

## *Influence of Buddhism on Popular Culture*

Historically as Buddhism has moved nation-to-nation, continent-to-continent, Buddhism has left a lasting effect on nations, just as the nations have on Buddhism. The story seems no different for Buddhism's advent in America. As we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we see the effects of Buddhism's influence spread beyond fringe communities and immigrant settlement, into mainstream culture. This is well exemplified in Buddhism's recent advent in popular culture and popular film. An example of Buddhism's influence can be seen in the recent movie "*The Matrix*" by The Wachowski Brothers. Taking a close look at historical Mahayana Buddhism reveals great similarities between this movie and common Mahayana ideas. I wish to explore a Buddhist interpretation of this film, and argue the strong corollary between the story of *The Matrix*, and the ideas argued by Mahayana philosophers for centuries, including those of Samsara, Sunyata, the existence of the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and other common Mahayana ideas.

Unfortunately, *The Matrix* does not lend itself well to comparison to a *single* school of Buddhism. The ideas of any one school are too specific, and the ideas presented in *The Matrix* too general. Instead, I have chosen to compare *The Matrix* more generally with the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, specifically those concepts which differentiate Mahayana Buddhism from what scholars refer to as Hinayana Buddhism. Thus, the ideas expressed here are found in most if not all schools which claim to teach Mahayana Buddhism.<sup>1</sup> There are also aspects of Buddhism, which without a specific choice of school, there is no basis for comparison. For such aspects, I have chosen to compare *The Matrix* with the "wisdom school"<sup>2</sup> of Mahayana Buddhism.

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<sup>1</sup> Schumann 92-96

<sup>2</sup> Schumann 120 – 156.

### *A background on Buddhism*

As a basis for my comparison of *The Matrix* with “pan-Buddhist” (i.e. those ideas present in all or almost all schools of Buddhism) ideas, I refer to Schumann’s lists in his *Buddhism: An Outline of its Teachings and Schools* where he proposes 8 key points which are central to all schools of Buddhism. Of his 8 points, I will focus on 7 here: belief that existence is sorrowful, and requiring deliverance; belief in rebirth; belief in karma; belief that the world is without substance and in constant flux; belief that each person is without self; belief that liberation is only achievable through extermination of greed, hatred and delusion and by gaining enlightenment; and finally, faithful confidence in the Buddhas. Also mentioned in his list is the idea of a natural law, and the goal of extinction of personality, both Buddhist ideas are not very visible in the film, thus I will address the contrast on these points between *The Matrix* and Mahayana Buddhism.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to identifying the “pan-Buddhist” elements in *The Matrix*, I also seek to compare ideas of this film with specifically the Mahayana branch of Buddhism. As basis for comparison, I again use a list of points from Schumann detailing how Mahayana Buddhism differentiates itself from the other Hinayana branch. To begin: Mahayana regard suffering as an illusion which is recognized through enlightenment; Mahayana teaches an absolute behind all things, and that the Buddha is a projection of the absolute; Mahayana also consider assistance from outsiders as possible, allowing for deliverance; Mahayana make a great distinction not to follow a personal goal of extinction, rather to lead all beings to liberation; Finally, Nirvana, to the Mahayana, is becoming conscious of one’s own absoluteness, and is a state of mental aloofness from, but within the world, which does not exclude interaction with the world after the enlightenment.<sup>4</sup> With this list, and the one prior to it, we have a construct from which to build an idea of Mahayana Buddhism and compare it to the film.

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<sup>3</sup> Schumann 94

<sup>4</sup> Schumann 94-95.

### *A summary of The Matrix*

Before I make reference to *The Matrix*, let me first give a brief summary of its story. The story focuses on a man named Thomas Anderson, a.k.a. Neo. Neo is dissatisfied with his present existence, and is looking for something more: he is searching for “the Matrix.” Before he finds what he is looking for, special “Agents” within the Matrix find Neo, and attempt to scare him away from his search. Regardless, he is tracked down by Morpheus, and his crew of outsiders and is convinced to join them and receive true understanding of “the Matrix.” Neo is then awakened; awakened to the fundamental reality underlying the Matrix. Consequently, he emerges from his digital illusion to find that his entire life was “a computer-generated dream world.”<sup>5</sup> Neo, now in the “real world,” is taught to understand the Matrix. On one occasion, reentering the Matrix, to seek out the mystical Oracle, the team is betrayed by a member, Cypher, who cannot cope with his own disillusionment. Cypher hopes by betraying the team to find favor with the agents and achieve eventual re-insertion. He reveals their position to the Agents, following which several members of the team are killed and Morpheus captured. Neo, after escaping the agents and leaving the Matrix, re-enters the Matrix, this time willing to sacrifice his own life to save Morpheus. Neo and Trinity succeed in rescuing Morpheus, and all but Neo escape the Matrix once again. Neo, now on his own, and under attack by the agents, finally begins to understand the true fundamental emptiness of all things. Neo dies in the Matrix, only to be revived again, with a true understanding and full enlightenment. Neo defeats the agents and the movie ends with Neo planning the revelation of truth to all those in the Matrix.

### *Comparison with pan-Buddhist ideas*

“Existence is sorrowful and requiring deliverance” this is the first of the pan-Buddhist beliefs to address.<sup>6</sup> This idea is expressed most basically in the Buddhist doctrine of the Four Noble truths. The

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<sup>5</sup> *The Matrix*

<sup>6</sup> Schumann 94

first two of these truths deal with suffering. The first truth, which all Buddhists must accept, is Dukkha – suffering, dis-ease, disease, dis-ease with the world: “To live is to suffer. There is always a fundamental dissatisfaction.”<sup>7</sup> Understanding this first truth, Buddhist’s also realize the origin of suffering. Buddhists believe that suffering originates from our ever-present disillusionment, and our constant desire for something new.<sup>8</sup> This is referred to as the cycle of suffering which all beings experience within Samsara: first ignorance, then attachment, then emotional afflictions, and finally ignorance again.<sup>9</sup> The idea of a sorrowful existence is addressed many times in the film *The Matrix*. Morpheus speaks of the world of the Matrix, as a “prison.” A place where people are “born into bondage.”<sup>10</sup> The fundamental illusion of the Matrix leads to the suffering of beings. One of the “agents,” Agent Smith explains the current design of the Matrix based on the fact that “human beings define their reality through misery and suffering.”<sup>11</sup> The Matrix is designed as a world in which people suffer just as the Buddhists fundamentally believe in the existence of suffering.

Along with the idea that the world is full of suffering, is the idea “that the world is without substance and in constant flux.”<sup>12</sup> This belief reiterates that attachment is futile in a world which so easily changes. Buddhists believe that all things in the realm of samsara are mutable and inconstant. This belief is echoed in *The Matrix*. The Matrix is described as “empty,” as an illusion, or “dream world.”<sup>13</sup> This can directly related to the emptiness of samsara. Moreover, the Matrix is also under constant change. One visible example of this change is déjà vu in the Matrix. A déjà vu in the Matrix represents a glitch, or external change in the Matrix. As such, the Matrix is then at any time under change. Intrinsic in the matrix, just as in samsara, is also the idea of decay. Decay can be seen in the repeated physical

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<sup>7</sup> Vorenkamp.

<sup>8</sup> Vorenkamp.

<sup>9</sup> Vorenkamp.

<sup>10</sup> *The Matrix*.

<sup>11</sup> *The Matrix*.

<sup>12</sup> Schumann

<sup>13</sup> *The Matrix*.

destruction in the Matrix. Nothing ever remains as it was, thus the Matrix, is in a similar state of flux as that of the Buddhist samsara.

The second pair of beliefs, which are necessary to address, are the Buddhist beliefs in karma and rebirth. Karma is “an intentional act, performed by body, speech, or mind, which ... will result in happiness or [suffering] in this or a future rebirth.”<sup>14</sup> Each individual acquires a “record” of karma, which affects future happiness or suffering. Buddhist believe that “we are karmically conditioned, both individually and collectively, by our past choices and behavior.”<sup>15</sup> So too, are these ideas of collective and individual Karma’s expressed in *The Matrix*. Direct reference in the movie is made to the Karma of the past affecting the present: Humans now live in a world controlled by an artificial intelligence they created. In effect, Humans bear direct responsibility for their enslaved state.<sup>16</sup> This is the idea of a collective Karma represented in *The Matrix*. References to individual Karma are seen perhaps best in the Oracle’s statements to Neo: “Sorry kid. You got the gift. But it looks like you’re waiting for something. What? Your next life, maybe. Who knows, that’s the way these things go.”<sup>17</sup> The Oracle makes reference to Neo’s “gift.” This gift, may be interpreted as the Karma and understanding which he has built up over his previous incarnations. The Oracle also makes reference to Neo’s “next life,” suggesting a belief in rebirth, another idea central to Buddhist thought. All Buddhist schools refer to some idea of rebirth, normally meaning the transmigration of karmic streams. Buddhists belief systems are built off of the idea of a “vast cycle of repeated birth, death, and rebirth.”<sup>18</sup> So to is this cycle characterized in *The Matrix*. Quoting Morpheus: “I watched them [the machines] liquefy the dead [humans] so they could be fed intravenously to the living.” This feeding of the dead to the living may represent the birth-death cycle present in Buddhism. Buddhist ideas of Karma and the eventual cycle of birth death and rebirth can be seen in *The Matrix*.

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<sup>14</sup> Robinson and Johnson

<sup>15</sup> Ford.

<sup>16</sup> Ford.

<sup>17</sup> *The Matrix*.

Fundamental to Buddhist belief is the idea that each person is without self – there is no “mini me.”<sup>19</sup> Buddhists believe that beings are “essential transient, they have no eternal Self or soul, no abiding individuality.”<sup>20</sup> Buddhists believe that we all lack a fundamental self. This idea can be compared to a similar idea of “the non-existence of me” in the Matrix. *The Matrix* does not seem to make direct reference to the “lack of a self,” but rather seems to understand that all that exists inside the Matrix is not a self, but merely a “digital projection of the mind.”<sup>21</sup> The contrast could also be made that the existence of a single mind, or consciousness behind this digital projection might be the existence of a “mini me.” I would contend however, that some schools of Buddhism, do rely on the concept of the existence of consciousness, as such, such a contrast is perhaps mute. This is one point of little mention in the Matrix. One example of “no self” in *The Matrix* comes in one of the final fight scenes, and might even be seen as a “Buddhist joke” of sorts.<sup>22</sup> Neo and Agent Smith are dueling with pistols. Running towards each other shooting, when they jump and collide in the air, spiraling to the ground with their guns against each other’s temples. Agent Smith says, “You’re empty.” To which Neo responds: “So are you.”<sup>23</sup> They both conceivably reference to ammunition, but it takes little extrapolation to relate it to “no self.” Depending on how far one might allow symbolic references in *The Matrix*, this very well could be taken as a play on the understanding of the emptiness of their world.<sup>24</sup> The idea of “no self” is at least presented in *The Matrix*, however remains a weaker point of comparison between *The Matrix* and Buddhism.

Another pan-Buddhist belief to address is the idea that “liberation is only achievable through extermination of greed, hatred and delusion and by gaining enlightenment.”<sup>25</sup> Buddhists as a whole believe that liberation from Samsara is only achieved through the extermination of these feelings. This is represented in *The Matrix* best through allegory. In *The Matrix*, there are two characters who contrast on

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<sup>18</sup> Robinson and Johnson.

<sup>19</sup> Vorenkamp.

<sup>20</sup> de Bary.

<sup>21</sup> *The Matrix*.

<sup>22</sup> Holland.

<sup>23</sup> *The Matrix*.

<sup>24</sup> Holland.

this point. The first is Cypher, who some might compare to Mara, or one tempted by Mara. Cypher is discontented outside of the Matrix, and is still tempted by greed and delusion, represented well by his conversation with Agent Smith: “You know, I know that this steak doesn't exist. I know when I put it in my mouth the Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy and delicious. After nine years, do you know what I've realized? (He pops it in, eyes rolling up, savoring the tender beef melting in his mouth) Ignorance is bliss. I don't want to remember nothing. Nothing! You understand? And I want to be rich.”<sup>26</sup> Cypher is one who is enlightened to a partial understanding of the Matrix, however he still retains attachment, and thus is prevented from attaining true bliss. In comparison, Neo rejects attachment to all things within the Matrix, and in the end rejects even the attachment to his own existence. Through this rejection, Neo attains enlightenment. This portrayal of these two characters can be seen as evidence of this Buddhist belief in *The Matrix*.

The Buddhist faith and confidence in the Buddhas and the teachings thereof is the final key point Schumann mentions that all Buddhist schools share. All Buddhist schools believe in the Buddha, or “awakened one” and seek guidance from such a being. “In every world-system, every region of the world, and in each age Perfect Ones do appear in order to show beings the Buddha-vehicle which leads to omniscience.”<sup>27</sup> Buddhists believe in the existence and return of Buddha’s who act as guides to enlightenment. Analogously, *The Matrix* presents Buddha figures. Quoting Morpheus: “When the Matrix was first built, there was a man born inside that had the ability to change what he wanted, to remake the Matrix as he saw fit. It was this man that freed the first of us.... When he died, the Oracle prophesied his return.... That is why there are those of us that have spent our entire lives searching the Matrix, looking for him.”<sup>28</sup> In this passage, Morpheus expresses 3 key beliefs intrinsic in Buddhist doctrine. The first is the existence of a Buddha, as the first enlightened or awakened one. The second is

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<sup>25</sup> Schumann.

<sup>26</sup> Lim. Parts quoted from *The Matrix*.

<sup>27</sup> Buddhism 101.

<sup>28</sup> Lim. Quoted from *The Matrix*.

the compassion of Buddhas (“the one”), and their continued return to free those from samsara (“the matrix”). Finally he expresses complete faith in the Buddha and his teachings.<sup>29</sup> Morpheus and those like him believe completely in salvation through this Buddha, and have spent their lives in search of such.<sup>30</sup> Comparing to the words of the Buddha: “Again and again I am born in the world of living beings.”<sup>31</sup> Buddhist’s believe the Buddha will return, and correspondingly those of *The Matrix* believe in return of “the one.” The Oracle also echo’s Morpheus’s unwavering belief in Neo, describing how Morpheus believes so blindly in Neo’s existence as “the one” that he is willing to sacrifice his own life to save Neo. Faith in the Buddha is central to Buddhist doctrine and is represented in *The Matrix*.

### ***Comparison with Mahayana Buddhist ideas***

More specifically than general Buddhism, *The Matrix* seems comparable to a Mahayana Buddhist belief systems. The first of the characteristics of Mahayana, which sets it apart from the Hinayana branch, is the Mahayana regard for suffering as an illusion. “The worldling ... lives in ignorance of his innate Buddha-nature, suffers by attributing significance to illusory phenomena, and hence considers himself not to be liberated.”<sup>32</sup> Regarding suffering as an illusion also means that the Mahayana’s believe that the understanding of this illusion is then liberation. This belief is exhibited in *The Matrix* as well. During Neo’s training, Morpheus continually instructs him to “free his mind.” As so much, “freeing Neo’s mind” would be him understanding his own Buddhahness and realizing his own self-liberation. Morpheus refers to “the minds of the people we are trying to save,” and warns that many of them are “so inert, so hopelessly dependant on the system.” It is this dependence that is the root of their suffering. The acceptance of the illusion is the basis behind suffering for these people. This view of suffering as being an illusion is key in Mahayana thought and is likewise represented in *The Matrix* as being the non-understanding of the fundamental illusion of the Matrix.

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<sup>29</sup> Lim.

<sup>30</sup> Brown.

<sup>31</sup> Schumann 100.

Three more of the beliefs of the Mahayana fit together in one. The belief in the possibility for outside assistance or deliverance towards the attainment of enlightenment, the Bodhisattva vow to the greater goal to lead all beings to liberation, and finally the belief that Mahayana seek to deliver the world while their Hinayana brethren seek only to surmount it.<sup>33</sup> Mahayanin, unlike Hinayanin believe that enlightenment need not be a strictly personal endeavor. Many Mahayanin believe that any who walk the path, and begin the understanding of enlightenment are Bodhisattvas.<sup>34</sup> These Bodhisattvas who are capable of helping others attain enlightenment and bestowing karmic merit or deliverance to others. In fact, Mahayanin believe that it is the responsibility of Bodhisattvas to help others. From Schumann: “‘Bodhisattva’ is the name which the Mahayana supplies to those beings who strive systematically for enlightenment, that is Buddhahood, or who have already obtained it but postpone their own Static, that is Post-mortal Nirvana until all beings are liberated.”<sup>35</sup> This belief in the responsibility of Bodhisattvas separates Mahayana Buddhism from other Hinayana schools. Belief in Bodhisattvas and Buddhas and the deliverance through such is seen in *The Matrix*. Take for example Neo’s original escape from the Matrix and enlightenment. This feat was not accomplished alone, but was rather the gift of someone external, a fellow walker of the path. Directly related to this is the idea that Bodhisattvas seek not to remove themselves from this world, but rather to lead all beings to liberation. So to does the crew in *The Matrix* seek to “save the souls” of others within, instead of themselves simply escaping. Both Neo and Morpheus, embody the true selflessness of the Bodhisattvas. First Morpheus sacrifices himself in combat against an agent to save Neo. Later then Neo risks his own life, and actually dies to save Morpheus. These two embody the Buddhist understanding “Bodhisattvas live exclusively for others.”<sup>36</sup> Finally, the last understanding, that Mahayanin seek to deliver the world while Hinayanin seek only to surmount it, is

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<sup>32</sup> Schumann.

<sup>33</sup> Schumann 94.

<sup>34</sup> Robinson and Johnson 320.

<sup>35</sup> Schumann.

<sup>36</sup> Schumann.

a corollary to the previous.<sup>37</sup> Because the Bodhisattvas seek to liberate all beings before themselves, the world is then delivered. Just so by those free from the Matrix seeking to liberate others instead of simply removing themselves, all those trapped in the prison of the Matrix are then liberated as well. These three ideas of Mahayana Buddhism regarding the Bodhisattvas and their commitment to all beings, are also demonstrated clearly in the matrix through the selfless acts of those enlightened.

As mentioned previously in recount of Schumann's characteristics of Mahayana schools, those who are Mahayana believe the Buddha is a projection of the absolute. This means that the Buddha himself is empty. This belief is also exemplified in *The Matrix*, by the description of the "one who was born inside the Matrix ... [and] freed the first of us."<sup>38</sup> This "one" was himself "empty," born inside the Matrix; he was just a digital projection along with the rest of Samsara. This is also in line with what the Mahayanin believe.

### ***Additional comparison with the Mahayana "wisdom school"***

Mahayana Buddhism has another very distinctive characteristic to its teachings: the existence of an absolute behind all things. All schools of the Mahayana teach the existence of this absolute. They differ however on what exactly this absolute is. For this comparison, I will be more specific and compare to the "wisdom school" of Mahayana Buddhism. The "wisdom school" of Mahayana Buddhism defines the absolute as the fundamental emptiness, or sunyata of all things. Robinson and Johnson define sunyata as "devoid of any substantial independent underlying reality; emptiness."<sup>39</sup> This idea of sunyata is also one expressed repeatedly in *The Matrix*. The "truth" which Neo is continually seeking, is the emptiness of all things in the Matrix. One expression of this belief, verbalized in the movie, is made by a young boy, sitting in the Lotus position, wearing brown robes, and bending the Oracle's spoon collection

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<sup>37</sup> Schumann 95.

<sup>38</sup> *The Matrix*.

<sup>39</sup> Robinson and Johnson 320.

with his mind.<sup>40</sup> “There is no spoon,” he says, attempting to impart to Neo, the fundamental emptiness of all things. In instructing Neo, the boy says: “Do not try to bend the spoon. That’s impossible. Instead, only try to realize the truth. ... There is no spoon.”<sup>41</sup> To the “wisdom school” Mahayanin, there is no spoon. Everything is fundamentally empty; everything is sunyata. So too, is everything in the Matrix, a digital illusion: empty.

The application and understanding of this Absolute, is for most Mahayana schools the attainment of enlightenment. The “wisdom school” of Mahayana Buddhism understands enlightenment as the realization of sunyata – understanding of the fundamental emptiness of all things. The process of enlightenment: “All beings ... have always been free, through without knowing it Liberation is, therefore, to be achieved by the removal of this ignorance and by the realization of the Absolute [sunyata].”<sup>42</sup> This expression of enlightenment as the removal of ignorance is presented analogously in *The Matrix*. During training, Morpheus repeatedly reminds Neo, “You have to let it all go Neo, fear, doubt, disbelief. Free your mind, Neo.”<sup>43</sup> To let go of one’s attachments, to let go of one’s ignorance for attainment of enlightenment is directly in line with Buddhist ideas. Also during training Morpheus poses the rhetorical question to Neo while within the matrix: “Do you think this is air you’re breathing?”<sup>44</sup> Here Morpheus intends to show Neo that all around him in the Matrix, corollary to samsara, all things are empty, and non-existent. Another representation of this belief is from Morpheus: “If you can break free your mind, the body will follow. You have to learn to let go of that anger. You must let go of everything. You must empty yourself to free your mind... If there are rules, there are limitations. If there are none, there are no boundaries.”<sup>45</sup> The final omniscience and limitless existence is what those escaping from the Matrix seek. True enlightenment comes for Neo only at the advent of his death. Previously Neo had understood that his mind was capable of more than the world represented to him. It is at the advent of his death however,

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<sup>40</sup> Lim.

<sup>41</sup> *The Matrix*.

<sup>42</sup> Schumann 120.

<sup>43</sup> *The Matrix*.

that Neo takes the next step. Neo realizes that there truly is no spoon. Neo awakens from his own death, and through his eyes, we see Neo's understanding of the true emptiness of all things. This Final enlightenment is brilliantly represented in *The Matrix*. Neo's attainment of true understanding is shown, when he sees the Matrix as the empty computer code for which it is. The "wisdom school" of Mahayana's understanding of enlightenment as the understanding of the emptiness of the world, is faithfully represented in the Matrix also as the understanding of the emptiness of the matrix.

I mentioned originally the core Buddhist belief in the fundamental suffering, and have also since spoken of the Mahayana understanding of this suffering as an illusion. Now, I offer for comparison, the world of suffering – Samsara, which Buddhists identify with, to the world of *The Matrix*, or rather the Matrix, itself.<sup>46</sup> Buddhist thinkers begin from the pretense that the world, which we are currently in, samsara, is one of suffering, death, and decay. Samsara is inescapable, even through death, and each individual, as part of a greater karmic stream, is transmigrated from one existence to the next.<sup>47</sup> Buddhists explain their understanding with the four noble truths: The existence of suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path to enlightenment.<sup>48</sup> The Buddhist then seeks to cease the cycle of suffering, and do so by following the path to enlightenment. Each Buddhist chooses their own path, and acquire for each choice, and by each action karmic consequences. When a Buddhist has acquired enough good consequences, their path changes, and they begin down the road to enlightenment.<sup>49</sup> I assert then the Matrix itself as a corollary to the world of samsara. Samsara is all that encompasses us, just so "The Matrix is everywhere, it is all around us. Even now in this very room."<sup>50</sup> More over, the Matrix is a place of suffering. When asked what the Matrix is, Morpheus replies: "It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth ... that you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone you were born into

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<sup>44</sup> *The Matrix*.

<sup>45</sup> Lim. quoted from *The Matrix*.

<sup>46</sup> Lim.

<sup>47</sup> de Bary 134-135.

<sup>48</sup> Vorenkamp.

<sup>49</sup> Vorenkamp.

<sup>50</sup> *The Matrix*.

bondage. Born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch, a prison for your mind.”<sup>51</sup> Morpheus identifies how the entire world is trapped in suffering. “Born into bondage” a suffering that they cannot perceive. It is exactly this world of suffering which Buddhists wish to free themselves from. Later, an outside observer, an Agent, comments on the simplicity of the Matrix, it’s just “Billions of people just living out their lives. Oblivious.”<sup>52</sup> He references to the fact that all of these people have no concept of enlightenment. Have no true understanding of their world. He also remarks, that “Human beings define their reality through misery and suffering.”<sup>53</sup> Which can be equated to an expression of samsara – the world of misery and suffering. Strong lines can be drawn between the Buddhist understanding of suffering in the world of samsara, and the Matrix described in *The Matrix*.

Where then does *The Matrix* separate from Buddhist philosophy. That is another interesting question, and again one with just as many answers. *The Matrix* can also be seen as vastly divergent from Buddhist ideals. The most obvious example of this is the ever-present violence of *The Matrix*, which lies in direct contrast to Buddhist principles of non-violence. Moreover, also *The Matrix* lacks much of the Metaphysics and underlying philosophy of Buddhism. Just because *The Matrix* expresses ideas, which can be interpreted as Buddhist, by no means makes *The Matrix* “Buddhist.” In contrast, ideas expressed in *The Matrix* of faith, rebirth, enlightenment, understanding, disillusion, and suffering are all ideas found in most all modern religions. To paint *The Matrix* as exclusively Buddhist would be a shortsighted mistake.

### *A final picture*

In response to the question of how many hidden messages there are in the movie *The Matrix*, writers/directors Wachowski Brothers responded, “there are more than you'll ever know.”<sup>54</sup> There are certainly more Buddhist images to be explored in *The Matrix* beyond the few which I had space to detail

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<sup>51</sup> *The Matrix*.

<sup>52</sup> *The Matrix*.

<sup>53</sup> *The Matrix*.

here. Not to mention the countless Christian and other religious, pop culture or Literary symbols.<sup>55</sup> I argue that part of the lasting value, and what has made The Matrix one of the best selling DVDs ever has been this strong symbolism.<sup>56</sup> But what to take from the movie? What if Neo, was a Buddhist? What would it mean? The strong Buddhist corollary could be taken as nothing, or of more worth as some indication of the continuing effect of Buddhist ideas around the world. The effect of The Matrix on the cash boxes of retailers is perhaps a lasting effect of the appeal of the story, of these ideas on culture. This is then not the end, as they say in The Matrix, but the beginning. Only a representation of a rich Buddhist culture which has survived for thousands of years, and now begins to adapt and influence our culture. It is then the beginning. In the future we will certainly see more influences from Buddhism in popular culture and popular movies.

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<sup>54</sup> “The Matrix Unfolded.”

<sup>55</sup> Ford.

<sup>56</sup> Lasting value – supported by Ford, DVD Sales: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

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