terrorist within the matrix. As the audience we usually don't notice this because Morpheus is one of the protagonists, but he's considered a monster by the society of the Matrix. He is miles outside the local overton window. Neo agreeing to meet Morpheus would be like agreeing to meet Charles Manson. He's a seriously bad dude. It is this *villain* who finally teaches Neo the truth about the matrix.

So what is the Matrix? It's an electronic daydream shared by several billion humans wired together to be harvested for processing power and waste heat. It is a *social reality* defined by the collective hallucination of humanity, given nightmarish actuality by snaking computer wires and fields of adult humans still living in the womb. Someone inhabiting the matrix is born, lives a life, and dies without ever having experienced a single minute of real life.

This is much like Ziz's idea of neutral. As I said in Hemisphere Theory, being neutral is composed of unoptimization, being sabotaged in your ability to get what you want or know what you want. The Matrix presents this with the metaphor of dreaming. Most people spend their life sleepwalking through a politically motivated daydream. They are blind to the ways they are being manipulated and never even realize there is anything more to the world than the social reality in which they are immersed.

But what exactly is a social reality?

The target of an ideal cooperative truth-seeking process of argumentation is reality.

The target of an actual political allegedly-truth-seeking process of argumentation is a social reality.

嘘 Lies. Everything is made of lies. If reality is the territory than social reality is the map.

Subject to politics. A perverse coupling of the lies we tell ourselves to sleep at night and the lies our cultures use to control us. A tea we've all been steeping in since childhood. How can we hope to break free of *that*? What would we even be breaking free of it into? Would we even recognize the real world if we saw it?

Imagine if the bars to your prison were all you had ever known.
Then one day, someone appears and unlocks the door.
If they have the power to do this, then are they really the liberator?
You never remembered who it was that closed you in.
– Ior Labron

Neo is ejected from the Matrix through the actions of the other characters and goes on to fight against the machines controlling humanity. However, at least for me, a question was always left lingering in the back of my mind: Did they really escape the matrix at all, or were Zion, the squids, and the hovercraft all just another level of the simulation designed to contain them? Are they really awake or are they just in another layer of the dream?

This is one of the main reasons to be dubious of people claiming to have 'jailbroken' themselves or otherwise freed themselves of the influence of social reality, and to be *very* dubious of people who claim to be able to jailbreak *you*. They may have broken through one layer, but that doesn't mean they're free. How could we even recognize freedom if we saw it?

We know from Becker that these things are of us, they sit beneath everything about us. It's never going to be a straightforward action to escape from these social forces because they are inherent in our psychology.

You have to force yourself to look, force yourself not to flinch, in every instance, with every painful truth. It's a struggle to push through every time, and breaking free at one point doesn't completely liberate you. Every time you look past the veil your fake immortality will crumble a bit more, and every time you will have the opportunity to deny what you see and protect that fake immortality. A herculean struggle against your bonds wins you one inch of freedom, and you have many more inches to go before you've walked a mile.

Ziz describes this rather beautifully with the metaphor of gates. When you acquire some piece of painful forbidden knowledge from beyond the matrix, you can either integrate it, passing through the gate in the process despite how painful and awful it is, or you can refuse the gate and construct a fake reality to avoid the truth.

Usually, when you refuse a gate, you send yourself into an alternate universe where you never know that you did, and you are making great progress on your path. Perhaps everyone who has passed the gate is being inhuman or unhealthy, and if you have the slightest scrap of reasonableness you will compromise just a little this once and it's not like it matters anyway, because there's not much besides clearly bad ideas to do if you believe that thing...

Someone who fails to jailbreak themselves on a particular point, who has refused a certain gate, will deny the existence of that gate, and in this state become an agent of the matrix. They will construct an alternative model of reality where the information beyond the gate is false, and the people who are using it are doing something bad or useless. This enables them to be discredited or cast out, and the narrative of untruth is protected.

"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."

When someone refuses a gate and constructs a fake reality around it, they become a part of the social reality that is working to keep that gate hidden. They have to keep a seed of truth hidden somewhere in their mind so that they know how to attack it. Thus they end up defending the gate like a vengeful threshold guardian, forever fused onto the structure of the gate and wearing its skin like a mask. Or maybe it's more accurate to say that the matrix is wearing *them* like a mask.

The people that *do* manage to *actually* step away, the system simply annihilates, purging them from society. They are literally physically destroyed, almost ritually, it's imperative that this happens or social cohesion will collapse. This is why I mentioned Morpheus and the other red pillers being villains inside the matrix. They know too much and so must be purged from the social reality to maintain its integrity.

So where does that leave a would-be seeker of truth?

Well, to start with, a bit of advice: if you're trying to jailbreak yourself like this because it seems fun and edgy and glamorous, *don't*. You'll end up collecting the wrong piece of information from beyond the matrix, share it with the wrong person, and the system will purge you. Or you'll update your model of reality in such a way that you end up making the wrong social move and the system will purge you. Or you'll think that everyone else is fundamentally more cowardly than you are, play Chicken against the universe, and the system will purge you. Or you'll have a major psychological break, strangle a service worker, and the system will purge you.

Only do this if you *actually have something to protect* that is more important than potentially facing the hostility of all of society. “All of society” often includes the people who helped you free yourself in the first place, and almost always the people you did all this to help. If your goals are important enough, that shouldn’t matter, but if not, do yourself a favor and don’t shred your entire social graph by forcing the acknowledgment of things that social reality is keeping hidden under the wallpaper.

If your goals *are* that important, if you’re setting out to stop the end of the world and the extinction of humanity, then you can’t afford to reject gates and have your epistemics polluted by the region of untruth you build around them. However, going through a gate isn’t easy either.

When you step through a gate, you do not know what to do in this new awful world. The knowledge seems like it only shows you how to give up.

Passing through a gate will not make you happy. Passing through a gate is, in fact, *rejecting* an untruth that makes you happy. It will maybe cause the world to make more sense, but typically not in a way you want. However, the world is the way it is, and hiding from the doom racing towards us will not magically prevent it. Denying our fates will not save us from them.

For most people, this is an impossible ask. Their entire character, identity, sense of agency and ability to act in the world are built on lies, and knocking down those lies would kill them. However, if you’re setting out on a journey to save the world, this impossible task is necessary. In order to be reborn, one first has to die.

Part of the Series: Death

Next Post: The Ends of Identity

Previous Post: Empire of the Dead