CHIBA'S NIGHT CITY (A.K.A. NINSEI)

“The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel” (Gibson, 3).

“deranged experiment in social Darwinism, designed by a board researcher who kept one thumb permanently on the fast-forward button” (Gibson, 7).

“deliberately unsupervised playground for technology itself” (Gibson, 11).

CHIBA'S NIGHT CITY (A.K.A. NINSEI)

“prison of his own flesh” (Gibson, 6).

“possible to see Ninsei as a field of data, the way the matrix had once reminded him of proteins linking to distinguish cell specialities” (Gibson, 17).
The macro- and microscopic are conflated here in a process of equivalence that finds being chased through the city comparable to programming a computer, the content of which is subsequently compared to the metropolis itself and that, in turn, to bio-chemical systems in the body, which is then an image of bodies themselves, and, finally, an analogy of cyberspace data. . . . In other words, we can understand cyberspace by reference to the city and we can understand the city by reference to cyberspace.

T. Myers, “The Postmodern Imaginary in William Gibson’s Neuromancer.”
MFS: Modern Fiction Studies, 47, 4 (2001), 897.

THE SPRAWL

Its official title is B.A.M.A.: the Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis. (Cf Gibson, 43)

“the mall crowds swaying like windblown grass, a field of flesh shot through with sudden eddies of need and gratification” (Gibson, 46).

FREESIDE

“brothel, and banking nexus, pleasure dome and free port, border town and spa. Freeside is Las Vegas and the hanging gardens of Babylon” (Gibson, 99).

“the center of a painted jungle of rainbow foliage” (Gibson, 107), they all “touched you when they talked” (Gibson, 106), and the place “smelled of cooked vegetables, humanity, and ganga” (Gibson, 102).

traditional architectural notions of exteriority and interiority are thus suspended in this new reflective space. People and buildings are absented from their actual place by projection.

T. Myers, “The Postmodern Imaginary in William Gibson’s Neuromancer.”
MFS: Modern Fiction Studies, 47, 4 (2001), 895.
FREESIDE

The trees that line the streets are “too cute, too entirely and definitely treelike” (Gibson, 124). The sunlight is manipulated to create a “rotating library of sky effects around it” (Gibson, 119). Its inhabitants artificial tans are “a stencil effect produced by selective melanin boosting, multiple shades of overlapping rectilinear patterns, outlining and highlighting musculature” (Gibson, 124).

“Horror. The spiral birth factory, stepped terraces of the hatching cells, blind jaws of the unborn moving ceaselessly, the staged progress from egg to larva, near-wasp, wasp” (Gibson, 122).

VILLA STRAYLIGHT

what seems to horrify Case about the hive is the way that it creates a complete continuum of production: each stage of the wasp is without break. . . . the hive image describes a corporation that has no gaps and whose control is complete.


“The ugliness of the door struck Case as she reached for it. Not the door itself, which was beautiful, or had once been part of some more beautiful whole, but the way it had been sawn down to fit a particular entrance . . . . They’d imported these things, he thought, and then forced it all to fit. But none of it fit.” (Gibson, 173)
THE MATRIX

It is the “consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators in every nation,” and a “graphic representation of data” with “unthinkable complexity” (Gibson, 51).

“The unfolding of his distanceless home, his country, [like a] transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity” (Gibson, 52).

. . . cyberpunk’s infatuation with boundary crossing, most evident in its transgression of the traditional boundaries between organic and inorganic, natural and artificial, human and machine, results in a decentering of the human subject precisely of the sort seen by many chroniclers of our age as the hallmark of the postmodern condition.


THE MATRIX

“‘Neuro from the nerves, the silver paths,’” and “‘Romancer. Necromancer. I call up the dead’” (Gibson, 235).

the “-mancer” suffix means soothsaying in Greek, that is to say the act of foretelling events.

It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself; that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. Never again will the real have to be produced.

THE MATRIX

‘I’m the matrix, Case.’
Case laughed. ‘Where’s that get you?’
‘Nowhere. Everywhere. I’m the sum total of the works, the whole show.’ (Gibson, 259)

CASE

“For Case, who’d lived the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall” (Gibson 5).

A year here and he still dreamed of cyberspace, hope fading nightly . . . he was no console man, no cyberspace cowboy. Just another hustler trying to make it through. But the dreams came on in the Japanese night like livewire voodoo, and he’d cry for it, cry in his sleep, and wake alone in the dark, curled in his capsule in some coffin bed, his hands clawed into the bedslab, temperfoam bunched between his fingers, trying to reach the console that wasn’t there. (4)

The cityscape is also defined by its sprawl, existing over vast distances and containing a series of near-slam districts full of detritus and shadowy transactions . . . the representation of squalid, sordid streets . . . is reminiscent of the rugged descriptions of city life in the ‘hard-boiled’ detective novels of writers such as Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett . . . Case, a drug addict as well as a hacker, lingers within these seedy territories.

Christopher Daley, “Case Studies in Reading 1: Key Primary Literary Texts.” Science Fiction Studies, edited by Nick Hubble and Aris Mousoutzanis (Bloomsbury, 2015) 95

CASE

“Ninsei wore him down until the street itself came to seem the externalization of some death wish, some secret poison he hadn’t known he’d carried” (Gibson 7).
the reader’s difficulty in coordinating him/herself in the reading space of Neuromancer is exacerbated by the genuinely forbidding nomenclature and technical innovations it portrays . . . It repels the cyberspace ingénue.


**THE MATRIX**

DIRECTED BY LARRY AND ANDY WACHOWSKY (1999)
FIRST PART OF A TRILOGY (MATRIX RELOADED AND MATRIX REVOLUTIONS [2003])

‘Follow the white rabbit.’

‘You’re feeling a bit like Alice, tumbling down the rabbit hole.’
‘Down the Rabbit Hole’, or the Matrix as Wonderland.

Mixing of filmic conventions (western and SF)

Humor present throughout the film.

‘Buckle up your seat belt Dorothy because Kansas is going bye-bye.’
ON GENDER

- Chapter 1 illustrates the general phallocentric assumption (beat cop stating ‘I think we can handle one little girl’), which is quickly proven wrong. (cf. Neo’s surprise at Trinity’s gender [“Most guys do”])
- Trinity is the looker and not the typical phallocentric subject-object relationship
- Heterosexual norms (cf. Trinity and Neo, Cypher’s comment on the Matrix, and the Woman in the Red Dress references)

‘Mr Wizard’ (another Wizard of Oz reference)

Reversed gender role in ending (cf. Sleeping Beauty)

Cypher: ‘All I see is blondes, brunettes, red heads’.
ON NAMES

- **Thomas Anderson**: Doubting Thomas, Aramaic word for “twin”, and ‘Anderson’ (‘son of man’)
- **Neo**: Anagram for ‘One’ and ‘Eon’ (‘an indefinite and very long period of time’)
- **Morpheus**: Greek god of dreams; linguistic root for ‘morphine’ and ‘morphing’
- **Trinity**: Describes the three-in-one nature of the Christian God (God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit)
- **Agent Smith**: Generic name; Morpheus’ comment “Inside the Matrix, they are everyone and they are no one”

ON CAPITALISM

- Joshua Clover’s clever take on the ‘MATRIX’ as an anagram for ‘MARX IT’ (IT being Information Technology)

The opening of the movie was important in that we wanted to alter the logos of the studios, mostly because we felt they were an evil empire bent on breaking the creative juices of the average director or writer, so we felt that desecrating the studio symbols was an important message to the audience, that we basically reject the system.

*Joan Gaeta, Visual Effect Supervisor, DVD commentary (1999)*
ON HYPERREAL

• ‘Welcome to the desert of the real’ (Baudrillard and the notion of ‘hyperreal’ not bearing any resemblance to anything in the real world)

• Color scheme of the film reinforces the distinction between the two worlds

• Reliance on technology within the Matrix as well (cf. “He’s a machine”)

• Grids: subtlety of the official control apparent in the design of the Matrix
The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - it is the map that engenders the territory and if we were to revive the fable today, it would be the territory whose shreds are slowly rotting across the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. The desert of the real itself.


**ON RACE**

The Matrix’s central plot concerns a human rebellion against the Artificial Intelligence that has taken over the earth and uses human beings as its power source. The AI keeps its human “batteries” docile by creating the artificial, cyber-realm of the Matrix, or what we know as the real world of the late 1990s. What critics have not yet dealt with in detail, however, is that this rebellion is, to a degree, raced as an African American rebellion against a white power structure.

*Jason Haslam, “Coded Discourse: Romancing the (Electronic) Shadow in The Matrix” (College Literature 32.3 [Summer 2005] 95*
ON RELIGION

- The Matrix is infused with many philosophical and religious ideas, primarily Gnostic Christianity and Buddhism.
- Buddhist notion of ‘Samsara’ (suffering) and awakening through knowledge of the artificiality of the world
- The orphan tells Neo: ‘Only try to realize the truth ... There is no spoon’ -- becomes Neo’s mantra
- The Matrix was released on the last Easter week-end of the twentieth century
- Numerous clues throughout the film (description of Neo as ‘savior’, debate about free will [exchange between Morpheus and Neo, and then Neo and the Oracle], Zion as last paradise on earth)
- More visual clues are spread throughout (cf. room numbers, and Nebuchadnezzar)
• Or is the sixth one? (101 is binary for 5; cf. Matrix Reloaded and the reference to the sixth iteration of the Matrix)

The Oracle herself touched upon the past and future iterations of Neo.

The conversation between Neo and the Matrix brings everything full circle.
• ‘101’ is also Room 101 in George Orwell’s 1984 (first published in 1949): ‘The thing that is in Room 101 is the worst thing in the world’ (chapter 5)
• Mixing of popular culture references with religion: Neo as the postmodern Messiah from the Old Testament (violence and technology) and Neo as the new Superman (final scene and reference to a God amongst men)

LITERARY ASSIGNMENT #1

▸ Question 1:
▸ Is Frankenstein sufficiently science-oriented to be called a science-fiction novel?

▸ Question 2:
▸ Would you agree with the statement that Gibson explores the theme of identity by drawing a tension between appearances and reality?

You choose 1 question and submit by email by noon on February 25th your 600-800 words answer.