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Cis-tem Failure: Anti-Normative Resistance and Queer Utopianism in "The Matrix" and "The Matrix Resurrections"

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1 Introduction

„*The Matrix cannot tell you who you are*” (Trinity, *The Matrix*, 01:38:39)

Though Trinity enlightens Neo that his true self cannot be determined by the simulation he was raised in, the Matrix is nevertheless a system, built from the 0's and 1's of binary code, in which humans must fit into neat binary categories of difference. As such, it constitutes a reality that controls both the human psyche and body. In a way, this resembles the 'real' world, in which control over human bodies and minds is often a polarizing subject in biopolitical debates, especially in the US. There is a host of conservative voices, perhaps epitomized by current president-elect Donald Trump, that deny certain demographic groups their psychic and bodily autonomy. Above all, this dangerously affects women's reproductive rights and limits transgender people's access to gender-affirming care. Unsurprisingly, these mostly right-wing, white, straight male voices stem from the longstanding societal hegemony of heteronormative patriarchy. To maintain their hegemonic status, they insist on a rigid, uneven binary split between superior men and inferior women, between superior whites and inferior nonwhites, while those who elude these normative molds and 'queerly' resist them are seen as a threat to the system's stability. In today's world, those who do not conform to this system of intelligibility, this white heterosexual matrix, are often silenced and at higher risk of experiencing both physical and verbal violence. For many of them, life has thus already taken a dystopian turn.

In the face of all the negative impacts of such oppressive ideologies in the present, many long for a place beyond these strictures. Even if a world outside these normative rules of being and behaving seems unattainable, it is often science fiction, whether literary or filmic, that offers hopeful and, indeed, utopian glimpses into such alternative life realities. Rather than merely providing an opportunity to temporarily escape the harshness of our material lives, science fiction offers more than that. As Wendy Gay Pearson, Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon argue, science fiction “is intimately concerned with the question of how people live in the world and what makes the world livable for them” (6). Therefore, although science fiction narratives are often tied to notions of futurity and technological advancements, they are also anchored in the present context of our social realities. They allow us to access and “imagin[e] a future that opens out, rather than forecloses, possibilities for becoming real, for mattering in the world” (ibid. 5). In applying queer theory to science fiction, Pearson, Hollinger and Gordon subsequently highlight the genre's potential to imagine a queer, open-ended utopian future in which oppressive heteronormative patriarchal structures are estranged and denaturalized.

Building on this queer potential of sci-fi and its utopian drive for a better, less oppressive world, my thesis offers a queer utopian critique of a particular sci-fi text, namely the *Matrix* film franchise (1999–) that was created by the siblings Lana and Lilly Wachowski. Specifically, I will focus on the franchise’s first installment, *The Matrix* (1999), as well as the fourth and most recent entry, *The Matrix Resurrections* (2021).¹ Through close viewings of various scenes from these films, this thesis explores their dystopian visions of the future, namely the two versions of the Matrix that keeps humanity enslaved in a system that I identify as both heteronormative and white normative. On the other hand, the thesis examines the films’ distinct queer utopian visions of human liberation from and resistance to that system. On the level of story, the films depict a future in which humanity unknowingly lives inside a simulated reality called ‘Matrix,’ a program that has been created by uprising machines to subjugate humanity. Meanwhile, the machines exploit the ‘real’ human bodies, which are plugged into the simulation, by using them as energy supply for themselves. *Matrix* follows Thomas Anderson, a ‘normal’ guy living inside the Matrix, who one day realizes the truth about his reality. He is subsequently freed from the Matrix by a group of human rebels, including his mentor Morpheus and his eventual love interest Trinity. Adopting his ‘real’ name, Neo, he joins the forces of the human resistance against the machines and learns that he is the ‘One,’ who allegedly has the sole power to overthrow the machines and thus free humanity. By the end of the original trilogy, he achieves a truce between the two warring ‘races,’ which sacrificially costs him and Trinity their lives. In the sequel, *Resurrections*, it is revealed that both their bodies have been reconstructed and reinserted into an updated version of the Matrix by its new operator, the Analyst. This film follows the protagonists’ liberation from the Matrix in ways that echo yet crucially diverge from the story of *Matrix*. As both films similarly revolve around the protagonists’ realization of the oppressive nature of the Matrix and their subsequent liberation from it, this thesis compares how both films engage with notions of human subjectivity in heteronormative and white systems of oppression, resistance to these systems, and the subsequent issue of (queer) utopian liberation and worldbuilding.

Apart from being a substantial commercial success and receiving widespread attention in the realms of popular culture and academia, the cyberpunk film series has also been appropriated by politically motivated groups. It is especially the films’ topic of liberation that has prompted various questions, such as ‘Liberation from what?’ and, consequently, ‘What, after all, is the Matrix?’. Infamously, the films’ red and blue pill symbolism has been adopted by conservative

¹ For the sake of conciseness, I will refer to the first film as *Matrix* and the fourth one as *Resurrections* throughout this thesis.

groups such as the men's rights movement, who consider taking the red pill, which allows Neo to exit the Matrix, as waking up to the threat that feminism supposedly poses for men. Conversely, the films have also been claimed by more progressive groups as decidedly queer-coded texts. In this light, taking the red pill may be perceived as a metaphor for a gender transition and recognizing that one lives in an oppressive, heteropatriarchal world. This interpretation may derive from the directing sisters' own lives as transgender women who have both transitioned between the release of the third and fourth films.

This thesis aligns itself with more progressive and queer accounts of the *Matrix* franchise. As such, I interpret the simulated reality of the filmic Matrix as a representation of what Terra Gasque calls "an overarching system of control" (58). I argue that this hegemonic system reflects contemporary capitalist and heteronormative structures that dictate social life. Concretely, I identify the Matrix as a system that is akin to what Judith Butler calls the heterosexual matrix. Thus, the Matrix normalizes traditional binaries of gender within a framework of heteronormativity. This interpretation is supported by Rainer Emig, who claims that the "Matrix indeed follows the rules of Butler's so-called 'heterosexual matrix'" (202).

Significantly, my analysis of the Matrix is not limited to heteronormativity, but also considers the simulation as a 'raced' (cyber)space that posits whiteness as a structural norm. This view is adjacent to Theresa Geller's argument that the Matrix represents the hegemonic white masculine nation-state which "conceives itself as heterosexual" (14). This hegemonic force of heteronormative white masculinity is embodied, for instance, by the exclusively white male Agents that roam the Matrix and control humans in the service of the machines that operate the Matrix. Therein, Lisa Nakamura identifies a link between "white male culture and [...] machine culture" (129). Through the Agents' policing, a sense of heteronormative whiteness is thus normatively imposed onto the enslaved humans, who are persecuted if they rebel against these norms. As such, the human resistance's fight against the Matrix figures as a struggle against the oppressive white normativity of the heterosexual matrix.

In analyzing how these interlocking structures shape human subjectivity inside the Matrix, I also view their force through a lens of queer negativity and failure that the machines impose onto those humans who do not conform to their normative mandates of being. I am specifically employing Mari Ruti's concepts of circumstantial negativity, which is the experienced negativity based on sexism, racism, and homophobia, among others, and constitutive negativity, which is a more general feeling of abjection and displacement in the world. The characters in the films experience both to some extent, sometimes even simultaneously. Crucially, I am also

interested in how they cope with this multifold negativity and use it as a catalyst for a mode of resistance against the white heterosexual matrix.

Not only do I investigate how *Matrix* and *Resurrections* portray resistance to heteronormative systems of control, but I also examine their vision of a queer future that lies somewhere on the horizon and which the human resistance strives for. This thesis' inquiry into the realm of queer utopianism builds substantially on the influential late queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz and his queer-of-color theory in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. Therein, Muñoz provides a useful account of the concept of queerness that I adopt for my thesis. Queerness, according to Muñoz, does not solely refer to sexual and gendered identities that deviate from a heterosexual and cisgendered framework of subjectivity. Rather, queerness denotes alternate and utopian ways of life and relating to one another, which are opposed to and transcend seemingly fixed white, heteronormative and capitalist societal structures. Accordingly, this relational perspective on queerness emphasizes care and communitarian well-being instead of individual profit. This calls for an understanding of 'queer' as a verb that expresses a resistant form of doing rather than simply non-normative being. My thesis argues that the human resistance to the Matrix does just that: It actively queers the Matrix to establish a future full of care, relationality, and freedom from oppressive hegemonic forces.

Importantly, this view of queerness is strongly connected to a sense of time. Although a better, queerer future is pursued, the way there is not necessarily linear. Instead, the present must be critiqued and 'queered,' for which, in turn, the past may act as an archive of queer traces that already contained a utopian drive for a better world, for stepping out of the present (Muñoz, *Cruising* 18). I utilize the concept of straight time, which Muñoz adopts from Jack Halberstam, to express the capitalist and white heteronormative logic of the present. Thus, straight time is the temporal flow of the Matrix which fashions itself as humanity's present. I then focus not only on how resistance to this flow is depicted through characters such as Neo, but also how this resistance is already inscribed in certain spaces that hint toward a utopian future that is not yet here.

The aim of this thesis is not only to locate instances of queer resistance in *Matrix* and *Resurrections* but also to evaluate each film's queer utopian potential. In other words, I will determine to what degree the respective film's critique of the white heterosexual matrix is conducive to queer utopian thinking and world-making. My thesis is that while both *Matrix* and *Resurrections* portray the negativity of the white heterosexual matrix imposed onto nonconforming subjects, the films' respective depiction of the force of queer utopian resistance against it varies. Even though *Matrix* contains several queer utopian elements in, for instance,

certain spaces, dialogue, style, and performativity, the film's vision of queer utopia ultimately fails to consider relationality due to its strong commitment to Neo as the normative Hollywood hero, the individual, white, male savior of humanity. *Resurrections*, by contrast, recovers this queer potential by engaging with the past shortcomings of *Matrix* to undo the Matrix's binary structures, specifically of 'race' and gender, more thoroughly and by deconstructing Neo's status as the 'One', ultimately portraying queer utopia as a relational effort.

Before embarking on the film analysis, I establish the thesis' theoretical framework in chapter 2. First, I discuss the general queer theoretical roots that my thesis follows, including my use of the word 'queer,' the relevance of queer of color critique, relational queer theory, and how I employ queer negativity as a relational concept. I also elaborate on Butler's concept of the heterosexual matrix and explain how I see heteronormativity as connected to a sense of white normativity. In the latter section of the theory chapter, I explore queer theories of utopia, first and foremost Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, from which I present select concepts and ideas. These include concepts of straight time, homonormativity, queer potentiality and performativity, failure, and the Ernst Bloch's notions of anticipatory consciousness, educated hope, the not-yet-here and the no-longer-conscious.

In chapter 3, I analyze the two versions of the Matrix, as seen in *Matrix* and *Resurrections*, as white heterosexual matrices. I examine how hetero- and white normative structures are inscribed in them, imposing a state of negativity onto those who resist or cannot conform to the Matrix. On the one hand, I focus more broadly on sequences of dialogue that illuminate some aspects of the respective Matrix's creation. On the other hand, I conduct close viewings of select scenes that demonstrate how these structures affect human life in the (heterosexual) Matrix, which is mostly shown through the eyes of Neo in *Matrix*, and both Neo and Trinity in *Resurrections*. In these analyses, I concentrate on dialogue while also considering spatial and visual elements that contribute to the normative structure of the Matrix.

In chapter 4, I aim to trace the utopian potential of both films. This entails an analysis of how the Matrix is queerly resisted by the human rebels to create opportunities for utopian world-making. In my investigation of *Matrix*, I conduct close viewings of three scenes in which I identify particularly strong utopian undercurrents. Following the methodology of Muñoz, my analysis highlights the characters' educated hope for a better world and their resistance against hetero- and white normativity. These queer utopian elements are often already inscribed in certain locations, such as the Oracle's apartment, but I also account for the utopian quality of the characters' physical performativity and style. Moreover, I examine the narrative centrality of Neo in these scenes, as well as his relationship to the film's queer utopian outlook. Lastly, I

turn to *Resurrections* and conduct three more close viewings. In these, I examine how the film retrieves the original film's utopian potentiality and renews its utopian promise of liberation. Again, I focus on dialogue and utopian spatiality to show how the film breaks both gender and racial binaries. Significantly, I trace the film's depiction of Neo and Trinity, highlighting how their roles have changed from the first film, which, in turn, indicates the film's reconfiguration of queer utopia and queer resistance to the binary white heterosexual matrix.

This thesis contributes to the existing body of literature on the *Matrix* franchise, specifically adding a perspective of how its critique of contemporary hegemonic social systems has grown over time. Given that *Resurrections* was released roughly twenty years after the original trilogy and is still rather recent, it has received little academic attention so far. This thesis aims to fill this gap. I also intend to highlight the evolution of the films' message of hope for a better world, a hope which often seems naïve in the current social climate that normalizes discrimination, violence, and hatred towards minorities. As a white European gay man, I have experienced both privilege and marginalization. Yet I stay hopeful that a less binary future, though utopian it may sound, is feasible. By showing how the *Matrix* films build on this hope and resist hegemonic systems of power, I offer, in a way, my small contribution to queer utopian resistance.

2 Theoretical Framework

I argue that the *Matrix* films are conducive to a queer reading that uncovers how they critique social orders characterized by capitalism and white heteronormativity, as well as how they portray queer resistance to these systems. Before investigating these claims, it is necessary to explain underlying theoretical aspects and concepts. First and foremost, this entails a tentative response to one of queer theory's most debated questions: What do we, in fact, mean by 'queer'? If the fast-growing body of queer studies literature can agree on one certainty in this regard, it is perhaps that the term 'queer' eludes a fixed, one-for-all definition. Historically speaking, the term's meaning has undergone a large shift. As Siobhan Somerville outlines, 'queer' was long used as a homophobic slur to denigrate anyone whose sexuality was not perceived as straight. It thus carried immense stigma, particularly at the height of the HIV epidemic during the 1980s and 1990s (2f). The view that the virus is a 'queer (or gay, specifically) disease' has been pervasive in mainstream public discourses ever since. Though the virus's threat has significantly diminished and is highly treatable today, parts of the original stigma remain.

As a result of bearing the stigmatizing effects of the word for such a long time, queer-identifying people started to reclaim its meaning in the early 1990s. Appropriating it from a place of social ostracism, queer people resignified the term not only with pride but also more radical and oppositional connotations "to signal a political stance of both solidarity and defiance, disrupting polite discourse and refusing to be shamed into silence" (Somerville 3). This recalibration of 'queer' has since paved the way for our current understanding of queerness. Importantly, this corresponds to Somerville's twofold conceptualization of the modern use of 'queer.' On the one hand, it is used to describe expressions of sexuality and gender beyond cisgendered heterosexuality. On the other hand, 'queering' can also be understood as a verb that indicates a critique of identity categories per se, possibly exceeding the realms of sexual and gendered identities. For Somerville, it is the latter part that unleashes the full potential of queer theory. Instead of focusing solely on a small variety of identity markers, "queer approaches help us understand normativity in *any* sense, based on interlocking categories of difference and power, including race, caste, indigeneity, gender, class, nation, and religion" (2, original emphasis). Though this list of categories is by no means exhaustive (we might add age and dis/ability, for instance), the thesis at hand is primarily concerned with the ways that the *Matrix* franchise engages with white heteronormative systems of control, as well as themes of queer resistance and the liberation of the human 'race.'

Although both meanings of 'queer' can be valid and useful focal points in cultural analysis, this thesis is substantially informed by an understanding of queering as a critical inquiry into

normativity itself. Rather than exclusively seeing queerness as a separate category of sexualized and gendered identity, I use ‘queer’ as a verb that unsettles normative ways of being and resists dominant hegemonic structures. In this light, I read the simulations present in both *Matrix* and *Resurrections* as social orders that are stabilized by white heteronormative constructions of subjectivity. Moreover, it is a third notion of queerness that I intend to employ here, one that I deem an immensely productive lens through which to view queerness, especially in the context of the future-oriented film franchise at hand. This understanding of queerness is highly indebted to the late queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz and his influential work *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* and puts emphasis on queerness as something utopian and on the horizon (Muñoz, *Cruising* 1). In direct response to the *Matrix* films’ rather dystopian atmosphere, I look for traces of queer utopia in them. This entails an investigation of how characters such as Neo and Trinity relate to and utilize the texture of the simulated matrix to resist its oppressive force. It is in their performance of defiance, be it through their dialogue, their fashion, their physicality, or their sheer failure to adapt to the matrix’s (hetero-)normative rules and regulations, that I locate hopefulness and kernels of utopia. It is the films’ queering of ‘straight’ temporalities that allows me to trace the utopian not-yet-here through a method of educated hope, to use Ernst Bloch’s terminology. This resonates with Muñoz’s approach, which uses hope “as a backward glance that enacts a future vision” (*Cruising* 4). Envisioning utopia thus includes finding utopian elements in the past and present in a not necessarily linear way towards the future. Subsequently, I read the films’ instances of hope and resistance both inside the Matrix (which, as will be shown, may figure as both past and present) and outside it as an enactment of what Bloch calls “anticipatory consciousness” (Bloch 13). These acts, therefore, contain an outlook for a future, for a queer utopian world in which oppression and social abjection of non-normative subjectivities disappear. Significantly, this stance on queerness calls “for an understanding of queerness as collectivity” (Muñoz, *Cruising* 11). Striving for a better, utopian world becomes a collective and relational effort against unjust and restricting domination, as is the case in *Matrix* and, arguably even more so, in *Resurrections*. This view of queerness stems from a particular tradition within queer theory that follows an antinormative and future-oriented stance in both theory and practice of queer politics.

2.1 Queer Theory

The following section delineates some general aspects of queer theory and its impetus that influence Muñoz’s approach. The collectivist and communitarian aspects of queerness highlighted here are thereby embedded in broader contexts of queer theoretical debates that have frequently produced diverging meanings of queerness. Given that I do not strictly use

‘queer’ as a category of identity, but rather as a critical lens with which to critique normativity, it is important to address some more general roots of the field, which have given rise to this triple meaning of ‘queer,’ to explain my distinctive use of this widely debated term. This also serves to highlight the films’ anti-identitarian stance, as I not only analyze specific representations of resistance to binary norms of gender and ‘race’, but also how the *Matrix*’s construction of docile, normative subjecthood is queered more generally.

2.1.1 Genealogies of ‘Queering’ as Antinormative Practice

The academic origins of queer theory are, without a doubt, multifaceted and complex, so that many scholars prefer to speak of ‘queer theories’ in the plural to account for the different coexisting roots and theoretical strands of the field. In the following, I present two genealogies of queer theory, the first of which outlines the rise of the ambiguous use of ‘queer’ as both a marker of a proud identity and a critique of normalized identity itself. The second one is a queer of color critique, offering a powerful lens that combines discourses of queerness and ‘race’. On the one hand, the aim is to provide insight into queer theory’s political and academic trajectories that my analysis builds on and is indebted to. On the other hand, I intend to distinguish my use of ‘queer’ as a critique of normativity from other uses that focus more on reinforcing a distinctly queer identity.

2.1.1.1 Academic Roots and the Paradox of Queer Theory

What many theorists agree on is that queer theory is rooted in queer political activism and resistance, as exemplified in the mentioned reclaiming of the term ‘queer’ as something positive (Somerville 3). Lorenzo Bernini contends that queer theories are “activist forms of knowledge which have been developed by people directly involved in the politics of sexuality [...]. There would be no queer theories without queer movements and, before them, sexual liberation movements” (99). This implies that the field was already in its nascent state during the big social movements of the 1960s. Though expressions of transgressive sexuality are not the focal point here, this thesis is nevertheless informed by queer theory’s roots in social and political activism. It is my intention to harness this queer potential of counterhegemonic resistance and drive for political change by mapping it onto the *Matrix* characters’ struggle against the powerful grasp of the oppressive simulation.

Echoing Somerville’s argument that the HIV epidemic significantly impacted the course of queer activism and later theory, Anna Fleischer highlights the importance of already existing feminist, gay and lesbian movements of the 1970s and 1980s for the formation of queer activism. According to her, these movements suffered increasingly from internal disagreements, which produced its own normalizations of certain identities while marginalizing

others, leading to an emphasis on identity politics and separatism. Reacting to this diffusion of interests, queer activism then sought to accommodate and unify these seemingly incongruent politics under the shared premise of fighting for the liberation of sexual minorities (Fleischer 108). As is my argument, the *Matrix* films depict a similar struggle for liberation from a normative hegemonic force, which is not exclusively a liberation of sexual minorities, but of the human 'race' as such. My analysis thus also focuses on how the *Matrix* films' queer critique of normativity relates to the characters' fight for liberation from their status as an oppressed 'race.'

In tracing the academic genealogical roots of queer theory and the field of queer studies, Kadji Amin identifies their emergence as originating in the US academy in the 1990s. Although queer theory initially vehemently opposed institutionalization, Amin proposes three ways in which the institutional structures of the academy helped shape its further development and eventual institutionalization.

First, queer theory gained momentum as it offered a critique of the recently established fields that Amin calls the "identity knowledges" (18). This included Women's Studies, Black Studies, and Latino Studies, among others. These came to be heavily contested, partially due to their assumptions of fixed and essential identities. In this context, queer theory assisted in highlighting the limits of such conceptualizations of identity while constituting itself as a critique of identity formation free from specific objects of study. However, given the originally negative meaning of 'queer' to describe non-heterosexual identities, 1990s queer theory also attempted to reclaim and reorient the semantic life of 'queer' and thus incorporated the recently established 'identity knowledges' of Lesbian and Gay Studies into its core. This implies that queer theory offers a study of non-normative sexualities and gender configurations while simultaneously critiquing the notion of (normative) identity more generally. This marks a somewhat still existing paradox in queer theory, which is characterized by Amin as "identitarian anti-identitarianism" (18).

Second, Amin contends that queer theory emerged in "the heyday of 'high' theory in the humanities. Queer theory immediately and promiscuously pillaged the various forms of theory in ascent at that moment and put them into transformative contact with dissident sexualities" (18). In this context, Fleischer points out French poststructuralism as the primary theoretical basis for queer theory. She specifically refers to Althusser's theory of subjectification, Saussure's semiotics, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Foucauldian discourse analysis as key influences towards "a novel understanding of the relation between the subject and sociocultural order" (my translation, 109).

Queer theory's utilization of these 'high' theories in the humanities is related to Amin's third point, namely that most queer theoretical work originally emanated from English departments (Amin 18). As such, queer theory can be seen as rooted in institutional structures of the academy despite its anti-institutional stance. By way of analogy, this resembles the human resistance of the *Matrix* films, in which the protagonists oppose the 'institution' of the simulation, though they are produced and shaped by it.

2.1.1.2 A Brief Survey of Queer of Color Critique

These internal tensions of queer theory need not constitute an insurmountable obstacle in its application, though. Nikki Sullivan exemplifies this in her introductory book on queer theory, where she embraces "critiques of normalising ways of knowing and of being that may not always initially be evident as sex-specific – hence the inclusion of topics such as community, popular culture, [and] race" (Sullivan vi). This highlights the multiplicity of ways in which normativity is constructed within a heteronormative society. Following Sullivan's argument for a conceptualization of queerness beyond positive identity affirmations, I employ a critical lens on the ways that the *Matrix* normatively shapes how bodies relate to one another, as well as the ways that it simultaneously produces a sense of racial normativity that posits whiteness as the structural norm.

Indeed, this expansion of queer theory to register normative configurations of being in a broader sense is reflected in the academic attempt to find alternative roots of the field. Hence, many scholars of queer theory have attempted to establish more nuanced forms of queer critique aimed at expanding the scope of queer theory beyond sexuality as a singular axis of difference. Cathy J. Cohen, for instance, highlights the shortcomings of a queer politics that perpetuates a simplistic dichotomy between queerness and heterosexuality. Instead, she favors an intersectional analysis of queerness that considers the multiple ways in which queer lives are affected (Cohen 440f). This challenges a homogeneous definition of what 'queer' means by emphasizing the various interlocking structures of power that shape and oppress us. Though Cohen's argument calls for a multidimensional framework that offers a more nuanced concept of what queer identity *is*, it does not fully account for what queerness *does*, which is the questioning and resisting of normative ways of being. In fact, I build on this use of 'queer' as a verb, which can "be understood as a deconstructive practice that is not undertaken by an already constituted subject, and does not, in turn, furnish the subject with a nameable identity" (Sullivan 50). In this vein, this thesis is more aligned with queer theory as an anti-identitarian critique, since it is concerned with the ways that the *Matrix* films portray a queering and unsettling of its central hegemonic system of power, the *Matrix*. This involves the characters' resistance to the

artificial and normative forms of subjectivity imposed by the simulation, as well as the ways they embody the strive for a queer utopian world in Muñoz's sense, which will be explained below. However, as I read the Matrix not only as a heteronormative but also a white-coded hegemonic system of power, a discussion of another genealogy that corresponds with this double-edged structure of oppression is needed.

This genealogical branch of queer theory is widely known as queer of color critique. It explicitly resists an oversimplified understanding of queerness that equates it with European and North American white gay men. This line of inquiry firmly claims women of color feminisms as its theoretical inspiration (Amin 23), such as Gloria Anzaldúa's Chicana feminism and Hortense Spiller's Black feminism (Bernini 103f). Importantly, queer of color critique draws on legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality as a central analytical tool through which it becomes evident that certain "racial formations are non-heteronormative and should occupy the center of intersectional queer theorizing" (Amin 24). Queer of color critique can thus be understood as a queer feminist project that considers the intersectional entanglement of different power structures which produce subjects and their lived experiences. Significantly, this also facilitates a mapping together of categories such as queerness and 'race,' through which it becomes possible to conceive of certain racialized groups as queered subjects. As one of the most prominent works in the field of queer of color critique, José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* theorizes how minoritarian spheres negotiate hostile majoritarian worlds and its discourses, which provides a useful perspective for my investigation of the *Matrix* films. In the films, the humans escaping the simulation can thus be seen as oppressed, as the queer and racialized Other of the machinic, hegemonic Matrix itself. Their resistance then queers the Matrix, confronting its white-coded heteronormativity. Though the films' conception of humanity as collectively oppressed may reinforce the notion that liberation and resistance should be a community effort, it is not without problems. The original trilogy, in particular, does not dispose of certain racial stereotypes even despite its depiction of an allegedly post-racial humankind.

Studying how oppressed subjects resist hegemonic systems and worlds raises the question of how these contested spaces are structured. Therefore, to provide an understanding of how I interpret the Matrix as a hegemonic majoritarian system, I discuss heteronormativity and Judith Butler's influential concept of the heterosexual matrix, as well as its relation to normative whiteness, in the following section.

2.1.2 The Other Matrix: Butler's Heterosexual Matrix and White Heteronormativity

Using 'queer' as a verb necessitates asking the question: What is being queered? Many queer theorists have proposed a response to this question. In this section, I give an account of some of the most influential concepts in queer theory which describe the social orders that structure not only our lives but also the lives of humans inside the Matrix. The structures in question are heteronormativity and, coinciding with the franchise's title, Judith Butler's heterosexual matrix. In discussing these concepts, I pay attention to the ways that normative notions of whiteness are fundamentally enmeshed within them. Correspondingly, the Matrix in the films is congruent to a heterosexual matrix that runs not only on heteronormative but also on white-coded power. Many scholars have theorized the systems of power that dominate and control us through their oppressive normativities and the differential distribution of privileges. Cohen, for instance, contends that "through our existence and everyday survival we embody sustained and multisited resistance to systems (based on dominant constructions of race and gender) that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labor, and constrain our visibility" (Cohen 440). This highlights how normativity, specifically in the realms of 'race' and gender, negatively affects the lives of those placed outside of such normative constructions. More concretely, Cohen critiques heteronormativity as particularly emblematic of interlocking systems of power that queer theory and politics attempt to unsettle. Michael Warner has coined the term heteronormativity to describe how "[h]et[erosexual] culture thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of intergender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist" (Warner xxi). From this perspective, heterosexuality constitutes an inescapable norm of being, desiring, and relating in society. However, as Joseph Marchia and Jamie M. Sommer point out, Warner's argument seeks to address sexual oppression as clearly distinct from gender oppression, thus explaining Warner's emphasis on the hetero/homosexual binary as key to understanding heteronormativity (Marchia & Sommer 274).

Although this thesis analyzes the Matrix as a heteronormative system of power, it does not solely rely on Warner's single-axis classifications of dominant heterosexuality and oppressed homosexuality. Instead of tracing specific representations of non-heterosexual desire and identity, my reading of the films aims to unveil the Matrix's underlying heteronormative order and the ways that it is disrupted and queered on multiple levels, hence pointing to its constructed nature. Subsequently, this requires a more intersectional framework of heteronormative power that does not single out sexuality as its principal site of oppression, but rather attests to the interwoven nature of multiple categories of difference. As such, I read the Matrix's

heteronormativity as a decidedly white heteronormativity. This is more aligned with Marchia and Sommer's argument, which echoes that of Warner, stating that heteronormativity "is not simply the privilege of heterosexuality, but a pervasive force in which heteronorms are linked to social oppression" (Marchia & Sommer 275). I argue that the Matrix's social oppression figures not merely as sexual oppression but contains a racial bias that normalizes whiteness and links it to binary views of gender and hetero-coded ways of relating.

A concept that offers an explication of the structure of heteronormativity that I locate in the Matrix films is Judith Butler's notion of the heterosexual matrix. Stemming from one of queer theory's most canonical texts, Butler's seminal work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, the heterosexual matrix describes

that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized. [It is] a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender [...] that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (Butler 194)

Not only does Butler's matrix share the name with the simulation in the films, but, as I contend, they are also structurally similar in that they both require bodies to be intelligible and thus normative within a binarily coded hegemonic system. My analysis then illuminates how the films resist and queer not only the intradiegetic Matrix, but also the heterosexual matrix and its heteronormative structure, which is largely congruent to that of the filmic simulation. Concretely, I concentrate on moments in which the films subvert hetero-coded ways of relating, as well as the alleged stability of normative and binary notions of gender that are implicated in the heterosexual matrix. However, Butler is aware that the heterosexual matrix does not solely thrive on oppressing one gender through a sense of universal patriarchal power. Instead, patriarchal oppression is differential and contingent upon the intersection of gender with other categories of difference, such as 'race' and class (Butler 6). Accordingly, I analyze the heterosexual matrix of the *Matrix* films as a white patriarchal system of oppression that is anchored in a Western context, due to the films' production context in the US and their depiction of an American-like metropolitan city as the major site of the plot within the Matrix.

In identifying and critiquing underlying discourses of whiteness in the films, my queer reading is informed by queer of color critique. Deeming this tradition a "critique of critique" (Reddy 56), Chandan Reddy points out the shortcomings of Western queer studies' ignorance towards its own white bias and US-centrism, "whose pervasive structuring and violent liberal heteronormativity it sought to contest" (Reddy 52). This shows how whiteness is so deeply inscribed in heteronormative society and the heterosexual matrix that it often goes unnoticed.

In contrast, nonwhiteness is placed outside this matrix, enabling its association with non-heteronormativity. Nonwhiteness then becomes a site that also holds the potential for queering dominant heteronormative systems of oppression. As Sullivan suggests, “any attempt to undermine heteronormativity must necessarily tackle issues of race and its historically and culturally specific relation to sexuality and gender” (Sullivan 59). Consequently, this thesis’ attempt at demonstrating how the *Matrix* films queer the heterosexual matrix does not intend to contribute to the longstanding canon of queer theory that ignores racial difference, but to an understanding of the interlinkage of multiple sites of oppression. Indeed, as Roderick Ferguson and Grace Hong argue, the notion of difference is key to queer of color critique (9). Importantly however, difference in queer of color critique “was intended not to erase the differentials of power, value, and social death within and among groups, as in a multiculturalist model, but to highlight such differentials and to attempt to do the vexed work of forging a coalitional politics through these differences” (ibid.). This coalitional politics is what figures as queer relationality in my thesis. As such, I focus on how the *Matrix* films portray human liberation efforts as a struggle against both the heterosexual matrix’s heteronormative structuring of life and its correspondingly inscribed whiteness. In some ways, the films can, therefore, be seen as an enactment of a coalitional queer of color critique.

This thesis views queering as a multisited and relational practice of counterhegemonic resistance. This approach to queerness, as well as queer of color critique, is largely indebted to Muñoz and the relational school of queer theory. In the following section, I briefly sketch the anti-relational/relational debate of queer theory and elaborate on the importance of seeing queerness as relational, as well as the usefulness of queer negativity, in the context of the *Matrix* tetralogy.

2.1.3 A Relational Approach to Queerness and Queer Negativity

This thesis employs queerness as a decidedly relational concept, as this reflects a sense of queer community that crosses diverse categories of difference and goes beyond normative ways of existing. This community which longs for liberation, for a queer utopia, is embodied by the human resistance in the *Matrix* films. It is a resistance against systems of power that are also relational and interlocking: heteronormativity and white supremacy. In this subchapter, I outline relational queer theory, as well as the usefulness of a queer politics that harnesses queer negativity, a notion usually associated with anti-relational queer theory, but which is nevertheless vital in the struggle against the *Matrix* and the building of a queer utopian world. Since its early days, queer theory has been marked by a general rift between those activists and scholars who advocate for a positive affirmation of queer identity beyond normative social

confines and those who revel in radically negating any attempt at rendering queerness socially intelligible (Fleischer 122). The discrepancy between queer positivity and negativity is a product of the ambivalent semantics of ‘queer,’ which again reflects the seeming paradox of queerness as, in Leo Bersani’s words, an “anti-identitarian identity” (qtd. in Fleischer 122). Indeed, it is Bersani’s work *Homos* that is usually credited with introducing a focus on negativity in queer theory, a school of thought that has since become known as anti-relational (or antisocial) queer theory. In his work, Bersani contends that it is an affirmative gay identity focusing inwardly on the desire not only for the same sex, but also for a more abstract notion of sociality based on sameness, that holds the true potential for resisting heteronormative society. Indeed, he maintains that “inherent in gay desire is a revolutionary inaptitude for heteroized sociality” (Bersani 7).

Though Bersani’s arguments about queerness are limited to white male homosexual desire and thus incompatible with this thesis’ view on queerness, they do contain aspects of a critique of heteronormativity that resonate with my argument. It is that hegemonic and heteronormative systems of power, such as the Matrix, produce ‘normal’ and intelligible ways of being and relating to others, which can be subverted. In theorizing an antinormative sociality based on homosexual desire rather than social identification with a group, Bersani formulates a negation of the rules of the heterosexual matrix. However, while he calls for white gay males to establish their own antisociality as a way of virtually negating heteronormative mainstream culture, relational or social queer theorists acknowledge the multiplicity of intertwined power structures that shape and potentially harm subjects. As late queer theorist Mari Ruti puts it,

“those on the social side of the debate tend to focus on more circumstantial and context-specific forms of negativity, wounding, decentering, and suffering [...], calling attention to the myriad ways in which the subject can be injured (even ‘negated’) by structural inequalities such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and global economic injustices”. (Ruti 131)

My thesis is informed by this viewpoint insofar as I interpret the Matrix as an oppressive hegemonic system that is both racially biased and heteronormative. In opposition to this system, the resisting humans figure as a relational queer community intent on disrupting this system across multiple lines of oppression. Therefore, rather than merely embracing their place of social abjection, as anti-relationists would prefer, this community enacts a queer politics of fighting back, of deconstructing the dominating force of the Matrix. I read the human resistance to the Matrix against Ruti’s critical stance towards the antisocial “celebration of negativity for its own sake”, instead “*work[ing] with negativity*, to see what negativity can do for us” (Ruti 38, original emphasis). As such, the Matrix imposes negativity upon the resistant humans,

causing them to fail to conform to its heteronormative imperatives. However, it is in this failure to comply with the system that they can invert this negativity as they recognize the artificiality of the Matrix's structure and utilize it for their own purposes. This is akin to Jack Halberstam's arguments in *The Queer Art of Failure*, according to which "failing [...] may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (Halberstam 2f).

In anti-relational theory, queer failure and negativity are never contested. Instead, anti-relationists suggest that queers should proudly inhabit their present place of social abjection without considering their future, which has often been deemed a "specifically white gay male approach to social transgression" (Ruti 4). Apart from Bersani, it is Lee Edelman who is associated with proliferating this notion of queer negativity in his 2004 polemic *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Fleischer 124). Like Bersani, Edelman is influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis and employs the concept of *jouissance* and its relation to the death drive as part of his theorization. According to Edelman, "the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure and form" (4). In fact, Edelman is highly critical of what he calls 'reproductive futurism,' which he understands as the underlying political logic of a given symbolic order, focusing on reproducing itself to ensure its own longevity (Edelman 2f). This locates queerness firmly in the present while disavowing any sense of queer futurity. Ruti deems this an "ethics of opting out", meaning that queers "embrace the negativity that dominant culture routinely bestows upon them by casting them as death-driven, AIDS-ridden, self-hating, and dangerous to the social order" (Ruti 28).

It is unsurprising that this form of negativity is not conducive to my analysis, which attempts to foreground the films' portrayal of a future-oriented queer politics. Therefore, a more relational sense of negativity is better suited, adhering to Muñoz's theory of queer futurity. For him, anti-relational notions of negativity stay within "a binary logic of opposition" (*Cruising* 13). He suggests that "[r]adical negativity, like the negation of negation, offers us a mode of understanding negativity that is starkly different from the version of the negative proposed by the queer anti-relationist. Here the negative becomes the resource for a certain mode of queer utopianism" (ibid.). Indeed, I aim to investigate how the human resistance negates their own negation, how they reclaim their place as the Matrix's non-heteronormative and racialized Other to counter the oppressive simulation. Queer utopianism, which I elaborate on below, then names what I identify as the resistance's goal, which entails a future characterized by queer relationality and freedom from restricting enforcements of subjectivity, going beyond the binary logics of normalness and non-normalness.

As mentioned, many scholars have criticized the anti-relational approach for privileging the queer perspective of white gay men specifically. For instance, Jack Halberstam claims that for anti-relational queer theorists, “utopian jouissance seems primarily available only in relation to male-male anal sex between strangers” (*Failure* 150). This quote contains two aspects worth highlighting.

First, this is reflective of how anti-relationists may conceive of queerness as a singular axis of sexual identity, specifically white male homosexuality. Indeed, it is a lack of consideration for the intersectional entanglement of identity that most scholars criticize in the anti-relational approach. In this context, Muñoz explicitly utilizes the anti-relational school as a catalyst for his own theory-building, which is heavily impacted by intersectionality and queer of color critique. He contends that anti-relational queer theory “moves to imagine an escape or denouncement of relationality as first and foremost a distancing of queerness from what some theorists seem to think of as the contamination of race, gender, or other particularities that taint the purity of sexuality as a singular trope of difference” (*Cruising* 11). It is precisely these exclusionary and monolithic tendencies of anti-relational queer theory against which the relational approach defines itself, thus placing a greater emphasis on the connections of different categories of identity (Ruti 6).

Second, it is noteworthy that Halberstam connects the jouissance proposed by Edelman to a notion of utopianness, and thus to a sense of futurity. This indicates that even in Edelman’s strongly anti-future rhetoric, there exists an idea of something not yet present to strive for despite his rootedness in anti-relational negativity. This clearly differs from Muñoz’s more relational utopianism, thus attesting to the existence of different utopianisms. Though Halberstam also subscribes to the theory of queer negativity (Ruti 34), I situate him more closely with relational negativity and with a future-oriented utopianism, as he echoes Muñoz’s “utopian refusal of social norms” (Halberstam, *Failure* 89).

Significantly, Ruti theorizes two kinds of queer negativity relevant to my thesis. Her approach, as previously quoted, invokes a sense of circumstantial negativity, a negativity that encompasses a multitude of structural inequalities often marginalizing queer people, which includes not just homophobia, but also sexism, racism, and classism, among others. Ruti juxtaposes this with the more anti-relational notion of constitutive negativity, i.e. a counterhegemonic attempt, informed by death-driven jouissance, to elude a fixed constitution of one’s identity. I agree with Ruti that this type does not consider that those deemed queer by society, who may be multiply ostracized, may not find the pursuit of “suicidal jouissance [...] particularly appealing” (131), given the already precarious state of their lives. Still, both types

of negativity are worth considering, as “it is often through circumstantial experiences of wounding that we are brought face to face with our constitutive wounding” (ibid.). Through her thorough recontextualization of Lacan to exploit his potential for queer relationists, Ruti finds a way of linking anti-relational paranoia of the Symbolic order with “reparative resources made available to us by the signifier” (133). Though my thesis does not build on insights from (Lacanian) psychoanalysis, I find Ruti’s arguments about negativity highly useful. My reading of the *Matrix* films will foreground both circumstantial and constitutive negativity, as well as (utopian) strategies that the films employ as counterhegemonic forces. For instance, Neo and Trinity experience circumstantial negativity inside the (heterosexual) Matrix in *Resurrections* as they fail to conform to hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity. In turn, this reminds them of their general state of negativity, forcing them “to grapple with the fundamental uncertainties of human life” (Ruti 132).

Before elaborating on how negativity can be linked to queer utopia, I first intend to give an account of one more theoretical aspect that expresses how I view human subjectivity in the *Matrix* films, and which is thus relevant for my subsequent analysis. Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of ‘being-singular-plural’ provides a useful lens through which this thesis looks at subjectivity. According to him, the term “means the essence of Being is only as coessence” (Nancy 584). Since Nancy maintains a relatively abstract philosophical jargon, it is rather Muñoz’s import of the concept into queer theory that I deem useful. For Muñoz,

being singular plural addresses the way in which the singularity that marks a singular existence is always coterminously plural [...]. Thus, if one attempts to render the ontological signature of queerness through Nancy’s critical apparatus, it needs to be grasped as both antirelational and relational. (*Cruising* 10f).

In terms of queerness, this may mean an acknowledgement of the coexistence of both the strive for queer individuality and the desire to be part of a queer community. As I will show, this can also be linked to the role of subjectivity in the films, where Neo figures as a specific singularity, as ‘the One,’ but also, especially in *Resurrections*, as part of a broader counterhegemonic community. In this sense, the films may display both anti-relationality and relationality, though the latter ultimately prevails.

Muñoz concerns himself with utopian visions of queerness beyond the confines of heteronormative capitalist structures. My thesis employs Muñoz’s utopianism, which serves as a primary theoretical frame with which I critique oppressive social structures in the *Matrix* films. Consequently, queer utopianism will be explored in more depth in the next section.

2.2 'The Future is Queer': Utopia and Queer Theory

Muñoz's elaborates on his approach to queer utopia in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. This chapter therefore explores this book and its significance for my thesis in more detail. Prior to delving into the bulk of these theorizations, it seems reasonable to first explore the roots of utopian thinking that Muñoz and this thesis build on.

2.2.1 A Word on Utopia as a Concept

The concept of utopia has circulated widely not only in academic discourses but has also entered the public consciousness and is by now part of everyday language. The term itself derives from the 16th century humanist Thomas More and his work *Utopia*, which has been identified as "an attack on [More's] own corrupt, dangerous times, and on the failings of humanity" (More, back cover). In the book, he conjures up the image of a paradisiac island named Utopia, which supposedly represents a perfected form of humanity. Etymologically speaking, 'utopia' is a composite of the Greek words 'ou,' meaning 'no' or 'not,' and 'topos,' meaning 'place' or 'where.' Thus, utopia translates to 'no-place' or 'nowhere.' It, therefore, designates a place that has no geographical location on a map, a place that does not materially exist. However, Lyman Tower Sargent remarks that More has also used the homophonous word 'eutopia' in the same manner, which translates to 'good place.' Subsequently, utopia is often understood as a "non-existent good place" (Sargent 2).

The utopian studies scholar Ruth Levitas argues that colloquial use of the word tends to deride the notion of utopia as naïve, unserious, and outright impossible to achieve. Scholars such as Karl Popper have been prominently hostile towards it, fearing that its realization would result in totalitarianism (Levitas 3). Muñoz concedes that any attempt to install "utopian communities would be replete with failures" (*Cruising* 27). However, neither scholar is willing to take this as a reason to simply abandon the notion. In her influential work *The Concept of Utopia*, Levitas takes utopia seriously and analyzes the different ways in which its definition varies in form, content, and function, thereby outlining the multiple and sometimes contradictory trajectories of contemporary utopian studies. Despite the many different inflections in approaches to utopia, largely depending on the area of life in which it is envisioned, Levitas imagines a unifying function of utopia as "the education of desire and the transformation of the world" (Levitas 8). The notion of desiring a better world, whether realistic or not, is central to her argument that aims to avoid any foreclosure of what characterizes utopia, thus always maintaining an openness in the term's conceptualization. This may be reflected in contemporary utopian fiction, in which "the emphasis has changed from the presentation of finished perfection to a more open exploration in which the construction of the individual, and thus the question of

another way of being, has central issue” (Levitas 8). Arguably, this applies specifically, but not only, to *Resurrections*, at the end of which Trinity and Neo embark on a project of quite literally creating a better world. It is not only a new construction of the individual, but especially the construction of a new world for everyone that is central to the films, even if it is unfinished.

Considering Levitas’ argument, utopia thus remains nonfinite, something that may never be reached. Nevertheless, this is not to discard utopia as an unusable form of wishful thinking. Indeed, as Levitas argues, the desire for a better world may be educated, which is what links her stance to that of the German philosopher Ernst Bloch and his concept of educated hope, which Muñoz also builds on substantially. In Bloch’s seminal treatise *The Principle of Hope*, which he published in three volumes between 1954 and 1959, he contends that there is an innate utopian drive in every human which makes us long for a better life and living conditions (Bloch 5). A key insight from his more than a thousand pages long text is that he conceives of utopianness in extremely broad ways. For Bloch, a sense of utopia can be located in “day-dreams, myths and fairy-tales as well as travellers’ tales and literary utopias” (Levitas 99). It is especially in daydreams, in quotidian imaginations that Bloch sees utopian potential, which makes utopia more palpable to us. As such, Neo’s flashbacks and Trinity’s anticipatory dream in *Resurrections* contain a daydream quality that, as I will show, becomes part of the film’s utopian outlook.

To avoid accusations of blind romanticization and naivete in his approach to utopia, Bloch makes a distinction between abstract and concrete utopias. According to him, “[t]he point of contact between dreams and life, without which dreams only yield abstract utopia, life only triviality, is given in the utopian capacity which is set on its feet and connected to the Real-Possible” (Bloch 146f). Abstract utopias are thus what is often pejoratively regarded as naïve wishful thinking as they are disconnected from material reality. In Muñoz’s words, they are “akin to banal optimism” (*Cruising* 3). Therefore, abstract utopias may have an unrealistic, dreamlike element, which represents a mode of imagining a better life that is largely detached from a historical consciousness. Bloch deems this type of utopia compensatory in that its envisioning of an improvement of life is a reaction to a momentarily perceived lack in the present. By contrast, “the only seemingly paradoxical concept of a concrete utopia would be appropriate here, that is, of an anticipatory kind which by no means coincides with abstract utopian dreaminess, nor is directed by the immaturity of merely abstract utopian socialism” (Bloch 147). This kind of utopia anticipates a better future more strategically, reaching beyond the naïve romanticism of abstract utopias. It is what Bloch calls ‘docta spes,’ or educated hope, and what Levitas calls educated desire. It involves a historically informed methodology, i.e. a

backward glance that brings “the past to bear on the present and the future” (Muñoz, *Cruising* 27). This becomes particularly apparent in *Resurrections*, which historicizes the Matrix by repeatedly referring to the original *Matrix* film. In doing so, the characters’ awareness of the previous Matrix’s structure is used as a form of educated hope to resist the new Matrix and ultimately rework it from within.

Gary Wilder, who builds on Bloch’s idea of concrete utopias, emphasizes the importance of remembering Bloch’s subscription to Marxism and socialism when considering his conceptualization of historically grounded concrete utopias (Wilder 10). According to Wilder, “concrete utopianism demands both a capacity to identify transformative possibilities that may already exist but are not yet recognized and a capacity to imagine that which is currently unimaginable” (10, original emphasis). This implies the relevance of considering both factual materiality and creative imagination when dealing with concrete utopias. Exemplifying how current systems and orders are not yet open for certain norm-shattering changes, Wilder lists some of these not-yet possibilities, such as “prison and police abolition, reparations for slavery, collective debt cancellation, or a prohibition against fossil fuels” (Wilder 9).

In this point, Wilder echoes Bloch’s call for concrete utopian imagining. Though abstract utopias may also have some merit as even they contain the drive and imaginativeness for a better life and are superior to sheer pessimism, Bloch criticizes them for suggesting a finiteness of utopia. Rather, Bloch prefers to envision utopia as an “unfinished forward dream” or “docta spes” (157). Echoing Bloch, Levitas contends that “[t]he rehabilitation of utopia depends upon the removal of the abstract elements which clutter up the concrete core. Concrete utopia must be winnowed out, stripping wishful thinking of that which is purely fantastic, compensatory and escapist” (104). Through the removal of abstraction, both Bloch and Levitas justify their investment in a utopia of a decidedly concrete kind. The *Matrix* films similarly prefer concrete utopia over naïve wishful thinking. However, they offer a unique space in which concrete utopia can arise from abstract ideas made concrete in the films, for instance through different ways of bending the rules of the binary-coded Matrix. For Andy Porter and Jessica Albrecht, *Resurrections* specifically “offers a multi-layered shedding of binary oppositions in favour of progressive togetherness” (Porter & Albrecht 12). This entails a shedding not only of the real/abstract binary, but also of the binaries existing within the heterosexual matrix. Shedding, therefore, becomes a form of queering, while togetherness is akin to relationality. Though it may be more palpable in *Resurrections*, I argue that such deconstructive queering practices are already at work in *Matrix*.

To better understand the visions of concrete utopia that the films promote, I now discuss Muñoz's theory of queer utopianism in *Cruising Utopia*, which substantially draws on Bloch's theories of utopia and educated hope.

2.2.2 José Muñoz's Queer Utopianism and Futurity

In a statement in the *Windy City Times* on her gender transition, film director Lilly Wachowski, who co-directed the original *Matrix* trilogy alongside her sister Lana, revealed that she is inspired by a quote by José Esteban Muñoz she had hung up in her office. It says "[q]ueerness is essentially about the rejection of the here and now and an insistence on potentiality for another world" (qtd. in Wachowski, "Second Wachowski filmmaker sibling comes out as trans"). Though this information might seem coincidental, it strongly links Muñoz's work to the *Matrix* films, which, I argue, are rife with queer potentiality. This chapter, therefore, discusses Muñoz's book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, which serves as the primary theoretical basis for my analysis. I discuss an array of relevant concepts that Muñoz employs, thus building a methodological corpus for the ensuing film analysis. This includes concepts such as homonormativity, queer temporalities, a critique of straight time, and theories of queer performativity. Moreover, I will refer to some of Bloch's terminology which influence Muñoz's arguments, including (queer) potentiality, educated hope and the temporal constructs of the not-yet-here and the no-longer-conscious. Throughout the chapter, I will relate these to notions of queer relationality, as well as queer negativity and theories of queer failure.

2.2.2.1 Critiquing the Present: Homonormativity and Queer Temporalities

Muñoz's work emphasizes 'queer' as a relational concept, thus devising *Cruising* as a critique of queer anti-relationality. Though he largely agrees with Edelman's suspicion towards reproductive futurism, Muñoz proposes a more relational and, indeed, optimistic way to tackle the oppressive majoritarian straight world that abjects queerness. However, he explicitly rejects the pragmatism that he identifies with mainstream queer activism whose politics prescriptively aim at allowing primarily white gay men to participate in institutions such as the military or marriage (Muñoz, *Cruising* 121). This politics of assimilation is what Lisa Duggan has coined as neoliberal homonormativity, which "does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan 179). Homonormativity, therefore, figures as an instrument of heteronormativity, extending the latter's arm to normalize even more subjects according to its own standards, under the pretense of inclusivity. I locate homonormativity in *Resurrections* specifically, where the Analyst embodies the assimilative force of the (new)

heterosexual matrix, absorbing forms of queer resistance from the original film into its hegemonic structure to limit its threat to the system.

The queerness that the films propagate is future-oriented and not restricted to mere gay assimilation and equality of non-heterosexual sexuality that is characteristic of present-day gay pragmatism (*Cruising* 55). Indeed, I, like Muñoz, am more interested in the becoming of queerness rather than how the present defines it. Correspondingly, Muñoz seeks “the utopian impulse that animated preidentitarian queer politics” (*Cruising* 116). This is meant as a critique of the present in which identity politics often claim to represent the demands of a clearly defined and formulated lesbian or gay identity, for instance. Such definitions often lead to normative formations, such as homonormativity. Instead, “[t]he queerness of queer futurity [...] is a relational and collective modality of endurance and support” (*Cruising* 91). It is this relationality, connecting subjects across multiple categories of difference in a shared vision of a better future, that I identify in the *Matrix* films. In connection to queer relationality and futurity, my thesis also echoes Muñoz’s earlier work *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, a seminal text for queer of color critique. Applying Muñoz’s concept of disidentification, I analyze how the human resistance in the films disidentifies with the Matrix. In doing so, I focus on “the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (*Disidentifications* 4). The Matrix is the hegemonic public, while the rebellious humans are minoritarian and non-conforming. Humanity itself is collectively cast as the racialized Other of the machinic white Matrix, which is why the human rebellion against it can be seen as a relational counterhegemonic act of the oppressed, negating the Matrix’s negation of them.

Significantly, the relationality Muñoz advocates for is linked to a specific sense of queer futurity, and temporality in general. Muñoz’s utopian methodology unsettles the linear fabric of time in that he looks for queer utopian kernels across the past, present, and future. He views queerness “as a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity” (*Cruising* 16). This locates queerness in the future as a utopian time and place that arises from present subjects uncovering the queer potentiality of the past. To view queerness as utopian is to view it as a ‘no-place’ that may never be actualized, but “always on the horizon” (ibid. 11). Muñoz’s utopian maneuvering serves as a critique of the present, which builds on Jack Halberstam’s work on queer temporalities. According to Halberstam, “[q]ueer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction” (*Time and Place* 1). Queer time

is thus distinct from ‘straight time,’ a term that Muñoz uses throughout his arguments to explain the capitalist logics of the present that grants a future only to majoritarian heterosexual subjects engaging in reproductive sexual practices (*Cruising* 22). He seeks to disrupt straight time by critiquing its focus on the here and now, which is marked by heteronormative capitalism (*Time and Place* 10). As such, I read the Matrix in the films not only as Butler’s heterosexual matrix, but also as a heterosexual matrix that hinges on the flow of straight time, i.e. a matrix whose temporal and spatial structure is based on principles of (heterosexual) reproduction and capitalist accumulation in a self-naturalizing present. This directly affects characters such as Neo in *Matrix* and both Neo and Trinity in *Resurrections*. They experience the negative strictures of straight time before they are freed from the Matrix into whose normative structure of life they are unhappily placed.

Muñoz’s critique prefers a utopian then and there, which enables alternative and queer modes of belonging and being in the world. In this context, queer temporality takes on the form of ecstatic time, thereby transcending straight time. Crucially, “[t]o see queerness as horizon is to perceive it as a modality of ecstatic time in which the temporal stranglehold that [is] straight time is interrupted or stepped out of” (*Cruising* 32). One way in which straight time is ecstatically interrupted in the films is through the bullet time effect. As a signature feature of the franchise, bullet time is skillfully used by the human resistance to move extremely fast within the Matrix to dodge bullets. I read these moments as a form of resistance to the Matrix’s temporal fabric of straight time. Not only do they contain elements of ecstasy, but also of futurity. Hence, this enables an understanding of how the characters resist the heterosexual matrix by performing a sense of queer utopian futurity.

However, it is vital to consider utopian thinking as connected to the present. This is where Muñoz’s Marxian influence becomes evident, as his queer utopian hermeneutic works with “a notion of futurity that functions as a historical materialist critique” (*Cruising* 26). This implies that utopia, if it is to have any political value, needs to be tackled via the concrete route, rather than through abstract atemporal wishful thinking. Explaining why concrete utopianism should be invested in, Wilder suggests that a “concrete utopian orientation helps us to unthink supposedly self-evident boundaries between here and there, now and then, us and them” (Wilder 11). As such, concrete queer utopianism entails a convergence of different temporalities. This relating of past, present, and future, as Muñoz argues, is what is achieved when entering ecstatic time (*Cruising* 189). Moreover, this speaks not only to a relationality of different temporalities, but also of a relationality of subjects. Since this thesis views the heterosexual matrix as a system marked by heteronormativity and racial normativity, I also

associate the Matrix with a sense of normative whiteness enmeshed in straight time. Indeed, Muñoz warns that “[t]heories of queer temporality that fail to factor in the relational relevance of race or class merely reproduce a crypto-universal white gay subject that is weirdly atemporal” (*Cruising* 94). Given that humans are collectively racialized in the films, resistance to the machines, therefore, represents both a queer utopian endeavor and a racial struggle for liberation. Subsequently, my argument is that the *Matrix* films envision a futurity for all, emphasizing the relationality of subjects across categories of difference while dismantling the white heteronormative Matrix. Delving into how the films achieve their utopian outlook, the following section discusses Muñoz’s use of Ernst Bloch’s methodology of educated hope, as well as the concept of future-oriented potentiality.

2.2.2.2 Defying Straight Time with Bloch: Educated Hope and Queer Potentiality

In his time-disrupting approach to queer utopianism Muñoz extensively utilizes Ernst Bloch’s terminology and develops an according methodology for tracing queerness across the past, present, and future. Muñoz primarily analyzes queer utopian aspects in the context of cultural production around the time of the Stonewall rebellion in 1969. He unearths these from the past, from the Blochian no-longer-conscious, which is “a term that attempts to enact a more precise understanding of the work that the past does, what can be understood as the performative force of the past” (*Cruising* 19). For instance, he analyzes the art of Andy Warhol, poems by Frank O’Hara, a script for a play by LeRoi Jones, or the irreverent and ultimately tragic performances of Fred Herko, to uncover something utopian in them. Muñoz specifically locates utopian kernels in the ornamentality of their art, in a certain cultural surplus, which is, as Levitas argues, “equated with concrete utopia” (Levitas 106). The ornamental aspect of art rejects usefulness in a capitalist sense while facilitating a utopian passage for audiences, granting them a glimpse of something on the horizon and not yet present (*Cruising* 128). It provides content for what is otherwise unimaginable, aligning it with concrete utopianism. Similarly, Muñoz investigates the utopian function of the quotidian, such as in “utopian bonds, affiliations, designs, and gestures that exist within the present moment” (*Cruising* 22f). Indeed, he invokes a sense of queer utopian relationality which he senses in photographs of desolate public sex areas, or in antihierarchical seating charts of the New York Correspondence School, a former collective of artists. These examples, albeit now in the past, contain traces of a forward-dawning utopianness that exceed the strictures of present-day social orders in favor of a queer futurity. In short, they, as well as the ornamentality of art, evoke the Blochian not-yet-here. The following passage captures how Muñoz employs and connects Bloch’s concepts of the no-longer-conscious (past) and the not-yet-here (future):

A turn to the no-longer-conscious enabled a critical hermeneutics attuned to comprehending the not-yet-here. This temporal calculus performed and utilized the past and the future as armaments to combat the devastating logic of the world of the here and now, a notion of nothing existing outside the sphere of the current moment, a version of reality that naturalizes cultural logics such as capitalism and heteronormativity. (*Cruising* 12)

This highlights the dialectic role of concrete utopian critique: Not only does it have a negative function in critiquing the constricting present, but it also contains a positive function in arguing for a better, though not prescriptive, future.

While Muñoz draws from the past as a queer archive to formulate a forward-oriented critique of the present, the *Matrix* films similarly cross the linearity of time, accessing the no longer conscious past to resist the present (heterosexual) Matrix in favor of a utopian world-making. Granted, the films extensively play with the concept of linearity. The Matrix in *Matrix*, for instance, is revealed to be a simulation based on metropolitan life in the year 1999, which is also the year of the film's release. The plot in the real world outside the Matrix takes place several hundreds of years later, beyond the human ability to keep track of how much time has factually passed. This Matrix, therefore, assumes a double role. To those who are unaware of the simulation, including Neo in the beginning, it is the capitalist present that is destined to always remain the present of 1999. To those realizing its artificiality, including the human resistance, the Matrix appears as an outdated image of the past that the machines use to subdue humanity by pretending to be its present. As the characters enter and exit the Matrix constantly, manipulating the laws of time and space, they move between past and present at their own volition. Therefore, they may access and use the no-longer-conscious within the Matrix to resist the Matrix itself, which is thus necessarily both past and present. This no-longer-conscious is represented, for instance, through spaces inside the Matrix that exist unbeknownst or in opposition to the system, such as an abandoned hotel or the apartment of the Oracle. These are, as I will show, spaces of queer relationality and spaces that hint to something missing in the overarching present-oriented system of the Matrix, something utopian. This utopian drive is also evident in *Resurrections*, wherein the characters fight for a better world that is not yet here by utilizing the no-longer-conscious of the updated Matrix. Here, the no-longer-conscious reaches a metalevel, as Neo and Trinity are inserted into the new Matrix without recollections of the events of the initial film trilogy. Therefore, the memories of these events, which they gradually regain and access in *Resurrections*, represent a new archive for the no-longer-conscious.

One of Muñoz's central arguments is that using the no-longer-conscious as a resource for a critique of the present and for queer futurity needs to follow a methodology of educated hope.

This hope refuses to be considered naïve or abstract, instead offering a form of critical idealism, an “emotional modality that permits us to access futurity, par excellence” (*Cruising* 98). Importantly, educated hope needs to be grasped as both queer and relational in the context of Muñoz (*Cruising* 94). Since hoping for a better future is not accessible to everyone equally, queerness should not be conceived as a singular trope of difference, but as a collective and relational working towards this future while considering the hopes and aspirations of everyone. For instance, Muñoz identifies a connection between Black struggles and queer struggles, which both hinge upon “a certain radicalness in relation to capitalism’s naturalizing temporal logic” (*Cruising* 87). Along this line, I interpret racial struggles as critical of straight time, and thus as queer. The educated hope of the human resistance in the films reconfigures the struggle for the liberation of the human ‘race’ as a struggle for queer relational futurity.

Hoping for a better and less restricting future in an educated way involves the development of what Bloch calls anticipatory consciousness, which is directed towards what is not present, towards the not-yet-here. As Bloch points out, “[t]he anticipatory thus operates in the field of hope; so this hope is not taken *only as emotion* [...], but *more essentially as a directing act of a cognitive kind*” (Bloch 12, original emphasis). This resonates with Muñoz’s use of hope as “both a critical affect and a methodology” (*Cruising* 4). Concrete utopian thinking applies this future-oriented consciousness strategically, as exemplified by Muñoz’s analysis of the anticipatory illumination of different works of art. Throughout his book, he seeks and locates utopian potentiality in these works. His theorization and application of the term ‘potentiality’ derives in many ways from Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who claims that potentiality is defined by its status as non-being. As such, “[t]o be potential means: to be one’s own lack, *to be in relation to one’s own incapacity*” (Agamben 182, original emphasis). A potentiality therefore always indicates a certain lack in the present and a Blochian not-yet-here. Muñoz echoes this argument and proceeds to make a critical distinction between potentiality and possibility:

Possibilities exist, or more nearly, they exist within a logical real, the possible, which is within the present and is linked to presence. Potentialities are different in that although they are present, they do not exist in present things. Thus, potentialities have a temporality that is not in the present but, more nearly, in the horizon, which we can understand as futurity. Potentiality is and is not presence, and its ontology cannot be reduced to presentness. (*Cruising* 99)

In the context of his methodology, looking for queer utopia becomes a matter of locating potentiality in cultural artifacts from the past or present that point to something not present. This not-yet-here often takes on the form of queer relationality, a vision of queerness as a collective belonging across categories of difference, as a shedding of normative ways of being

under capitalism and the white heterosexual matrix. Muñoz primarily finds queer potentiality in the ornamental, in the function of art as aesthetic surplus. He also remarks on the presence of potentiality in queer of color nightlife, highlighting the “world-making potentialities contained in the performances of minoritarian citizen-subjects who contest the majoritarian public sphere” (*Cruising* 56). In my thesis, I similarly look for queer potentiality in the *Matrix* films as part of a methodology of educated hope, not only performing a critique of the white heteronormative Matrix, but also offering a glimpse of a queer not-yet-here. For instance, I identify utopian potentiality in the characters’ Matrix-style, in certain locations, and in their seemingly choreographed movements which defy not only gravity but also straight time. These instances often present a queer relationality that is not yet present within the overarching system of oppression, the Matrix. They also evoke a sense of queer performativity of resistance, which is the subject of the next section.

2.2.2.3 Performativity and Strategies of Queer Failure

Focusing on how the films critique and disrupt the Matrix as well as the heterosexual matrix, I interpret these queering acts as enactments of a sense of queer performativity. Seeing queer utopia as performative reinforces anti-identitarian notions of queerness, as performativity emphasizes “not the fact of a queer identity but the force of a kind of queer doing” (*Cruising* 84). Theories of performativity are largely indebted to Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, in which they claim that both gender and sex are performative and discursively constructed, contesting the widely believed opinion that gender is a cultural inscription onto an allegedly prediscursive natural sex. Instead, this notion of sex itself is constructed through gender. That is, binary cultural discourses which conceive of gender as either masculine or feminine crucially produce the effect that male and female sex are seen as essential, thus becoming intelligible within the parameters of the heterosexual matrix (Butler 9ff). Subsequently, it is one of Butler’s key arguments that one does not possess a core gender identity that may or may not fit into the heterosexual matrix’s imperative of coherence. Instead, gender is continuously produced and figures as an effect of repeated, performative acts (ibid. 33). By extension, Butler sees identity in general as unfixed and as a repeatedly constituted effect (ibid. 187). This adds a performative aspect not only to gender, but also to other categories of difference, such as ‘race.’ This suggests that normative identities do not ‘naturally’ precede their discursive constructions. Rather, they are repeatedly constituted through social performances that seek to consolidate normalized identities by concealing their performativity. For instance, the heterosexual matrix is a construct that depends on the performance of hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity, delineating their mutual exclusivity through the compulsory performance of heterosexuality. As my

analysis of the films will show, this construct also posits normative whiteness as deeply entangled in the construction of norms of gender and sexuality.

Significantly, Butler argues that “gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts* [which] requires a conception of gender as a constituted *social temporality*” (ibid. 179, original emphasis). Hegemonic performances of gender can thus be seen as adhering to straight time, the time of the heterosexual matrix that requires intelligible performances. Nevertheless, the performativity of gender and identity in general can also be used subversively and deconstructively, pointing to the instability of hegemonic systems of power. As Michel Foucault has famously postulated, power is not merely repressive but also productive (Foucault 8-12). For instance, Butler highlights the gender-subversive power of cross-dressing and drag (Butler 174). However, as Amelia Jones comments, Butler’s contribution to the theorization of performativity has caused the term to be largely associated with the construction and subversion of gender and sexuality as rather isolated categories, obscuring their intricate connectedness with ‘race’ and class, for instance (Jones 37). To avoid reproducing this implicitly white perspective on performativity, Jones stresses that all aspects of culture and subjectivity have come to be understood as performative throughout postmodernism, which is why she sees performativity as a decidedly relational concept (36). This also invokes the influential work of Eve Sedgwick, according to whom queer performativity “is the name of a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame and to the later and related fact of stigma” (Sedgwick 61). Queer of color critique maintains that queerness is often associated with feelings of shame and being stigmatized across multiple categories of difference (Muñoz, *Disidentifications* 5). For this reason, queer performativity can unite these dispossessed subjects, thus relationally producing counterhegemonic meanings that resist essentializing tropes which dictate normative and restrictive ways of being. For my film analysis, I employ this strategic performative production of queer, non-normative meaning as a reclaiming of queer negativity and failure, which enables the characters to resist the (heterosexual) Matrix. They disidentify with the Matrix, constantly defying its oppression while simultaneously trying to build a better world. Queer performativity thus becomes a means of disidentification, of performing educated hope, and of working towards utopia while critiquing the present.

More precisely, I employ Muñoz’s future-oriented analysis, according to which “there is a performance of futurity embedded in the aesthetic. [...] Queerness in my formulation is also not quite here and no longer conscious. Queerness, if it is to have any political resonance, needs to be more than an identitarian marker and to articulate a forward-dawning futurity” (Muñoz

87). Therefore, to see queerness not as a form of being but doing is to see queerness as a performance of futurity itself. Again, temporality is important in that “the political effects that result from [...] queer performatives have everything to do with the interpretive *other* who will engage the text, the body, or the signifier *at a later moment*” (Jones 62, original emphasis). This corresponds with Muñoz’s methodology of looking back to instances of queer performativity in the past to unearth meanings that contain a queer potentiality for the future. One way of harnessing this potentiality is by considering the force of queer performative gestures. For Muñoz, “the performative force of the gesture interrupts straight time and the temporal strictures it enacts” (*Cruising* 83). For instance, he analyzes the queer performances of American nightclub performer Kevin Aviance whose dancing and on-stage gestures incorporate high-fashion glamour, which Muñoz reads as a “racialized self-enactment in the face of overarching opposition” (*Cruising* 80). Such forms of gesturing can be seen as a queer of color strategy of resistance in the face of imposed negativity. Similarly, I analyze the characters’ movements and style in the *Matrix* films as a means of not only resisting and disidentifying with the heteronormative laws of the simulation, but also as part of the characters’ performative gestures that contain a queer potentiality and, therefore, a utopian kernel. However, rather than focusing on the transformative gestures of on-stage performances, my analysis approaches performativity more generally by considering the characters’ bodily and discursive gestures in connection to their performance of utopian resistance to white capitalist heteronormativity. Concretely, I will focus on their movements within the *Matrix*, their dialogue, and how the films’ mise-en-scène frames and relates to their performances.

Finally, though queer performativity may lead to a sense of queer utopia, the path to this ‘no-place’ is not necessarily linear or without obstacles. Performativity, performance, and hope are not exempt from failure. However, the queer use of Blochian hope is educated precisely because it considers queer failure and negativity not as hindrances but as integral parts of the path towards queer futurity. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam elaborates on queer failure, reclaiming it as “a refusal of mastery, a critique of the intuitive connections within capitalism between success and profit, and as a counterhegemonic discourse of losing” (11f). This reconfigures failure as an inability to conform to hegemonic systems such as capitalism and heteronormativity. Halberstam thus develops a counterhegemonic, bottom-up methodology that seeks to invert conventional meanings of failure, thereby questioning the self-naturalization of contemporary social relations and providing “models of contestation, rupture, and discontinuity for the political present” (*Failure* 19). In Muñoz’s terms, the political present that

is critiqued is straight time, which he crucially connects to queer failure and queer performativity:

The misfire, this failure, is intrinsic to how the performative illustrates the ways different courses are traveled in contrast to what heteronormativity demands. Heteronormativity speaks not just to a bias related to sexual object choice but to that dominant and overarching temporal and spatial organization of the world that I have been calling straight time. [...] Queerness and the politics of failure are linked insofar as they are about doing 'something else'. (*Cruising* 154)

Doing 'something else' that is different from systemic norms, something that fails to conform to conventional modes of being, performing and feeling, is thus a way of finding a concrete utopian kernel (ibid.). As such, the protagonists of the films rebel against the Matrix by consciously failing to conform to its internal structure that normalizes whiteness, heteronormativity, and capitalism. This reinforces accounts of queer theory that have embraced queer failure as a means of rebellion (Ruti 27). For instance, Trinity is depicted as rather dissatisfied with her imposed role as a married mother. Therefore, she represents a failure to 'perform' happiness in a heteronormative capitalist setting, ultimately remembering her past as Trinity and explicitly choosing rebellion over her fake family.

Instead of limiting my analysis to how the human resistance revels in queer negativity to subvert the (heterosexual) Matrix, I attempt to unveil how the films strategically place negativity as a function of queer utopianism, reflecting the films' invocation of a sense of educated hope rather than abstract wishful thinking. These utopian ways of being can become more palpable when seeing failure as a practice which, parallel to Muñoz's temporal methodology, "recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent" (Halberstam, *Failure* 88). Halberstam's approach of locating alternatives within dominant systems of power, therefore, complements my use of Muñoz's approach of finding utopian kernels across time, since I interpret the Matrix as a representation of a hegemonic system that exists both in the past and the present. To fail is, thus, to fail with educated hope, strategically taking advantage of the negativity imposed on non-normative subjects by finding and harnessing an inherent queer potentiality, allowing for a glimpse of a better world, a concrete utopia.

3 The Matrix as the White Heterosexual Matrix

In this chapter, I analyze how the simulations in *Matrix* and *Resurrections* represent heterosexual matrices that normalize the logics of capitalism, heteronormativity and white normativity. This chapter is divided into two sections, each focusing on one film and its respective version of the Matrix. In each section, I conduct close analyses of particularly revelatory scenes that exemplify the Matrix's normative and oppressive structure, as well as its effect on resistant characters such as Neo and Trinity. Throughout the section, I will also address parts of the films in which the origins of the respective Matrix are exposed, offering additional insight into how normativity is inscribed into them.

3.1 The Simulation in *Matrix*

"Unfortunately, no one can be told what the Matrix is. You have to see it for yourself."

(Morpheus, *The Matrix*, 00:28:39)

Taking Morpheus's words to heart, I base my analysis of the (heterosexual) Matrix largely on the visual material of the film. Ironically, Morpheus does frequently explain the Matrix verbally. Hence, I initially focus on his expository dialogue, which gives further insight into the nature of the simulation and helps analyze various levels of normativity enmeshed within its structure. I also discuss Agent Smith's machinic and racially supremacist perspective of the Matrix and humanity, which he exposes to the captive Morpheus before torturing him.

Subsequently, my close analysis of a key scene in *Matrix* illustrates the congruity of the filmic Matrix and the heterosexual matrix. It also highlights the hostility towards those who defy the latter's rigid hetero- and white normative rules.

3.1.1 The White Supremacist Origins of Cyberspace

The lore of the Matrix's creation is so complex that a detailed account would exceed the scope of this thesis.² Instead, I will focus on how it is described by characters in the films. Morpheus, the leader of the human resistance, particularly fulfills the role of educating not only the protagonist, Neo, but also the audience about the Matrix's nature. For instance, a while after freeing Neo from the Matrix, Morpheus explains the Matrix to Neo in one of the resistance's construct programs. These are human-made simulations that members of the resistance enter for training purposes, thereby acquiring abilities and combat skills to use in more hostile simulations such as the Matrix. Morpheus explains that the Matrix is "[c]ontrol. The Matrix is a computer-generated dreamworld built to keep us under control in order to change a human

² Other canonical texts of the franchise, such as the series *The Animatrix* and the videogame *Enter the Matrix*, delve deeper into the Matrix's history.

being into this” (00:43:21). ‘This’ refers to a battery he holds up, revealing to a horrified Neo that humans are being farmed by machines, serving as the primary energy resource for them. The machines thus designed the Matrix to keep humans in a dreamlike state that simulates virtual ‘ordinary’ lives while their ‘real’ bodies are exploitatively drained.

Significantly, Morpheus also introduces a discourse of racial Otherness in the story. In their first conversation, shortly before Neo takes the red pill to exit the Matrix, Morpheus tells him how the resistance perceives the Matrix:

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, born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison...for your mind. (00:27:44-00:28:32)

As such, Morpheus casts a picture of humanity as having been collectively enslaved by an invisible hegemonic system of power that structures the world around them. He mentions activities such as working, going to church, and paying taxes as moments in which the Matrix’s yoke can be felt. As these acts are often considered characteristic of what it means to be a ‘good citizen’ in Western capitalist society, the film likens ‘good citizenship’ to being a ‘good slave’ who engages in normative activities that do not threaten the hegemonic order, i.e., the Matrix. Humanity, therefore, figures as the racialized Other to the Matrix and its machine creators. These require humans to remain docile and assimilated in this capitalist system to ensure the continuously unchallenged provision of energy, which they depend on for their sustenance and dominance.

My argument that racial difference is central to the human/machine relation in the films is also supported by Morpheus’s explanation of the rise of the machines. He tells Neo that “at some point in the early 21st century, all of mankind was united in celebration. We marveled at our own magnificence as we gave birth to A.I. [...]. A singular consciousness that spawned an entire race of machines” (00:41:25). His comment suggests that all internal differences of humans, based, for example, on categories of ‘race,’ gender, or nationality, have eroded upon the arrival of A.I. It also invokes a new sense of ‘race,’ not as ethnicity, but as something that comprehends all of humanity as one ‘race’ that has been enslaved by the new machine ‘race’. Later in the film, Agent Smith offers more insight into the Matrix’s history as he holds Morpheus captive inside the simulation:

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 that we lacked the programming language to describe your perfect world. But I believe that, as a species, human beings define their reality through misery and suffering. So, the perfect world was a dream that your primitive cerebrum kept trying to wake up from. (01:32:03-01:32:43)

Smith exposes the failure of a previous version of the Matrix, a utopia for humans, wherein humanity did not accept this imposed perfection, resulting in major losses of resources for the machines. The machines concluded that humans need ‘misery and suffering,’ thus imposing a state of constitutive negativity onto the humans of the new Matrix to distract them from the truth that they live in a simulated reality, enabling the machines to maximally capitalize on human bodies. To cement the machines’ racial superiority, Smith uses the argument of “[e]volution, like the dinosaur. Look out that window: you had your time. The future is our world, Morpheus. The future is our time” (01:32:56). By referring to evolution, he imagines the machines’ enslavement of humanity as part of the ‘natural’ progression of events, which recalls the white supremacist trope that insists on the seemingly natural superiority of the white ‘race’ over nonwhites. As such, Smith’s statement reflects the machines’ hijacking of humanity’s future, which the queer human resistance attempts to reclaim throughout the films.

Smith also expresses to Morpheus his personal views on the human slaves, which he desires to exterminate, foreshadowing his usurpation of the Matrix. According to Smith, “[h]uman beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet. You are a plague, and we are the cure” (01:38:25). He also likens the Matrix to a stinking zoo and prison, reinforcing his disgust at humanity. He, therefore, views himself and the machines as superior, as the saviors of a planet that is dying from the human ‘virus.’

The elevation of ‘race’ relations to a humanity-versus-machines narrative and the consequential obscuring of internal human ‘race’ relations is not an uncommon cyberpunk trope. Critiquing their tendency to envision post-racial societies, Isiah Lavender contends that “the cyberpunk future champions high tech low life that renders racial identities obsolescent, as if cyberspace is not a racially coded environment” (310). Though the films seemingly center on the conflict between humans and machines, Smith’s machinic perspective is structurally parallel to white supremacy, which is accentuated by the scene’s portrayal of the white male slaveholder, in this case, Smith (played by Hugo Weaving), and an enchained African-American slave, Morpheus (played by Laurence Fishburne). According to Theresa Geller, this scene, therefore, addresses “racist discourses such as the history of colonialism and its related narrative of evolutionary theory [...] that imply a critique of racial mixing” (17). As such, I argue that the machine-made Matrix represents a racialized heterosexual matrix that normalizes ‘unmixed’ whiteness, as well

as the heteronormative gender binary. Although intra-human differences may appear obsolete inside the simulation, my analysis of a crucial scene uncovers the Matrix's heteronormative whiteness that marks its capitalist world.

3.1.2 Exploring the Repressive White Heteronormative Construct

Arguably, few instances in *Matrix* depict the Matrix as the white heterosexual matrix as clearly as when Morpheus teaches Neo about the dangers they face inside the Matrix. This scene (00:56:30-00:58:58) takes place after Morpheus shows various training constructs to the newly freed Neo, revealing to him the truth about the Matrix and practicing combat skills with him. Although this scene does not feature the Matrix per se, it shows a construct that simulates the Matrix to teach Neo about the danger of Agents in the Matrix. It is virtually indistinguishable from the Matrix, as Neo only recognizes it as a different construct upon being told later by Morpheus.

The scene begins with a close-up shot of a red traffic light, which disappears after a few seconds, showing a large group of people crossing the street. As Figure 1 shows, the crowd initially fills out the bottom half of the screen, waiting for the light to turn green. With the shot of the red light, this sequence of images highlights the aspect of control in the Matrix, dictating how people move within it.



Figure 1: The white heterosexual Matrix (00:56:31)

As the crowd approaches the static camera, they soon fill out much of the frame, creating the effect of a wave crashing over the camera and the audience. Strikingly, everyone in this wave is white and dressed in black and white formal attire, underlining the Matrix's binary nature. As this group represents 'everyday people' inside the Matrix, a sense of white upper-class normativity is created, which is also reflected in the scene's location itself. It is a fast-paced capitalist uptown area of a metropole largely frequented by upper-class businesspeople, leaving little to no room for alternative, let alone resistant, lifestyles. They firmly move within the

parameters of straight capitalist time, individually racing through the streets, thus creating a sense of competitive anti-relationality. Moreover, their quick walk prevents a prolonged inspection of their features, suggesting that this white virtual mob is faceless and lacks individuality and depth. As Nicola Rehling argues, this reflects how, in many science-fiction films, “[e]lectronic space in general is coded as white, [...] presumably because whiteness connotes absence and non-materiality” (128). The prevalence of whiteness on screen, both in the people and the space around them, serves to naturalize images of upper-class capitalist whiteness while racial differences appear absent.

Morpheus and Neo contrast with this overbearing wave of whiteness for two reasons. On the one hand, Morpheus leads Neo through the crowd in the opposite direction, causing Neo to bump into multiple people who seemingly ignore him. While Morpheus moves through the crowd effortlessly, Neo struggles to catch up as they figuratively move against the mainstream. The scene’s ominous soundtrack, ‘Clubbed to Death’ by Rob Dougan, conveys Neo’s paranoia and struggle as he chases after Morpheus. On the other hand, they diverge from the crowd visually. Morpheus wears black leathery clothes and shades that are characteristically worn inside the Matrix by members of the resistance, contrasting with the crowd. Though characters’ racial identities other than ‘human’ are never explicitly thematized, Morpheus’s Blackness further juxtaposes him with the white Matrix, highlighting his state of circumstantial negativity in terms of ‘race.’ Meanwhile, Neo has not fully adapted to being a rebel yet and wears a casual black jacket and pants, resembling his style from his former life as ‘Thomas Anderson.’ Combined with his failure to physically move through this wave of white upper-class capitalism, this emphasizes Neo’s circumstantial negativity in terms of class.³ Therefore, they both differ from the Matrix’s white upper-class mold through their visual Otherness to it.

As they progress through the crowd, Morpheus lectures Neo about the people in the Matrix:

MORPHEUS. The Matrix is a system, Neo. That system is our enemy. But when you are 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. (00:56:36-00:57:08)

The professions listed by Morpheus can be considered normative within a hegemonic capitalist system such as the Matrix, upholding its status quo while not posing a significant threat to it. However, Morpheus posits them as their enemies since they unconsciously contribute to the

³ The racial identity of Keanu Reeves, who plays Neo, has often been deemed ambiguous, given his Hawaiian-Chinese father and his white British mother (Rehling 126). Despite Reeves’ multiracial background, Neo is constructed as white in the original *Matrix* trilogy, as will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.1.

Matrix's integrity. The Matrix is also heavily policed, which already becomes evident when Neo has brief eye contact with a police officer writing a parking ticket. The camera follows the officer's gaze, which is covered by his shades, vigilantly and grimly eyeing Neo in the same instance as Morpheus calls the Matrix's citizens 'enemies.' This officer represents the oppressive white masculinity that protects the system from any resistance. The officer's shades depersonalize him, reinforcing that the Matrix's oppressive white male controlling apparatus is systematic rather than tied to individual embodiments of hegemonic white masculinity. The Matrix's repressive white male power is especially represented by the Agents, sentient programs with superhuman strength designed to protect the Matrix from potential threats and human resistance. For instance, this demonstration of power is on display during Agent Smith's earlier violent interrogation of Neo about his alleged connections to Morpheus, whom Smith deems a 'terrorist.' According to Rehling, the Agents represent the Matrix's policing apparatus of heterosexual white masculinity, which becomes evident both in their stereotypical Anglo-Saxon names, such as Smith or Jones, in their non-expressive faces, and in their normative suit-and-tie wear (Rehling 127f). Morpheus and Neo, who do not fit into the Matrix's normative structure, are seen as threats to the system and are, therefore, targeted by the Agents.

As Morpheus continues his lesson for Neo, it is revealed how its controlling apparatus utilizes heterosexual desire inscribed in it, exposing the system as a heterosexual matrix. When he mentions that some people are tempted into protecting the Matrix, a white, blond woman in a red dress passes them, distracting Neo. Morpheus asks Neo to look at the woman again, who is now Agent Smith, pointing a gun at a flinching Neo. Morpheus freezes the simulation and reveals that this is part of his lesson about the Matrix's potential dangers.



Figure 2: The woman in red (00:57:10)

As Figure 2 shows, the woman in red passes Neo, who functions as the eyes of the audience at this moment, and smiles at him faintly, virtually reflecting the male gaze. Albeit only seen

briefly, her appearance bears great significance for illustrating the heterosexual dynamics and functions of the Matrix. She represents a highly hegemonic form of femininity, emulating the white, blond bombshell stereotype. Whereas the crowd morphs into a seemingly genderless mob, the woman in red is isolated and marked as highly feminized. Her appearance can be considered a comment on how women have long been objectified and reduced to visual pleasures. She thus embodies one of the few acceptable “versions of selfhood [...] for women within the (heteropatriarchal) matrix” (Geller 16). This is stressed by the woman’s lack of dialogue, the slow-motion effects allowing a prolonged glimpse of her bodily movements and even the sudden high-pitched strings that accompany her walking, briefly alleviating the otherwise grim soundtrack to signal her presence and Neo’s distraction.

The scene demonstrates how the Matrix exploits hegemonic gender performances, particularly white femininity, to sustain its binary structure. Neo’s seeming infatuation with the woman in red underlines how such a matrix requires heterosexual desire of men to markedly hegemonic forms of femininity to continuously distract from the systematic structure of the matrix itself. The force behind the heterosexual matrix, covertly regulating these binary structures of gender and sexuality, is (at least virtually) embodied by the Agents. The woman in red turning into Smith thus illustrates how heterosexual desire conceals the heterosexual matrix’s repressive mechanisms of control, that is, straight white supremacist masculinity. As Butler argues, “the repressive law effectively produces heterosexuality, and acts not merely as a negative or exclusionary code, but as a sanction and, most pertinently, as a law of discourse, distinguishing the speakable from the unspeakable” (83f). The repressive binary of gender and sexuality, therefore, locks men and women in prescribed social categories, while abjecting those who fail to conform to them.

With Butler’s argument in mind, it seems unusual that Neo’s heterosexual desire for the woman in red is still punished by her turning into a gun-wielding Smith. This may be because Neo’s and Morpheus’s presence is already marked as different from the (heterosexual) Matrix’s white hegemony due to their allegiance to the human resistance, which functions as the Matrix’s racialized Other. The scene shows how the heterosexual matrix punishes individuals who may display heterosexual desire but who nevertheless elude its white mold. Therefore, the heterosexual matrix requires clearly defined and interlocking norms of gender hegemony, heteronormativity, and whiteness while abjecting anyone that deviates. However, although Neo is affiliated with the nonwhite human resistance, the initial trilogy firmly constructs him as a white savior figure, the ‘One,’ upon whom humanity’s liberation hinges. The film thus centers on an individual heroic form of whiteness while simultaneously critiquing a system of white

heterosexual hegemony, the Matrix. As I will show in section 4.1, this apparent contradiction ultimately prevents the original trilogy from exploiting its full utopian potential. It is only in *Resurrections* that this is addressed and reworked.

3.2 The Simulation in *Resurrections*

Set roughly sixty years after the events of the original trilogy, *Resurrections* features an updated Matrix into which Neo and Trinity are reinserted after having both died at the end of *Revolutions*. This version has been created and is run by the Analyst, who initially disguises as Neo's psychotherapist inside the new Matrix. In this chapter, I investigate how the new simulation functions as an updated heterosexual matrix. First, I zoom into the creation and driving force of the new Matrix, which the Analyst addresses in a monologue, exposing that the system thrives on negativity and suffering. Then, I analyze two scenes that illustrate how the new Matrix structures daily life and social interactions within a capitalist framework of hetero- and white normativity.

3.2.1 The Absorption of Queer Resistance in the Updated Matrix

Like *Matrix*, *Resurrections* substantially illuminates the structure and history of its central simulation through characters' explanations and expositions. General Niobe (played by Jada Pinkett Smith) of the human resistance, for instance, briefs Neo on everything that has happened in the years since he sacrificially arranged a truce with the machines at the end of the original trilogy. She explains that the truce, which saw that humans could now be freed from the Matrix of their own volition, has not persisted as it created an energy shortage for the machines, causing an unprecedented machine civil war. This has led to another attack on the last human city of Zion, which is why the remaining humans and some of their machinic allies relocated, building the city of Io together. As such, *Resurrections* tells a story of how human liberation causes a crisis of capitalism due to the absence of human energy contributing to its systemic sustenance. The film's critique of the capitalist heterosexual matrix is, therefore, also inscribed into the story more broadly.

Niobe further explains that the Oracle, a human-friendly program of the Matrix designed to study the human mind, prophesied the rise of a new power in the Matrix before disappearing. The new power she refers to is the Analyst, who has repaired Neo and Trinity's dead bodies and reinserted them into an updated Matrix, imposing once again assimilated and unaware identities on them inside of a simulation. One scene is particularly revelatory of how this new Matrix structures Neo's and Trinity's unhappy 'second' lives. After the recently freed Neo and his crew re-enter the Matrix and fight the new Agent Smith and his minions in a long combat sequence, Neo goes to Trinity, who still goes by her imposed name, 'Tiffany,' to free her, too.

She is currently in her atelier welding metal when Neo arrives and eases her into an intimate conversation about the truth of the Matrix. However, their talk is interrupted by the Analyst, who slows down time, using Neo's signature bullet time move against him.



Figure 3: The Analyst uses bullet time against Neo (01:34:50)

As the close-up in Figure 3 shows, Neo looks frustrated as he realizes his powers are being used against him. While his slowed-down punches continuously miss the Analyst, the latter explains that “[y]ou can’t beat time. This rewind is happening faster than you can blink. You gave me the idea. Allow me to sum up our goal in a single word. ‘Bullet time.’ I know. Kind of ironic, using the power that defined you to control you” (01:33:51 – 01:34:44). As I will show in chapter 4, the bullet time effect serves as a means of queer resistance in *Matrix*, offering a passage to queer or ecstatic time that transcends the normative straight time of the Matrix. This scene represents a core feature of the updated Matrix in *Resurrections*, that is, the appropriation of queer resistance by its hegemonic force. This aspect also arises when considering that Neo’s recollection of his past now only exists as a videogame that he created himself after being reinserted into the new Matrix as ‘Thomas Anderson.’ In an earlier scene, Bugs, who helps free Neo, comments that “[t]hey took your story [...] and turned it into something trivial. That’s what the Matrix does. It weaponizes every idea. Every dream. Everything that’s important to us. Where better to bury truth than inside something as ordinary as a videogame?” (01:01:17). Viewing the *Matrix* films as queer texts elucidates how the updated Matrix in *Resurrections* capitalizes on queerness, turning a queer text into a purchasable commodity and thus limiting its revolutionary potential. This shows how the new (heterosexual) Matrix preys on resistance to it, absorbing any potential queer disruption into its capitalist order. As such, the Analyst (portrayed by white gay actor Neil Patrick Harris) may represent a homonormative or, more generally, ‘queernormative’ force. His Matrix capitalizes on resistance, thereby normalizing

and thus neutralizing queer resistance, which integrates queerness “into political salience as a perceived mainstream” (Duggan 179).

The queerness that is rendered mainstream within the updated (heterosexual) Matrix is defined by negativity and anti-relationality, as the Analyst himself explains. He proceeds to reveal to Neo how he designed the new Matrix and how its new mechanism exploits humans to maximize their energy output. The following quote exposes the predatory capitalist nature of the new Matrix and how it thrives on queer suffering:

ANALYST. Resurrecting you both was crazy expensive. [...] We worked for years, trying to activate your source code. I was about to give up, when I realized, it was never just you. Alone, neither of you is of any particular value. Like acids and bases, you’re dangerous when mixed together. [...] However, as long as I managed to keep you close, but not too close, I discovered something incredible. Now, my predecessor loved precision. His Matrix was all fussy facts and equations. He hated the human mind. So he never bothered to realize that you don’t give a shit about facts. It’s all about fiction. [...] And you people believe the craziest shit. Why? What validates and makes your fictions real? Feelings. [...] Here’s the thing about feelings. They’re so much easier to control than facts. Turns out, in my Matrix, the worse we treat you, the more we manipulate you, the more energy you produce. It’s nuts. I’ve been setting productivity records every year since I took over. And, the best part, zero resistance. People stay in their pods, happier than pigs in shit. The key to it all? You. And her. Quietly yearning for what you don’t have, while dreading losing what you do. For 99.9% of your race, that is the definition of reality. Desire and fear, baby. Just give the people what they want, right? (01:35:38 – 01:38:48)

By concentrating on fiction and feelings rather than on facts in controlling humanity, the Analyst exposes how the updated capitalist Matrix exploits the human mind, including its ability to think creatively and ‘queerly.’ In this regard, the updated Matrix differs from the original one designed by the Architect, who ‘merely’ fought against queer resistance instead of appropriating it.

The Matrix’s absorptive qualities are on display, for instance, when the Analyst disguises as Neo’s psychotherapist, helping Neo see his ‘dissociative episodes’ as resulting from being so immersed in the videogame he created that he mistakes it for reality. However, the flashes that Neo experiences are not videogame footage, but memories from his past life, shown through archival footage from the initial trilogy, which are suppressed through the Analyst’s integration of them into a narrative of Neo’s seeming psychoticism. The trilogy, therefore, represents a Blochian no-longer-conscious in *Resurrections*, as it contains the story of how a previous queer resistance has already succeeded at defying the heterosexual matrix, which offered a queer utopian glimpse.

Not only does the Analyst limit Neo’s access to these memories of past queerness, but he constrains the thriving of new queer resistance by exploiting human suffering. He extracts

energy from the desire for relational belonging, thus thwarting a mode of relating that potentially queers the Matrix's imperative of alienated individuality. Terra Gasque pointedly summarizes how the Analyst alienates humans in the updated Matrix. She contends that "while everyone shares the same troubles and miseries, they are distanced from each other just enough to nullify organizing into a meaningful rebellion" (Gasque 60). Neo's and Trinity's subconscious wish for closeness is particularly exploited, given that they share the code anomaly previously only thought to be possessed by Neo, which would significantly threaten the Matrix if they combined their powers. The Analyst admits that 'the worse we treat you, the more we manipulate you, the more energy you produce,' demonstrating how human misery is used for the profit of the ruling capitalists, the remaining 0.1% of humanity. The scene also exemplifies the Analyst's control over the negativity he imposes, as one of his 'handlers' shoots at Trinity in bullet time, prompting Neo to chase the bullet in vain while the Analyst keeps talking. It is only in the last moment before the bullet reaches Trinity that the Analyst grabs it mid-air, reinforcing his control over both the Matrix's manipulable temporality and the human wish for closeness.

Keeping Neo and Trinity perpetually close but apart indicates how the heterosexual matrix allows glimpses of queer relationality, though always preventing it from becoming too oppositional to the hegemonic system. Therefore, queerness and queer feelings are kept in a constant state of anti-relationality, negativity, despair, and unfulfilled desire. His remark that 'desire and fear' define the lives of '99.9% of your race' underlines the continued racial conflict in the films, reflecting the human 'race's' enslavement by the machine 'race,' whose patronizing dominance is represented by the Analyst in *Resurrections*. Indeed, I argue that while the new (heterosexual) Matrix is distinguished by its absorptive quality that transforms queer resistance and negativity into energy, it simultaneously inherits certain heteronormative and racially normative structures from the first Matrix. The following subchapter illustrates these structures in two scenes.

3.2.2 Sexism and Heteronormativity in the Updated Matrix

Similar to *Matrix*, viewers experience life in the Matrix in *Resurrections* largely through the eyes of the protagonist, Neo. However, since Trinity is also plugged into the Matrix this time, the film offers an additional perspective on how the Matrix shapes human life. An early scene that reintroduces Neo and Trinity to each other as 'Thomas Anderson' and 'Tiffany' particularly reveals how the heterosexual matrix imposes heteronormativity onto humans to fit into its binary and exploitative structure.

This scene (00:14:57-00:17:28) shows Neo, as ‘Tom,’ and his coworker Jude having coffee when Trinity, as ‘Tiffany,’ and her family enter, after which Jude initiates a conversation with them to introduce Neo to her. In the beginning, Jude gushes over the original trilogy of ‘Matrix’ games that were developed by Neo, claiming that they took over his life at one point.



Figure 4: Neo and Jude have coffee (00:15:20)

As Jude praises the supposed philosophical genius of the games, Neo remains largely silent and shows ennui, as seen in Figure 4. The café itself, aptly named ‘Simulatte,’ displays the cold, polished aesthetics often associated with modern ‘hip’ locales. This can be seen, for instance, in the dim lighting, the neon letters hanging on the wall, a wall made of brick, a few plants on the side, and generic pictures in the background. Whereas Neo’s silence and deflected gaze underline his alienation from mainstream places like this, Jude smiles throughout their talk, appearing to be overly enthusiastic and fully in tune with the café’s consumerist reality and the Matrix at large.

Not only is the character of Jude a controlling mechanism designed to supervise Neo, as Bugs later exposes him as one of the Analyst’s handler programs, but he also illustrates the normative gender politics of the updated Matrix. As Albrecht and Porter argue, Jude “embodies an overtly misogynist geek masculinity emblematic of online masculine gaming cultures in the 21st Century” (6). This becomes immediately apparent when he spots Tiffany entering the café with her children, describing her as a “total effing MILF” (00:15:44). This suggests that the new Matrix is, indeed, still the heterosexual matrix in which femaleness is rendered stable and intelligible through sexual objectification. The remark also attests to the new Matrix’s proliferation of what can be considered intelligible masculinities within the heterosexual matrix. Although geek masculinity used to be “a highly subordinated form of subjective masculinity” (Albrecht & Porter 3), *Resurrections* illustrates how the new heterosexual matrix extends hegemonic power to various masculinities while keeping femininities largely under

control and exploitable, thus reinforcing a strict gender binary. In this scene, 'Tiffany' performs the role of a soft and caring mother, a hegemonic form of femininity that the Analyst has imposed on Trinity. Jude's remark sexualizes 'Tiffany's motherhood for his pleasure and reduces her femininity to her reproductive activity, showing how even hegemonic forms of femininity are in a state of circumstantial negativity, in this case, sexism, in the heterosexual matrix. The updated Matrix is designed to fortify masculine hegemony over femininities, which the Analyst practically admits by claiming that "[w]omen used to be so easy to control" (01:57:13).

After Tom looks sternly at Jude to signify that his remark is utterly disrespectful, Jude immediately apologizes by saying "I'm a geek. I was raised by machines" (00:15:50). Not only does the comment emphasize his geek masculinity, but it also presents the machines, which have literally created Jude, as the undisputable justification for his unwarranted behavior, exposing how the sexual objectification of women is ingrained in the machinic (heterosexual) Matrix.

However, Jude's overstepping continues, as he promptly approaches Trinity to introduce Neo to her, much to the latter's discomfort. By contrast, Trinity takes Jude's approach lightly and retains a friendly demeanor throughout their conversation. When Neo and Trinity shake hands, wondering if they have met before, they momentarily appear to block out the rest of the characters present, as underscored by a few soft piano notes accompanying the close-up shot of their hands touching. This slows down the scene for a moment, thus stepping out of the hectic straight time of the Matrix, nearly reminding them of their past alliance and love. However, they promptly experience their imposed misery of being close yet always apart, as their moment is interrupted by Trinity's sons requiring her attention again, with her older son even confronting Neo by asking him, "[y]ou try'na ball my mom or what?" (00:17:01), which Jude finds funny. This reinforces the sexualization of 'Tiffany's status as a mother, while also reflecting the expectation that geeks are sexual predators inside the heterosexual matrix. Shortly after, Trinity's husband Chad enters, introducing himself and telling Trinity that they are late for an appointment. Trinity apologizes, and they promptly leave. Chad is later revealed to be one of the Analyst's programs to control Trinity, thus reminding Trinity to reassume her ascribed position inside the heterosexual matrix, locking her in her fake life as a wife and mother. Her apology serves as an apology for failing to adhere to straight time, for experiencing a brief glimpse of her past life where she was an integral part of queer resistance to the heterosexual matrix.

3.2.3 The New Capitalist and Colorblind Matrix

While the previously studied scene highlights the binary gender politics and heteronormativity of the updated heterosexual matrix, it is a different scene that exposes the simulation's inbuilt colorblind normativity. Said scene (00:23:28-00:26:40) features Neo's company 'Deus Machina' developing the new videogame 'Matrix IV,' a sequel to Neo's original game trilogy. It depicts a fast-paced montage of the developing team exchanging ideas about the new game while commenting on what made the original games unique and revolutionary. The montage also focuses on Neo occasionally, showing how his mental stability gradually deteriorates in the working process. This scene provides self-referential commentary on the hegemonic and profit-oriented film industry in Hollywood, explicitly addressing the *Matrix* franchise and the apparent inevitability of Warner Bros. making a fourth entry, *Resurrections*, despite the Wachowski sisters' longstanding denial of a filmic continuation (Schedeen, "The Matrix 4 Rumors"). These moments that break the fourth wall point to 'real' hegemonic systems such as Hollywood, which grounds the film's depiction of life in the racially normative heterosexual matrix in material reality.

Throughout the scene, Neo's coworkers discuss the new game while he remains silent. They share their opinions on what made the original *Matrix* game trilogy, which refers to the actual film trilogy, different. For instance, two male coworkers, one white American and one of Indian descent, state that "it effed with your head" (00:23:46) and that "people want us up in their grey space, switching their synaptic WTF-light on" (00:23:50), thus highlighting the *Matrix* franchise as a philosophical spectacle that drew in audiences due to its alleged intellectual qualities. These remarks are repeated throughout the montage, amplifying the voices that intend to capitalize on the franchise's original intellectual appeal. Jude later reminds everyone of what he considers to be people's main association with the games: the bullet time effect. He says that "we need a new bullet time" (00:26:06) and that "we need to revolutionize gaming again" (00:26:12), both of which echo through Neo's head, suggesting that he feels haunted by his own creation. A white Scottish coworker dislikes the first *Matrix* precisely because of its intellectual qualities, saying that he has "zero tolerance for anything that requires a syllabus and a highlighter. I like my games big, loud, and dumb" (00:24:28). After Jude says that the game needs more guns, the man agrees by saying "*Matrix* means mayhem" (00:24:37) while firing a toy gun in their office. A Black British female coworker then counters that "mindless action is not on brand" (00:24:43). The two men who previously addressed the intellectual qualities of the franchise take this insight to a sexual level by adding that "she's right, *Matrix* is mind-porn, philosophy in shiny tight PVC" and that "ideas are the new 'sexy'" (00:24:46). This connects

the franchise's philosophical features to superficial elements such as the signature fetish leatherwear of the resistance. Therefore, this scene shows how the updated Matrix capitalizes on the *Matrix* franchise itself, on its own past, commodifying its 'mind-bending' action scenes, its philosophical ideas, and its sexual components to offer intellectual and visual pleasures simultaneously. As I identify elements such as bullet time, the fetish clothing, and the idea of unplugging from the Matrix as integral parts of the queer resistance to the heterosexual matrix, the scene also foregrounds the absorptive quality of the updated Matrix, absorbing any trace of queer resistance into its structure. The Analyst's method behind this is practically spelled out in another moment of the montage in which Neo is sitting on the toilet. On the wall of the bathroom stall, he reads that "it is so much simpler to bury reality than it is to dispose of dreams" (00:24:58), alluding to how the truth of his queer past life has been turned into a series of commodities.

Strikingly, it is mostly the company's men who talk and propose ideas about the new *Matrix* game in this montage. They focus on the spectacles of the action sequences and the alleged 'sexiness' of its intellectual components. The contributions by the women in the scene often appear secondary, as is the case when the Black female coworker warns that "this cannot be another reboot, retread, regurgitated..." (00:25:27), which the Scottish man interrupts, asking "why not? Reboots sell" (00:25:31). I argue that this scene's dominance of male voices exposes this company space as one in which white geek masculinity becomes hegemonic. Their opinions reflect stereotypically male geek desires, such as action-loaded narratives and 'mind-blowing' cinematic spectacles, while seemingly overruling the contributions of their female peers.



Figure 5: Everyone is plugged in (00:24:01)

Not only does this scene suggest that Neo has been reinserted into a new heterosexual matrix in which the hierarchical gender order still dominates social life, but it also conveys a sense of colorblindness that ultimately renders whiteness an unmarked norm, thus resembling the racial

structure of the first Matrix. Given that the Matrix in *Resurrections* shows not only whites but also people of color inhabiting mainstream spaces such as Neo's company or the café, claiming that whiteness continues to be the norm, like in *Matrix*, may initially appear strange. Figure 5, for instance, shows Neo standing in his crowded company elevator, surrounded by a racially diverse group of people. Though nonwhite people also appear inside the Matrix of the first film, they are largely confined to marginal spaces such as the Oracle's apartment, as will be shown later. By contrast, the Matrix in *Resurrections* elevates racialized people to upper-middle-class status, granting them the capitalist pleasures of technological immersion and diversion, as seen in the still above. The devices' white interfaces cast everyone in a bright light, which is reminiscent of how the previous films treat "whiteness as a racial formation with its own visual culture and machine aesthetics" (Nakamura 126). This constructs the technological company, cyberspace, and thus the Matrix at large, as a space of white normativity. As such, the people of color who are digitally connected are stripped of their previous abject position and incorporated into the Matrix's capitalist logic, which requires everyone to be plugged in.

The montage of Neo's coworkers exchanging ideas features quick cuts, vocal overlaps, and the voices of a diverse group of employees. It includes an Indian man, a Black British woman, and a Black American man, while most are white Europeans and Americans. On the one hand, this already manifests the prevalence of Western-centric whiteness on the level of physicality, evoking the impression that the nonwhite employees may have been hired as mere tokens of diversity. The fact that most of their contributions, as well as those of all women, are overruled by their white male counterparts underlines both the racism and the sexism extant in this corporate capitalist space designed to control Neo. On the other hand, the splicing together of these diverse voices creates a blurring effect that suggests that the new Matrix is racially inclusive and welcomes multiculturalism. In fact, I argue that the scene reflects discourses of an alleged post-racial American society in which 'race' and racism are no longer issues, an idea which, as Sherrow Pinder explains, has gained momentum after Barack Obama was elected the first Black American president (63). The montage indicates a sense of colorblind relationality that unites a diverse range of voices discussing a new product. Some of their remarks about the meaning of the original *Matrix*, such as 'trans-politics,' 'crypto-fascism,' or 'capitalist exploitation' (00:25:10), reflect the real-life spectrum of interpretations of the *Matrix* franchise. Interestingly, these contain a counterhegemonic potentiality and are uttered by a Black American man, a white British woman, and a white German woman, respectively. Within the context of the white heterosexual matrix, their combined voices could constitute a queer relational resistance. However, their revolutionary potentiality is limited because their intent is

solely on capitalizing on these ideas, which are ultimately overruled by the action-focused voices of their white male counterparts. Therefore, this relationality differs from the relationality of the queer resistance because, as I have shown, it does not escape the hierarchical gender and ‘race’ binaries of the capitalist heterosexual matrix. Instead, it only groups together diverse people under the white masculine corporate structures already present in the first film, reflecting how the new Matrix’s “colorblindness and post-raciality maintain the presumptive hegemony of whiteness” (Pinder 2).

The scene also follows Neo, who inhabits a rather isolated position in this scene. As seen in Figure 5, he is the only one not looking at a screen in the elevator, instead observing the others. The montage starts with Neo waking up and starting his daily routine, which includes running on the treadmill in a gym, showering, and having coffee in his office before work. He repeats these activities regularly, as well as taking blue pills prescribed by his therapist (the Analyst) to keep him mentally stable. It is the same type of blue pill Morpheus presents to Neo in *Matrix*, the taking of which would keep him oblivious to the simulation. Together with his daily routine, the pills impose a normative and repetitive capitalist life on Neo. The scene then depicts how he gradually takes fewer pills, seemingly becoming more unstable and alienated from his surroundings. This is evident, for instance, when he dines alone and pretends to have company, when he frantically performs martial arts at home before breaking a table, when he touches a mirror and laughs at his reflection, and when he sits in a bathtub with a rubber duck on his head. As such, Neo fails to be a ‘normal,’ assimilated citizen of the Matrix. Instead, he is drained by his hectic work life. The scene is accompanied by the song ‘White Rabbit’ by Jefferson Airplane, referring to Lewis Carroll’s book *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, a copy of which even appears in this scene. The book is also referenced in *Matrix*, in which Neo follows a woman with a tattoo of a white rabbit, ultimately leading him to Morpheus. The use of the song, therefore, reflects the descent of Neo into a state of dissociation and, perhaps, disidentification with his imposed life, which parallels his path to unplugging from the Matrix in the first film. The montage ends with him regularly going to a café also frequented by Trinity, yet they never see each other. As mentioned, it is the Analyst who keeps them close yet apart, who imposes negativity on their lives for the sake of exploiting their bodies to energize the Matrix. In the next chapter, I focus on how they work through this negativity together to resist the heterosexual matrix and how they work towards queer utopia, both in *Matrix* and *Resurrections*.

4 Visions of a Queer Future: Utopianism in *Matrix* and *Resurrections*

“I’m interested in one thing, Neo, the future. And believe me, I know, the only way to get there is together.” (The Oracle, *The Matrix Reloaded*, 00:46:30)

Having identified the oppressive capitalist, hetero- and racially normative structures in the different iterations of the (heterosexual) *Matrix* and how they shape human subjectivity, specifically that of Trinity and Neo, I now shift my analytical focus to the question of how these normative systems are resisted and queered in the films. My goal is to illustrate how the human resistance’s actions against the *Matrix* not only critique the binary nature of the heterosexual matrix but also offer a glimpse of a world beyond its imperative of assimilated normality, a glimpse of queer utopianism in Muñoz’s sense.

Like the previous chapter, this chapter is divided into two sections, with the first one zooming in on *Matrix* and the second on *Resurrections*. In either part, I will concentrate on select scenes that saliently foreground the films’ queer utopian suggestions. As will be shown, *Matrix* regularly evokes dominant Hollywood tropes of heroism, which often overshadow the film’s potentiality for queer utopian relationality. However, *Resurrections* meaningfully engages with these pitfalls of the past, subsequently recovering the franchise’s queer utopian potential.

4.1 Building a Utopian Basis: Queer Futurity in *Matrix*

Matrix introduces some of the franchise’s key issues, such as free will, reality, control, and human liberation. The ideas thematized throughout the trilogy have often been read as containing a utopian promise for humanity, offering a story of human life beyond oppressive control. However, many scholars have concluded that “the trilogy of films ultimately reinforces ideology typically associated with Hollywood cinema” (Albrecht & Porter 1), which idealizes individual hero figures, usually white and male, who save their community. As this applies to Neo, *Matrix* aligns itself with this hegemonic system of meaning-making and thus restrains its queer resistant potential. Nevertheless, I argue that *Matrix* still contains queer utopian aspirations, which, though they might not fully succeed in the original trilogy, lay the foundation for the concrete utopianism in the sequel, *Resurrections*. In this chapter, I, therefore, investigate three scenes from *Matrix* that exemplify queer utopianness. On the one hand, I will show how these scenes depict spatial and physical queer resistance to the heterosexual matrix. On the other hand, I will also indicate where they might weaken the film’s utopian promise, which is often linked to the construction of Neo as a white heroic savior.

4.1.1 (Non-)White Resistance to Straight Time: The Dojo Scene

The first scene that will be examined for its queer utopian characteristics is one in which Morpheus guides Neo through a martial arts training simulation (00:49:10-00:53:34). Morpheus uses the training to teach Neo about the rules of the Matrix and how to exploit them. After initially failing to keep up with Morpheus, Neo then learns to use his mind to augment the powers of his digital self. I argue that while the scene exemplifies aspects of the human resistance's queer utopian repertoire in terms of physical actions that defy the Matrix's straight time and whiteness, it also follows a politics of multiculturalism that perpetuates racial stereotypes on various levels. As such, the scene's Asian influences are reduced to clichéd background props due to the narrative foregrounding of Neo's becoming a white Western hero. After running through multiple combat training programs, Neo is challenged by Morpheus to demonstrate his newly programmed kung-fu skills in a simulated sparring dojo. Morpheus explains that this construct follows the same physical rules as the Matrix, and that "some of them can be bent others can be broken" (00:49:26). After several failed attempts at besting Morpheus, Neo finally learns to exploit the artificiality of the simulation's rules, eventually overpowering his mentor.



Figure 6: Morpheus and Neo train in the dojo construct (00:49:41)

These bendable rules can be seen as the rules of straight time that characterize the (heterosexual) Matrix. Indeed, it is in the dojo scene that Neo first displays his signature gravity- and time-defying gestures that allow him to step out of the normative temporality of the Matrix, to critique the simulation's present-focused time flow.

In the scene, he is still honing his skills to fight against the Matrix later. The dojo thus becomes a training stage for Neo in which he practices the embodiment of performativity that grants him the ability to queer the Matrix's flow of straight time by, instead, entering bullet time. As seen in Figure 6, the performative aspect of Neo's training is also corroborated by the sunlight

illuminating him from outside the dojo, resembling actual stage lights that signal the start of Neo's 'performance.' Given that the dojo is a simulated cyber-construct existing beyond both the film's main locations, that is, the Matrix and the 'real' world, it creates a sense of 'no-place-ness' and utopianness. Offering an East-Asian time-space for practicing utopian performativity, it exists beyond the logic of reproductive capitalism associated with the white heterosexual matrix and straight time. It, therefore, becomes an "actual utopian rehearsal room, where we work on a self that does not conform to the mandates of cultural logics such as late capitalism, heteronormativity, and, in some cases, white supremacy" (Muñoz 111). That this scene is not a case in which white supremacy is necessarily resisted will be shown below.

The scene's utopian quality also becomes evident in Morpheus and Neo's fight in which they continuously shatter the 'naturalness' of straight time and space. They defy gravity by jumping extremely high, running up walls, and moving their limbs extremely fast, as indicated by a swooshing sound accompanying every gesture. These moves represent a not-yet-here within the Matrix, a performative queering of its normative rules. Neo initially fails to hit back, prompting Morpheus to tell him, "you're faster than this. Don't think you are, know you are" (00:52:43). Morpheus thus instills a sense of educated hope in Neo, a sense of future-oriented knowing that he can resist straight time. It is a hope he needs to perfect his queer utopian performativity, finally allowing him to enter bullet time and deal blows at an ecstatic rate, effectively threatening Morpheus in their fight.

Despite the scene's promising utopian outlook, a closer look reveals that the potentiality for queer utopia envisioned here does not progressively engage with issues of 'race,' instead adhering to a model of colorblind multiculturalism that ultimately leaves white normativity unquestioned. As Anne Cranny-Francis observes, the scene uses elements of martial arts films, including Neo's mastery of his superhuman abilities by heeding his mentor's words to achieve moral superiority (109). This intertextual reference is emblematic of the franchise's mix of multicultural and global references, which draw heavily on Eastern influences. This reflects the ambiguity in how the franchise handles the issue of 'race.' Richard King and David Leonard point out that though the films are purportedly not about 'race' but instead representative of a modern colorblind view of 'race,' racial language is often used, such as when Morpheus tells Neo that the latter was born a slave. Moreover, though the films depict a host of nonwhite characters, such as in the multiracial society of Zion, these are often reduced to background scenery stripped of historical racial identity (35ff).

This 'background' quality is also found in the dojo, which registers as Other to the white Matrix. The scene expresses this through a range of elements that convey Asian exoticism. For instance,

the long shot in Figure 6 is accompanied by a stereotypical gong sound to signal the start of the fight. Though Morpheus and Neo practice kung-fu, their outfits are usually used for judo or karate, indicating how the film's Western context conflates different aspects of Asian heritage. Initially, their sparring is underscored by dramatic drum music reminiscent of martial arts films before switching to an industrial breakbeat just as Neo gains momentum. This reflects the mix of Western and Eastern traditions, which in turn evokes the colorblind multicultural future that the films propagate. Ultimately, however, the scene's colorblind mixing of Asianness into a white, Western context not only locks it in martial arts stereotypes but also reduces it to an unobtrusive background prop.

What enables this racial difference to remain largely unmarked not only here but throughout the trilogy is the narrative focus on the development of Neo as the 'One,' the savior of humanity. When he matches Morpheus's pace in the fight, the music changes from kung-fu drum music to Western industrial breakbeat, signaling how Neo defies and adapts to the initial foreignness of their battle. He thus gradually grows into the cyberpunk hero that humanity depends on, inscribing him into the longstanding Hollywood trope of the individualistic and usually white male savior figure (Albrecht & Porter 3). Seeing Neo as a white savior is not unproblematic, given Keanu Reeves's multiracial heritage with a Hawaiian-Chinese father and a white British mother. As Leilani Nishime argues, Reeves's multiraciality "provides a visual metaphor for the hybrid future" (88) propagated by the films. Despite the dojo scene's possibility for highlighting Reeves's Asianness, this metaphor remains secondary as the scene foregrounds Neo as a white male Hollywood hero figure, for whom kung-fu represents a nonwhite addition to his repertoire of white savior qualities. Though Neo's nonwhite utopian performative repertoire, including various Asian combat styles and bullet time, is necessary to battle the Matrix's normative whiteness and heteronormativity, Neo himself "is significantly 'whitened' by his narrative function of messiah" (Rehling 126). Neo's construction as the 'One' thus assigns his nonwhite utopian repertoire a place in the colorblind background in favor of highlighting his role as a white savior, mirroring how the films' multicultural approach often reduces nonwhiteness to stereotypes. Reeves's background then appears secondary, reflecting how he "is usually racially unmarked in both his film roles and in the public mind, an absence that reads as white" (Nishime 24).

Neo's individualistic white heroism, therefore, restricts the potential for queer utopia and the film's queer of color critique for various reasons. On the one hand, it overshadows how the films' multicultural influences, in fact, lock notions of 'race' in stereotypes while the white hero identity of the protagonist is reinforced. On the other hand, it suggests that a better future is

achieved by one destined person, which contradicts concrete utopia as a collective, relational effort. *Matrix* does contain spaces and gestures of queer utopian relationality, as will be discussed in the next analysis. Nevertheless, they, too, are haunted by the overarching myth of Neo as the ‘One,’ thus preventing the potential queer of color critique in *Matrix* from achieving greater potency.

4.1.2 A Hint of Utopian Relationality: The Oracle’s Apartment

Identifying the Matrix as a (cyber)space that resembles a white heterosexual matrix, one may conclude that its normative structure is ubiquitous and impenetrable. The following scene analysis will show that this is not necessarily the case by concentrating on a space within the Matrix that acts as a queer utopian microcosm existing in the shadow of the mainstream white capitalist Matrix. The scene (01:09:16-01:12:31) depicts Morpheus taking Neo to the Oracle’s apartment in the Matrix. I argue that while the apartment offers a space of a not-yet-here queer utopian relationality, it is plagued by certain racialized and gendered stereotypes as well as the repeated focus on Neo as the potential ‘One.’



Figure 7: Entering the Oracle’s Apartment Building (01:09:16)

The scene begins with a medium shot of an older Black man sitting in the foyer of the Oracle’s apartment complex. As Figure 7 shows, the man is seemingly holding a blind person’s cane, foreshadowing that they are entering a space in which conventional ‘straight’ eyesight is not useful for seeing the truth of the Matrix’s coded artificiality, as hinted at Neo later by one of the children in the Oracle’s apartment.



Figure 8: Neo Gazes at the Old Man (01:09:23)

The camera slowly pans to the left to reveal Neo and Morpheus entering the rundown building, as seen in Figure 8. Morpheus nods to the old man, who nods in return, suggesting their alliance, while Neo briefly gazes at the man. The old blind man surrounded by bags that suggest homelessness, the rundown foyer with graffiti on the wall, and Neo's fixated gaze at the sitting man signify a spatiality that the conventional capitalist eye of the average Matrix citizen is not accustomed to. This space strongly contrasts with the rest of the slick, clean, capitalist whiteness of the rest of the Matrix, instead depicting a nonwhite space of urban decay and abandonment. Neo's gaze figures as a white gaze, revealing his unfamiliarity with such non-normative spaces and bodies inside the Matrix.

As Morpheus leads Neo to the Oracle's apartment, a middle-aged Black woman opens the door and welcomes them inside, telling Neo that he is "right on time" (01:10:41). This contrasts with an earlier scene in which he, as 'Thomas Anderson,' is reprimanded for being late to work, for not sticking to the Matrix's mandate of capitalist straight time. Upon entering, the woman tells Morpheus to "make yourself at home" (01:10:51) while Neo should follow her and wait for the Oracle. She escorts him to the living room, which is occupied by several children and another woman holding a baby, as Figure 9 shows. The children do various mind-engaging activities, such as chess or writing on the computer. One child reads a Japanese book, while two others make toys levitate with what appears to be psychic abilities. The first woman introduces them as the "other potentials" (01:11:00), implying that there are multiple candidates who could be the 'One.'



Figure 9: The 'Potentials' in the Oracle's Apartment (01:10:59)

There are several reasons why the Oracle's apartment can be considered a queer utopian space. Visually, it appears as an ordinary urban apartment imbued with the same green filter as the rest of the Matrix. At the same time, the apartment evokes a sense of no-(longer)-conscious queerness, as it is presented as a clandestine place of the subaltern, existing perhaps unbeknownst to the hegemonic machinic forces of the Matrix. The apartment's covertness is reinforced by the scene's lighting, which displays almost as many dark spots as well-lit ones. These shadowy places, such as the apartment or the rundown hotel where Neo first meets Morpheus, represent queer spaces that often only exist in the heterosexual matrix's realm of abjection. However, hiding and safely growing there is necessary for these children, as their potential 'One'-ness could threaten the integrity of the Matrix. In other words, the place harbors levels of queer utopian potentiality, which is cleverly concealed from the oppressive executive forces of the (heterosexual) Matrix, the white male Agents.

That the apartment is a queer safe space is also expressed through the depiction of a not-yet-here queer relationality. Many characters in the scene, including most children and the women, are not white, thus representing a previously unseen Otherness to the white hegemonic Matrix. The exchanges are quiet, and the atmosphere is filled with tender care for these extraordinary children, contrasting the loud, action-filled scenes in the Matrix's hegemonic urban spaces. Though the parent-child dynamic persists, the scene offers a largely resistant image to traditional white heteronormative structures of the home. It shows two women of color taking care of a group of children that are non-normative not only because of their supposed 'queer' superhuman gifts but because they deviate from the Matrix's mandate of whiteness. The depiction of this queer relationality also transcends the linearity of straight time due to the temporal duality of the Matrix. The simulation registers as both present, for those who inhabit it, and past, since it simulates life in 1999 which the human resistance accesses from the distant

future. Therefore, the relationality in the apartment exists in the past but differs from the present-oriented capitalist and anti-relational white heterosexual matrix. It reflects the caring togetherness associated with the humans in Zion seen in the sequels. Since Zion represents the future of humanity in *Matrix*, this scene indicates a utopian, not-yet-here mode of belonging, a queering of the Matrix's temporality that enacts how "[s]traight time's 'presentness' needs to be phenomenologically questioned" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 25).

Despite the queer utopian outlook, this scene is haunted by the film's vision of colorblind multiculturalism that ultimately reinforces Neo's white heroic individualism. None of the children and women present in this scene have a name, and even the Oracle's name merely reflects her function. Only one of the children, a bald white boy, receives greater focus as he bends a spoon with his mind. As Figure 10 shows, his light-colored garment is reminiscent of the attire of Buddhist monks, evoking the film's Asian influences. In fact, the 'potentials' all wear white flowy clothes, suggesting peaceful innocence. As Melba Joyce Boyd observes, the apartment's location "in the middle of the slums constructs an interesting contrast between material oppression and spiritual transcendence" (Boyd 137).



Figure 10: The spoon-bending 'Buddha' child (01:11:32)

Notably, the boy is the only child with dialogue, preaching to Neo the Buddhist belief that "lifting the veil of illusion is how truth is revealed" (Boyd 137):

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. (01:11:42-01:12:06)

The spiritual wisdom in his words instructs Neo to ‘bend’ himself and his mind to defy the normative logic and constraints of reality in the Matrix. Taking on such a ‘bending’ stance involves realizing why the spoon does not exist. It is because the Matrix and the heterosexual matrix are representative constructs of reality without a natural core, without an underlying essentialness. This realization pushes Neo to queer his own perspective of reality to resist and queer the Matrix itself. It suggests the importance of ‘mind-over-matter,’ thus offering a way to see past the negativity of oppression by realizing that the rules of materiality can be bent.

This moment mirrors the earlier dojo scene, as both depict teacher-student relationships in which Neo is taught Eastern Asian lessons that expand his repertoire as a white savior. While Morpheus hones Neo’s physical skills, the Buddhist boy teaches him mental flexibility. Interestingly, despite the Asian teachings, neither teacher is Asian, with Morpheus being African American and the boy white. This reinforces the Matrix’s vision of colorblind futurity in which various cultural heritages are easily accessible and appropriable. This pertains specifically to Neo, whose becoming the white individualistic savior figure is central in this scene. Though any of the ‘potentials’ could be the ‘One,’ they are ultimately overshadowed by the narrative focus on Neo. None of these characters have names, and only the Black female caretaker and the white Buddhist boy receive minimal dialogue, effectively positing this multicultural group of characters as background props that serve to highlight the centrality of Neo.

The focus on him continues in his subsequent talk with the Oracle. Throughout the trilogy, she is revealed to be a fundamental program of the Matrix that is designed to study the human mind and to offer humans a variable of choice. Through her clairvoyant abilities and her siding with the queer human resistance, she personifies anticipatory consciousness and educated hope. She instills this utopian hope in Neo in this scene, subtly guiding him on his path towards fulfilling his role as the ‘One’ to arrange peace with the machines. Despite the Oracle’s significance for human resistance, her depiction in this scene fails to resist certain stereotypical notions of ‘race’ and gender. She refers to the children in the apartment as “my kids” (01:13:15), which links childcare responsibilities to women of color, as the other two caring women in the apartment are also not white. King and Leonard specifically identify the Oracle as a representation of the mammy stereotype due to her appearance as a nurturing, cookie-baking older Black woman who looks after both white and nonwhite children, even after Neo (40). The anticipatory consciousness that she embodies is thus tied to longstanding stereotypes of Black femininity, inconspicuously importing a reductive notion of identity into the film’s utopian vision that centers on Neo’s white heroism.

Though the group of people inhabiting the Oracle's apartment hints at a queer relational collective, the scene creates distance between this queer sense of togetherness and the individualistic white hero Neo. As such, the relationality of the other characters is secondary, obscuring the significance of their racialized and gendered roles for the sake of Neo's character development. Individualism and colorblindness thus limit the scene's concrete utopian potentiality.

4.1.3 Queer Performativity Versus Heroic Destiny: The Rescue Mission

Before focusing on *Resurrections*, I turn to a prolonged scene at the climax of *Matrix*. I argue that its stylized action sequences illustrate the franchise's queer utopian drive perhaps more strongly than any other scene from the original trilogy. After Morpheus is taken hostage in the Matrix by Smith, Neo realizes that the Oracle's prediction has come true: He must choose between saving Morpheus and saving himself. Heroically, he decides to re-enter the Matrix to rescue his mentor, fulfilling his destiny as a savior despite not believing that he is the 'One.' Trinity wants to come with him on the mission, but after Neo rejects her, she confronts him:

TRINITY. No? Let me tell you what I believe. I believe Morpheus means more to me than he does to you. I believe if you were really serious about saving him you are going to need my help. And since I am the ranking officer on this ship, if you don't like it, I believe you can go to hell because you aren't going anywhere else. (01:36:59-01:37:17)

Trinity thus establishes her own importance in the mission, refusing Neo's seemingly blind belief that he can save Morpheus himself and instead offering to help him, which turns out to be crucial. Her verbal dominance foreshadows her toughness in the action scene that follows. More significantly, though, her loyalty to Morpheus indicates a queer relationality that arises from their abject positions. Trinity exemplifies what Geller deems the "'tough chick' [...] at odds with the social order" (8), while Morpheus is considered a terrorist threatening the Matrix. They, therefore, experience constitutive negativity as they fail to adapt to the Matrix's normative ways of being, which is why they are relationally and queerly connected in "their historical position as Other to a white, heteropatriarchal order" (Geller 17). While the ensuing action scene occasionally suggests this queer relationality, it is again Neo's actions that are narratively foregrounded, emphasizing his status as the white individualistic hero.

This scene (01:41:03-01:47:05) shows Neo and Trinity infiltrating the building in which Morpheus is apprehended. Before reaching him, they must overcome a host of armed police forces as well as an Agent on the rooftop. Though machinegun fights dominate the scene, I argue that there is an inherent utopian quality both in Neo's and Trinity's fighting styles and in the *mise-en-scène*.

The building that Neo enters is characteristic of the fine-lined corporate spaces shown to constitute most of the city in the Matrix, conveying a sense of capitalist grandeur and white male power. Neo steps through a revolving door in slow motion, with the camera focusing on his leathery boots in a close-up, shown in Figure 11.

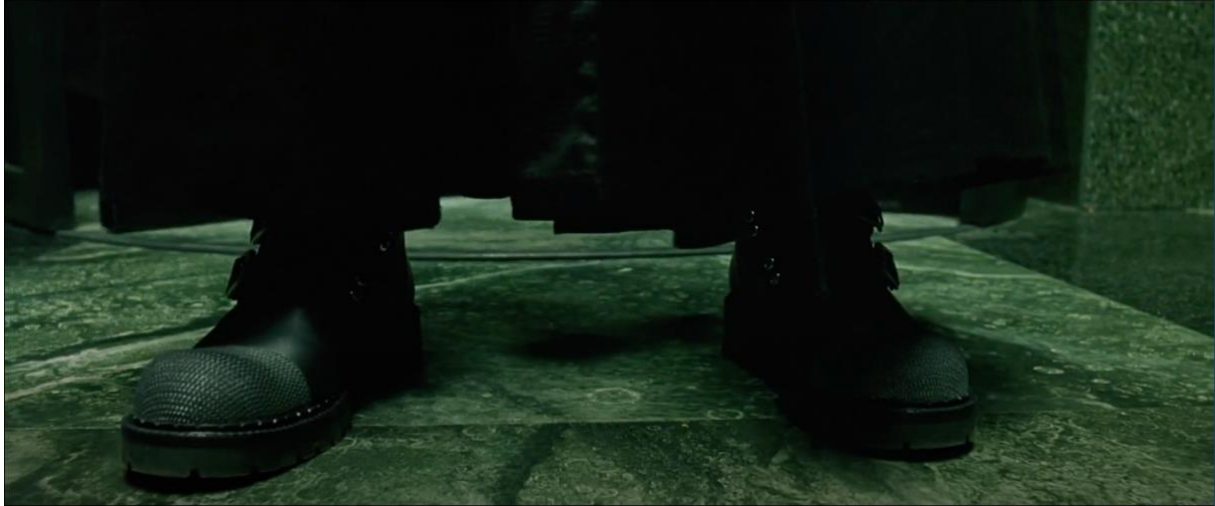


Figure 11: Neo enters the police building (01:41:08)

The dark, thumping music from the previous scene, in which Morpheus is violently interrogated by Smith, carries over into the beginning of this scene, with every thump accompanying one of Neo's steps. The music thus shifts its meaning from signaling the brutality of Smith to introducing a new, more powerful Neo who fully embraces his position within the queer resistance to the Matrix, which is reinforced by the slow-motion of his steps. Neo thus appropriates the menacing music from a place of negativity, synchronizing it to his steps to make himself the menace. Figure 11 also contains a fetish quality, with the leathery boots exemplifying the resistance's generally fetishistic attire that they wear while inside the Matrix. As he stands firmly in his fetish boots, his stance becomes a queer stance, ready to fight the guards of the heterosexual matrix.

He faces a group of white policemen at a security check, as seen in Figure 12. Their outfits are white, contrasting with Neo's black fetish attire. The guards are, therefore, visually aligned with the white heterosexual matrix as they represent the executive force of this simulation that Geller identifies as signifying "the racist, hetero-oppressive state apparatus" (15). They distrustfully gaze at him as he gives up a black bag for a safety check, triggering the security alarm. The white gazes of the guards at his visually 'Other' appearance and his failure to pass the security check reinvoked the image of the terrorist, connecting Neo to Morpheus. From the perspective of the white heterosexual matrix, Neo's actions, and those of the queer resistance in general, appear as acts of terrorism, which fosters a narrative of negativity around the resistance to protect the matrix's hegemony. However, as the film posits Neo as the heroic protagonist

presumed to save humanity, this scene inverts the negative notion of terrorism, thus constituting their fight as a queer struggle.



Figure 12: Neo goes to security check (01:41:09)

Upon being asked to prepare for an inspection, Neo opens his coat to reveal a host of machineguns, pushing the officer away and opening the gunfire on the unsuspecting men. The last surviving officer calls for backup but is shot an instant later by Trinity, who has also entered the building. As a large group of armed officers surrounds them, Neo and Trinity glance at each other for a moment before sprinting off in opposite directions. As Figure 13 illustrates, Trinity and Neo face the camera while their gun-wielding stances are framed in a nearly symmetrical medium-long shot, suggesting a powerful equilibrium between the two. In this moment of anticipation for the ensuing combat, the power of the ‘One’ becomes the power of the ‘Two.’ This creates a sense of utopian relationality in that their struggle against the oppressive Matrix toward a better world becomes collective rather than individual.



Figure 13: Trinity and Neo are prepared to fight (01:42:09)

Figure 13 prominently features both Trinity's and Neo's signature black Matrix attire. I agree with Rainer Emig's observation that they are largely presented as "fetishistically uniform and sexless bodies" (198) due to their nearly identical slicked-back hair, their sunglasses, and their stern faces and stances. As such, this fetish quality reflects their non-normative, counterhegemonic resistance against the Matrix, additionally in terms of style, failing to display legible and acceptable roles of sex and gender within the parameters of the heterosexual matrix. Although the shininess of Trinity's latex outfit is more explicitly reminiscent of fetishism, I agree with Stacy Gillis that Trinity does not conform to classic versions of the oversexualized femme fatale as her clothes are not revealing, yet still stylish and functional (79f). Both of their outfits are non-normative and thus represent a utopian potentiality outside the heterosexual matrix's rules, a sense of queer futurity within the present-oriented Matrix.

Importantly, it is not only in their fashion but also in their physical actions that they queer the Matrix and thus invoke the Blochian not-yet-here. As Trinity and Neo run to either side of the room, the gunfight commences, signaled by the start of another industrial big-beat song that underscores their triumphant resistance against the police force. They meticulously evade the storm of police bullets by hiding behind pillars and performing acrobatic-like moves. For instance, Figure 14 depicts Trinity running up a wall and then somersaulting off of it before attacking an officer with martial arts moves. In addition to their bodily combat skills, Neo and Trinity also illustrate their offensive strengths by shooting their machineguns while elegantly performing acrobatics, such as Neo's shooting in mid-cartwheel in Figure 15.



Figure 14: Trinity runs and jumps off the wall (01:42:28)



Figure 15: Neo cartwheels while shooting (01:43:34)

Almost all the duo's actions are shown in slow motion with 'swoosh' sounds accompanying their movements. The zooming on their flawless bodily movements to a big-beat song produces the effect of a heavily choreographed performance. These movements can be seen as embodiments of queer utopian performativity that allows Neo and Trinity to disidentify with hegemonic straight time, reinforced by the slow-motion effect. This sequence thus serves as an aestheticized critique of the present, of the heterosexual matrix that normatively defines the laws of being and behaving. The aesthetic dimension of this gunfight also becomes evident in a shot that shows how bullets rain from Neo's gun in slow-motion. This queerly inverts the negativity of the armed police force, which represents the exertion of white male power inside the Matrix. These performative temporal and physical distortions contain a utopian surplus quality and an ornamentality that hints at something beyond the ordinary rules of the Matrix, something in the not-yet-here. It expresses how "[t]o denaturalize the way we dwell (move) in the world is to denaturalize the world itself in favor of a utopian performativity" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 151).

As Neo and Trinity continue their fight against the police force on the building's rooftop, the necessity of mutual support in the face of adversity is emphasized even more. After killing a group of officers, the duo is confronted by an Agent whose rapid movements easily avoid Neo's bullets. With no bullets left, Neo calls for Trinity while the Agent starts shooting at him. Promptly, Neo's body bends unimaginably fast as he exits straight time and enters bullet time, as depicted in Figure 16. This is captured in a 360-degree bullet time shot, showing how he dodges every individual projectile. He thus momentarily engages a queer temporality that exceeds even the speed of bullets, i.e. the oppressive negative force of the Matrix.



Figure 16: Neo enters bullet time (01:46:32)

However, he fails to get away unscathed as the last two bullets graze his body. The Agent towers over him, points his gun at Neo, and tells him that he is “only human” (01:46:48). Given that Agents are programs designed by the machines to control humans in the white-coded Matrix, this statement evokes a sense of racism and white supremacy. Before he shoots, Trinity appears and shoots the Agent in the head after telling him to “dodge this” (01:46:51). The Agent is blasted away, which is shown in slow motion in Figure 17.



Figure 17: Trinity shoots an Agent (01:46:53)

This moment allows for a prolonged image of queer resistance against the white heterosexual matrix. Trinity’s powerful, broad stance, her expressionless face, and the merciless pulling of the trigger align with Geller’s interpretation of her role as the ‘tough chick’ who, “in her gender ambiguity, masculinizes a body not socially coded as male” (17). Therefore, she transcends the mandate of traditional and intelligible gender roles within the heterosexual matrix. Simultaneously, Neo fails to fulfill his role as the individualistic Hollywood hero, depending on Trinity to save him. This constitutes another concrete utopian impulse, arguing for a more

relational version of heroism, one that collectively resists the oppressive white patriarchal Matrix embodied by the Agent. With joined powers, Trinity and Neo eventually free Morpheus. However, it is again Neo whose heroic fate is put at the center of the narrative as the action sequence closes. After Trinity kills the Agent, she marvels at Neo's bullet time skills while her being the first human to ever kill an Agent is never mentioned. Later, Trinity flies a helicopter while Neo opens fire on the remaining Agents with a heavy machinegun, creating an opportunity for Morpheus to break his chains. While Trinity flies them to safety, it is Neo who eventually pulls the dangling Trinity up from the crashing helicopter as triumphant heroic music plays. The ship operator Tank whispers in awe that "he is the One" (01:51:30) while Morpheus asks Trinity if she now believes that Neo is the 'One,' overshadowing her integral part in the mission. These moments are indicative of how, according to Iles, the film cements Neo within dominant Western discourses that hail the self-sacrificial individualistic hero, who is usually male and white (Iles, "The Matrix"). Not only does this prioritization of Western white discourses of selfhood reduce the significance of the film's many global and nonwhite influences, but it also privileges individual heroism over collective and relational queer resistance.

Despite the many queer utopian kernels present in *Matrix*, the promise of queer liberation from the white heterosexual matrix is thwarted due to the film's inscription of its protagonist Neo into the longstanding Western tradition of white male savior figures. This ultimately maintains a sense of normative white maleness even within the resistance's fight against the white patriarchal Matrix. I now turn to *Resurrections* to investigate the degree to which the latest entry reworks this.

4.2 Resistance Reloaded: Queer Utopianism in *Resurrections*

In many ways, *Resurrections* mirrors the story of the original film: Neo lives an unhappy and alienating life as the suicidal 'Thomas Anderson' in a simulated reality of which he grows increasingly suspicious. He is eventually freed from the Matrix by a group of resistant humans who teach him the truth of his life. Ultimately, he reenters the Matrix to free someone important to him, Morpheus in *Matrix*, and Trinity in *Resurrections*. Footage from the original film appears throughout *Resurrections* as Neo's déjà-vu-like flashbacks, which he experiences in moments that resemble the original films. For instance, this is explicitly shown when Neo follows Bugs to a room in which he is offered a red pill to unplug from the Matrix again. Upon entering, he walks through a canvas onto which a key scene from *Matrix*, described as part of Neo's videogame, is projected, namely the one in which Morpheus first offers Neo the red pill.

Bugs notes that “we thought elements from your past might help ease you into the present” (00:43:50), showing how *Resurrections* creates intertextual parallels to *Matrix*.

Resurrections, therefore, contains traces of its diegetic past in which I have already identified queer utopian kernels. I argue that the sequel’s engagement with its own history utilizes the queer potentiality of the past to work towards a queer utopia more effectively than in *Matrix*. Although the two plots are structurally similar, the utopian impulses in *Resurrections* considerably diverge from the original film, thus reworking some of the utopian shortcomings of *Matrix* with an approach of educated hope. This includes a more thorough critique of the binary heterosexual matrix with its normative ways of being, and the dismantlement of Neo as the heroic ‘One,’ which is replaced by a greater focus on queer relational and communitarian efforts to effect utopian change. Subsequently, in an analysis of three scenes and sequences, I will demonstrate how *Resurrections* plants a more potent seed for a concrete queer utopia.

4.2.1 A Utopian Bond that Negates Negativity: Neo and Trinity in the Café

The first scene I investigate (00:26:40-00:30:45) features a conversation between Neo and Trinity, in this case, ‘Tom’ and ‘Tiffany,’ in the café where they had previously been introduced. I argue that their seemingly quotidian exchange about their lives in the heterosexual matrix reflects their discontent with their realities and questions normative notions of gender, which creates a relational bond between them in the face of the Matrix’s imposed negativity.

As they sit down, Trinity begins talking about being a mother:

TRINITY. I remember wanting a family, but was that because that’s what women are supposed to want? How do you know if you want something or if your upbringing programmed you to want it?

NEO. Hmm. I pay my analyst a lot of money to answer such questions for me.

TRINITY. Smart. I should get more therapy, but honestly, I’m too goddamn tired. Kids are exhausting, you know?

NEO. No, never had kids.

TRINITY. Oh, right, I knew that. Sorry, I googled you. So, what’s it like being a world-famous game designer? Must be amazing.

NEO. Uh, lot of hours. Sometimes it is amazing. Most times...I don’t know.

TRINITY. But you made ‘The Matrix’. Even I’ve heard of that.

NEO. Yeah, we kept some kids entertained.

TRINITY. So, worth it? (00:26:57-00:27:54)

Trinity, even as ‘Tiffany,’ displays an awareness that her desire to have a family and to be a mother may be linked to societal expectations that idealize docile motherly femininity. Her upbringing figures not only as the Matrix that literally programmed her, but also as the heterosexual matrix that postulates norms of gender intelligibility.



Figure 18: Trinity's appearance to others in the Matrix (00:30:13)

As the film explains, she, like Neo, appears differently to others in the Matrix than to herself. When their conversation ends and ‘Tiffany’ answers her phone, there is a brief shot of her reflection on the glass table (Figure 18), which shows her altered appearance as a blond woman with long hair. This image shows the ‘Tiffany’ that everyone else sees, resembling the blond woman in the red dress from the first film who represented an idealized normative femininity in the heterosexual matrix. Fittingly, the image appears in the moment that Trinity is required to assume her role as the motherly ‘Tiffany’ to look after her injured son. Neo and Trinity are thus kept close yet apart, which the Analyst orchestrates to generate energy for the Matrix.

Trinity’s confession that she could use therapy yet lacks the energy for it due to her children reveals how she experiences circumstantial negativity in her imposed role as a traditional mother and wife. Simultaneously, Neo tells Trinity about the negativity in his own life that binds him to his profession. His exhaustion becomes apparent, for instance, in the strained quality of his voice and in his apparent unwillingness to further explain his draining job. He is, therefore, alienated from his past life as the selfless Neo who embodied white heroic masculinity, instead having to endure the energy-depleting machinery of the capitalist Matrix. In the end, however, they can mildly laugh about their struggles as Trinity commends Neo for making a game that entertains children, temporarily reducing her workload as a mother. By sharing their struggles and laughing together, they create a bond that arises from their experiences of circumstantial negativity.

As their conversation continues, Trinity is interested in Neo's game and addresses her likeness to the woman in the game:

TRINITY. Did you base your main character on yourself?

NEO. There is a lot of me in him. Maybe a little too much.

TRINITY. Can I ask you something else?

NEO. Please.

TRINITY. There's a woman in your game.

NEO. Trinity.

TRINITY. Which is a weird coincidence also, right?

NEO. God, yeah.

TRINITY. I like her, I like Trinity. And I dig her Ducati. Another coincidence, I love motorcycles. My friend Kush and I actually build them.

NEO. Really?

TRINITY. You have your analyst, I have my bikes. So, I was looking at images from your game. At Trinity. Well, I showed Chad a scene and I was like 'So, what do you think?' He didn't get it until I said 'Don't you think she looks like me?' You know what he did? He laughed. And I laughed too, like it was a joke. How could it not be, right? Made me so angry. I hated myself for laughing. I wanted to kick him so hard. Not too hard. Maybe just hard enough to break his jaw off. And right now, you're probably regretting sitting down with me.

NEO. This is the best thing I've done in a long time. (00:28:06-00:30:02)

While she wonders about the apparent coincidence that the woman in Neo's game looks like her, Neo has brief flashes of loving moments from the previous films, which intercut their conversation. Trinity's questions trigger Neo's memories from their queer-resistant past as Neo and Trinity, suggesting how a not-yet-here, a world beyond the heterosexual matrix dawns on them through their past. It is especially Trinity who actively displays a level of anticipatory consciousness of a place beyond her heteronormative shackles, while Neo experiences the flashes from the past passively.

What raises Trinity's suspicion in the first place is Neo's game, which essentially allows her to remember her past life and to find parallels between herself and the Trinity she sees in-game. As such, 'Tiffany' is reminded of Trinity as a 'tough chick' who queers "heteropatriarchal narratives of appropriate womanhood" (Geller 16). For instance, Trinity's affinity for motorcycles, which is traditionally masculine-coded in the heterosexual matrix, continues with

‘Tiffany,’ constituting an ephemeral trace of her queer-resistant past even in her heteronormative present. The reversal of the traditional gender binary is also evident when she compares her bikes to Neo’s analyst. This expresses how both Neo and Trinity cope with their failure to happily conform to the capitalist Matrix and its rigorous gender roles. Both coping mechanisms indicate a queering of traditional roles of masculinity and femininity, thus undermining the Matrix’s binary structure (Albrecht & Porter 9). In Neo’s case, masculine coping is linked with emotionality and psychotherapy. In Trinity’s case, feminine coping is more material, as she channels her unhappiness through working on bikes. They, therefore, share a sense of misplacement in this world, a sense of queer negativity. Though their individual struggles are different, they reflect how “our circumstantial deprivation leads us to a direct confrontation with our constitutive deprivation” (Ruti 132). This fundamental lack also becomes apparent in ‘Tiffany’s visceral urge to break the jaw of her dismissive husband Chad, who laughs at the thought of ‘Tiffany’ being anything more than a perfectly docile and assimilated wife and mother. Her reaction then conveys grief for her past in the queer resistance as the combat-skilled Trinity.

As mentioned, the scene exemplifies how Trinity’s and Neo’s queer relational bond counteracts their imposed negativity. Ironically, this bond is liberating and uplifting, as expressed in Neo’s final comment. Though the film also features their romantic love, I agree with Gasque that this scene, and *Resurrections* at large, is less about their heterosexual desire for each other than about a desire for queer relationality, genuine human connection, care, and acceptance in the face of the oppressive Matrix (59). This scene then contains a utopian potentiality that anticipates not only their unplugging from the Matrix but also their eventual plans to remake its structure together.

4.2.2 Challenging Racial Binaries with Educated Hope: Io’s Biology Laboratory

While *Resurrections* is largely concerned with breaking through the Matrix’s binary structure to facilitate queer utopian possibilities, the film also engages more concretely with such utopian specters present in the ‘real’ world outside the Matrix, especially in the new human civilization Io. In this section, I focus on a scene (01:11:48-01:13:37) in which General Niobe shows the recently freed Neo the biological laboratory of Io. I argue that the presentation of this department suggests that Io is a concrete queer utopia in the making. This is manifested by a queer and relational sense of belonging across racial boundaries, non-capitalist practices that emphasize care and collaboration, and the exercise of a forward-oriented educated hope that considers the shortcomings of the past while maintaining the unfinishedness of futurity.

Therefore, the scene depicts more concretely a way of living beyond and in defiance of the oppressive white heterosexual matrix.

After Neo is freed from the Matrix by Bugs and her crew, they take him back to Io, where he is reunited with General Niobe from the second and third films. After their initial talk, she shows Neo Io's biology department, named the 'garden,' in which various species of plants and wildlife, such as strawberries and butterflies, are brought back from extinction in a process that uses their digital codes from the Matrix. At the beginning of the scene, the camera pans across the lab, showing a range of workers. It is revealed that humans work alongside 'synthients,' referring to machines and programs that sided with humans after the human/machine truce. Upon entering, Niobe acquaints Neo with Freya, the chief botanist who is human, and Quillion, a digital intelligence who acts as lead 'digitologist.' As seen in Figure 19, Freya is an older Black woman (played by Telma Hopkins), while Quillion is a computer program that can create a human-like exomorphic body image (played by white actor Max Mauff).



Figure 19: Freya and Quillion of the Botany Department (01:12:47)

Freya hands Neo one of their grown strawberries and welcomes him "to the garden" (01:12:32). As Neo takes a bite, they briefly explain how they recreate extinct species using Matrix code, which has been difficult, but they are "getting there" (01:12:47). Freya's mentioning of the garden and Neo's biting into the strawberry may be a reference to the biblical garden Eden, commonly presented as a utopian paradise. Here, however, the myth of the paradisiacal garden is presented with a queer twist. On the one hand, Io as a utopia is still in the making, in an open-ended process of becoming, as becomes clear when they admit to the current imperfection of their fruits. Utopia is depicted as a relational effort that arises from the utopian bonds of humans and machines, which is evident in Freya's and Quillion's friendly smiles at each other in Figure 19. Together, they develop unique ways of life and methods of production and sustenance that differ from the capitalist Matrix, such as growing their food with care and passion, as they are

also “quite excited about the blueberries” (01:13:00). On the other hand, the biblical narrative is also queered as Neo figures as Eve in this instance, biting into the ostensibly forbidden fruit. However, instead of symbolizing an act of sin that leads to punishment, this strawberry is cordially shared with the eater as a genuine gesture of benevolence, inviting Neo into this unfinished queer utopian space. This gesture thus contains a utopian impulse that is “extra to the everyday transaction of heteronormative capitalism” (Muñoz, *Cruising* 22).

The newly created bond between humans and machines also has racial implications, as implied in Niobe’s explanation of the difference between the former human civilization Zion and the new Io:

NIOBE. You remember that shit we used to eat? That slop that tasted like rust?

NEO. [nods]

NIOBE. Zion could have never made something like this. [holds up strawberry]

NEO. Why?

NIOBE. Because we needed synthients and D.I. like him. [looks to Quillion]. Zion was stuck in the past, stuck in war, stuck in a Matrix of its own. They believed that it had to be us or them. This city was built by us *and* them. [looks to Quillion] (01:13:01-01:13:31)

Io’s creation was thus facilitated by the breaking of the racial binary that saw a clear antagonism between the oppressed humans and the oppressive machines, which characterizes the race war in the original trilogy. Lisa Nakamura, in fact, argues that this is a war between whiteness and Blackness. The machines, as well as simulated cyberspace and the exclusively white Agents, represent hegemonic and oppressive white masculinity, while Zion, as seen in *Reloaded* and *Revolutions*, is largely populated by African Americans, which ties Blackness to notions of naturality and authenticity (Nakamura 126-9). Aimee Bahng adds that due to Zion’s reproductive imperative, “tropes of black authenticity are further entangled in a fiercely heteronormative idea of community” (Bahng 175). As Niobe aptly puts it, Zion was, therefore, ‘stuck in a Matrix of its own,’ another heterosexual matrix that also contained racial normativity. This critiques the original trilogy’s colorblindness in that it features “a pan-ethnic aesthetic that pretends at a consolidated humanity but ultimately reveals itself to be a superficial bronzing over of racial differences” (Bahng 171).

The scene in the biology lab, therefore, represents a departure from the essentializing tropes of ‘race’ in the first three films. I argue that this is a queer utopian departure as the prosperity of Io also hinges on an active reworking of the past shortcomings of its predecessor Zion. The civilization of Io uses educated hope to engage with their history to avoid becoming another

heterosexual matrix, thereby shedding the old human/machine binary and forming utopian bonds between the two.

Freya and Quillion are an emblem of this union beyond fixed categories of difference. Although Freya is a Black, ‘natural’ human and Quillion a ‘white’ program, these embodiments do not definitively reproduce the mentioned racial split of the initial films. In *Resurrections*, the ‘natural’ humans dwelling in Io are not exclusively Black. Meanwhile, the film introduces a new Morpheus (played by African-American actor Yahya Abdul-Mateen II), who is a synthient program created by Neo and can create an exomorphic body image like Quillion. Though the Matrix itself still represents white male hegemonic power, the humans, as well as the machines siding with them, dispose of binary categories of difference, which haunt the previous films, in favor of creating a queer utopian community in Io.

4.2.3 Queer Resistance and Undoing the Myth of the One: Trinity’s Choice

While the scene discussed above depicts a growing queer utopia in the ‘real’ world outside the Matrix, I now turn to the climax of *Resurrections*, in which the human resistance enters the Matrix to rescue Trinity, leading to a prolonged fight against the Analyst and his army of human bots inside the Matrix (01:49:49-02:12:24). I argue that the protagonists, especially Trinity and Neo, perform a sense of queer utopianness that resists the white heterosexual matrix, which is evident in Trinity’s eventual choice of queer relationality over her fake heteronormative family and in the deconstruction of Neo’s individualistic hero status.

The mission of the resistance is complex: Not only must they salvage Trinity’s real-life body that is still plugged into the Matrix, but they must also receive consent from her Matrix self to unplug her safely. The beginning of the scene intercuts both parts of the mission.



Figure 20: Morpheus, Bugs, Sati, and Kujaku save Trinity's body (01:52:50)

In the ‘real’ world, the exomorphic Morpheus (left), Bugs (middle), and the friendly machine Kujaku assist Sati (right), another exomorphic program who devised the entire mission. As seen in Figure 20, they secure Trinity’s dormant body together, preparing her for the unplugging. The medium-long shot frames all involved parties. Strikingly, Trinity is featured in blue lighting, reflecting her literal connection to the machines as a still unaware ‘blue pill’. Kujaku, an actual machine, is also tinged in blue. The others are shown in red lighting, underlining their affiliation with the ‘red pills,’ i.e., those who know about the nature of the Matrix. Despite their differences in being, whether machine, exomorphic humanoid program, human, blue, or red, it is their resistant mission that unites them here, creating a sense of utopian relationality that queers normative forms of belonging inside the Matrix. Since everyone fulfills a central role in freeing Trinity, the focus is on collective action rather than individual heroism. As they rescue Trinity from the white heterosexual matrix, their plan becomes a relational queer-of-color strategy.

Meanwhile, Neo approaches the Analyst inside the Matrix to convince him to let Trinity decide if she wants to maintain her life in the Matrix or exit it with Neo. His walk to the Analyst is shown in slow motion, along with suspenseful music. As depicted in the long shot in Figure 21, Neo is alone at first. This frame is reminiscent of his status as a tough cyberpunk hero that he embodied in the original trilogy (Albrecht & Porter 3).



Figure 21: Neo Approaches the Analyst (01:50:42)

However, the new Neo does not carry armed weapons, while his appearance is strikingly toned down from his previous Matrix outfit, with only his long black coat remaining. He is, therefore, constructed as a reformed, tamer hero who has shed his tough cyberpunk masculinity to some extent.

To reach the Analyst, he passes through a group of police officers and SWAT units that have appeared and protectively surround the Analyst. As in previous installments, the executive

forces of the Matrix are exclusively white and male, rendering this another display of white male hegemony, at the center of which sits the enthroned Analyst.

Though Neo initially talks to him alone, he is soon joined by other members of the resistance, whose entrance is also marked in slow motion and with the same dramatic score as Neo's. Their appearance displays the signature Matrix aesthetics: They all sport stylish sunglasses, non-normative haircuts, and dark fetishistic garments. Cyberpunk heroism is, therefore, not an individual matter anymore but becomes a collective mode of resistance to the normative white heterosexual matrix. The similar mise-en-scène for both Neo's entrance and that of the other 'saviors' helps undo Neo's status as the 'One', instead contextualizing his role within the broader web of the resistance in which everyone fulfills an important part and ascends to hero status. The moment in which Neo turns around to anticipate the entrance of his companions marks the moment in which his character ultimately crosses the threshold from a singularity to a 'being-singular-plural,' in Jean-Luc Nancy's terminology. Neo is thus "an entity [that] registers as both particular in its difference but at the same time always relational to other singularities" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 10f).

After the Analyst seemingly agrees to let Trinity decide her fate, she arrives on her motorbike at the scene, which is again the Café 'Simulatte.' In slow motion, she enters the café, and all eyes are immediately on her: Neo's, the Analyst's, and their respective allies. She approaches Neo and whispers to him that she has dreamed of this exact situation. After Neo reveals that his game is based on true events of their past, they sit down at a table and Trinity tearfully confides in him:

TRINITY. After you left, I went home and I played it. I kept thinking: Why does this story feel like a memory? There is a part of me that feels like I have been waiting my whole life for you. And that part is like: What the hell took you so long?

NEO. I don't have an easy answer. Maybe I was afraid of this, afraid of what might happen, afraid of hurting the only person I ever loved.

TRINITY. I wish I was who you think I am. But look at me – I can't be her. (01:54:04-01:55:07)

Playing the game and having forward-dawning dreams has increased Trinity's suspicion of her reality. The 'Matrix' games, i.e., the original film trilogy, grants her access to her past, to memories of her queer life as part of the resistance against the Matrix. In *Resurrections*, the *Matrix* trilogy thus functions as a queer archive which Neo and Trinity inadvertently access in dreams, déjà-vus, and flashbacks. These help them reawaken from the updated Matrix and proceed into a queer future. Trinity's lines hint that she might already be aware of the truth, but she hesitates to fully accept it, fearing that she cannot live up to the original Trinity and her

toughness. While professing that she “can’t be her,” her fake husband Chad and their kids enter the café, frantically telling her to come with them because her youngest daughter was hit by a car. She gets up and unhappily whispers to Neo that “it’s too late” (01:55:25), which Neo understandingly accepts. Hence, she bows to her imposed identity as wife and mother, locking herself firmly within the oppressive heterosexual matrix that perpetually reinforces a legible gender binary.

As she leaves the café with her fake family, the human resistance prepares to fight the SWAT team since their mission has apparently failed. However, right before her exit, Trinity turns around and sees Neo being held at gunpoint by the police while Chad pulls her away from the scene, as seen in Figure 22. Chad appears only blurrily in the background while the close-up shot focuses on Trinity, signaling a turning point in her character.



Figure 22: Trinity turns her back on Chad (01:56:19)

Chad repeatedly calls her ‘Tiffany’ until she cannot stand it anymore. The dramatic music stops, and she coldly rebukes him:

TRINITY. I wish you would fucking stop calling me that. I hate that name. [turns to Chad]. My name is Trinity, and you better take your hands off of me. (01:56:26-01:56:36)

In this pivotal moment, she figuratively comes out, ultimately shedding her imposed identity and reclaiming her true name. Trinity’s awakening thus coincides with her choice of queer relationality to the resistance over assimilated heteronormative femininity so that she breaks through the heterosexual matrix’s hold over her. This moment also shows how Trinity’s experience of circumstantial negativity, in her case, her unhappy life as a traditional mother and wife, reminds her of her constitutive negativity, of a fundamental feeling of inhabiting an abject position within the Matrix. As the negativity becomes excessive, with Chad shouting her ‘deadname’ and her love Neo in danger, she takes her fate into her own hands and turns

negativity into queer resistance. She adopts a resistant stance immediately as she fights Chad, who is exposed as one of the Analyst's handlers designed to control Trinity. She immediately recalls her past combat skills, implying that she has always been close to her true self as the 'touch chick' Trinity, silently longing to be her.

The ensuing battle frenzy contains many elements that recall the action sequences in the previous films, including the gratuitous use of gunfire, martial arts, and Neo's supernatural moves to dodge bullets. Before the initial fight stops, both Trinity and Neo are held back by a large group of SWAT officers that keep them apart. However, they push through the forces as they scream in yearning agony, during which flashbacks of the original films are shown in which they hug and kiss. They eventually reach each other's hand, triggering a shockwave that blasts everyone around them away, including the Analyst. They then share a moment of holding each other tenderly. This sequence of events can be seen as a moment of resisting and overcoming police brutality, i.e., the executive force of the Matrix's white male state apparatus, which is designed to subdue non-normative behavior and keep resistant individuals apart and anti-relational.

The following sequence, in which they flee from the swarm of bots, constitutes a prime example not only of the deconstruction of Neo's white savior status but also of the film's juxtaposition of queer utopian relationality and the heterosexual matrix's anti-relationality. As their ship operator, Seq, warns them of an onslaught of bots, that is, a zombie-like mob of Matrix humans whom the Analyst controls, the Resistance prepares to evacuate the simulation. After being asked whether he can still fly, Neo attempts to take off but immediately fails, admitting that it is "not happening" (02:01:33). He thus fails to utilize the full potential of his past repertoire of supernatural abilities. This implies a failure to live up to his previous hegemonic Hollywood hero status, the white male savior that Neo was originally constructed as. It can, therefore, be seen as a performative queering of the old Neo, reflecting "a rejection of normative protocols of canonization and value" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 153f). As such, the resistance cannot rely on Neo as the 'One' anymore, instead having to take collective action. Rather than mourning the loss of a central saving figure, the crew immediately starts fighting the swarm while taking flight and shooting at approaching bots. Trinity drives her motorcycle and dodges bots while Neo sits in the back and creates forcefields to block them off.

As the chase sequence progresses, the tension increases as the Analyst begins to turn "bots into bombs" (02:02:41), who jump out of tall buildings to potentially hit the fleeing members of the resistance upon smashing into the ground. The extremeness of this becomes apparent as the scene shows a sleeping straight white couple. As the man wakes, his eyes turn green, and he

promptly runs to the window and jumps through it, leaving the woman screaming in horror as he hits the ground close to Trinity's motorcycle. It is a death battle between the white heterosexual matrix, whose full oppressive force is displayed, and queer resistance that skillfully evades attacks. Stripped of their conscience, these bots become suicide bombers on command. The jumping man then testifies to the Matrix's horrifying abuse of the human 'race,' an emblem of how even conforming individuals can be instrumentalized to eradicate the queer 'threat' of non-conformity. Their bodies are weaponized, forcing them to sacrifice their humanity to become mindless minions of the heterosexual matrix. They are themselves united through a collective purpose, as shown in the green-glowing eyes and blank expressions of the bots in Figure 23.



Figure 23: The bots of the Matrix (02:05:58)

However, the scene juxtaposes the relationality of the bots with that of the resistance. The bots of the heterosexual matrix are only connected by default as the Analyst's controls them, acting according to their programming to maintain their reality's hegemony at any cost. Conversely, the resistance's relationality is depicted as intentional and full of care and consideration for each other. For instance, when the crew members Lexy and Berg are nearly overwhelmed by the bots, Bugs enters the Matrix to help them, ultimately rescuing them together with the other members, after which they all hug. Hence, they display a utopian, not-yet-here form of belonging to a chosen family, transcending the Matrix's normative straight time that thrives on keeping humans close yet apart.

At the climax of the scene, Trinity and Neo have reached a rooftop, where they are cornered by the SWAT team and two attack helicopters. Neo continues to block the bullets with his powers and redirects a missile from one helicopter into the other, causing an explosion that knocks them back. In slow-motion, Trinity awakens from the blast and marvels at the rising sun on the horizon. She is joined by Neo, telling him that she remembers their past, after which they share

a kiss. She then confesses to him that her “dream ended here” (02:10:52). As SWAT members storm the rooftop, Trinity and Neo leap off the building together while holding hands. A few moments later, however, their fall stops mid-air as Trinity has gained the ability to fly herself. Her dream that foresaw these events comes to represent a utopian specter at this moment. It crosses the temporality of straight time as it is now a past dream, yet a dream of a future in which she is reunited with her ally and lover, Neo, as they are about to exit the Matrix. In the present moment, the memory of this dream, as well as its realization, grants Trinity the necessary educated hope to realize she can also bend the Matrix’s rules and fly. The music changes to triumphant orchestral music as she holds onto the currently flightless Neo, as seen in Figure 24. The extreme long shot captures Trinity’s mastery of queering the Matrix’s rules, while the rising sun in the background signals the dawning of a new era in the simulation.

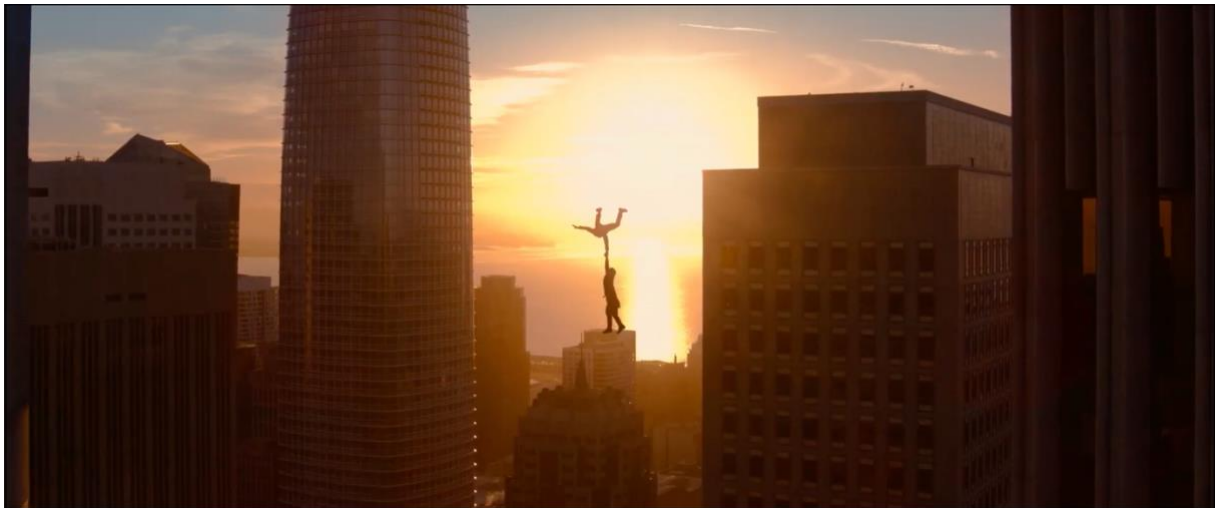


Figure 24: Trinity flies and holds Neo (02:12:05)

Trinity, therefore, achieves full heroine status, but rather than depicting her as a new ‘One,’ the shot only shows their silhouettes, thus constituting a more general celebratory image of queer utopian support. It is not an individual that ascends to heroism, but a sense of queer relationality. Therefore, the film ultimately restructures Neo’s position as the lone savior. This corresponds with Gasque’s reading of the film, according to which “[t]he One’ is reconfigured as a group that may include any type of person willing to protect her true community” (63).

5 Conclusion

In this thesis, I explored themes of utopia and queer resistance to heteronormative and white-coded hegemonic orders in the *Matrix* franchise, specifically in the first film, *Matrix*, and the fourth film, *Resurrections*. After identifying the films' eponymous simulation, the Matrix, as a Butlerian heterosexual matrix, I showed how both films critique its rigid binary norms and subsequently work toward a sense of queer utopia, which is achieved more successfully in *Resurrections* than in *Matrix*.

My analysis has shown that both the original simulation in *Matrix* and its updated version in *Resurrections* normalize binary structures of gender and 'race.' In *Matrix*, racial difference is embedded more generally in the story of the human 'race's' enslavement by the machine 'race.' Due to the narrative centrality of this conflict, the film suggests a dichotomous distinction between machines and humans, between oppressor and oppressed. Upon closer inspection, the prison that the machines have created for humans, i.e. the Matrix, is presented as an oppressive reality that ties the machines to notions of capitalist white male supremacy. This becomes evident especially in the simulation's hectic Western urban spaces that are policed by the Matrix's white male human-hating Agents, who are designed to punish those who rebel against the hegemony of white masculinity. Meanwhile, notions of femininity are reduced to objectified, stereotypical forms, as exemplified by the woman in red. The humans who queerly resist these binary norms of being and behaving thus become the Other to the machines and inhabit a position of abjection and negativity within the Matrix.

This sense of negativity, of not fitting in, is even more present in the updated Matrix in *Resurrections*, in which both Trinity and Neo feel miserable in their fake lives after their reinsertion into the new Matrix. As the film explains, this Matrix exploits human feelings, drawing energy from the suffering of being kept close yet apart. Moreover, this Matrix is different from the original one because it does not merely fight queer resistance, but rather absorbs it. As such, Neo's and Trinity's memories of their past queer-resistant lives, that is, the story from the original trilogy, are commodified into a videogame, thus stripping it of its insurrectionary potential. Significantly, this Matrix continues its predecessor's heteronormative structure. While Trinity is fundamentally unhappy with her fake heteronormative life as a mother and wife, Neo is severely depressed and far removed from his past life as the heroic masculine savior of humanity. Moreover, this Matrix continues the trope of machinic whiteness as the structural norm. Despite the unprecedented depiction of nonwhite people within the Matrix's mainstream upper-class capitalist spaces, this suggested multiculturalism only operates at surface level, as everyone remains 'plugged in' in the capitalist, profit-oriented machinery of

white cyberspace. Therefore, the new Matrix perpetuates whiteness as the norm while offering a colorblind approach to cultural diversity.

My comparative analysis of queer utopian futurity in the two films has shown that while both strive for utopian possibilities beyond the capitalist, white heteronormative present, it is only in *Resurrections* that the franchise's full queer utopian potential is unleashed. Granted, *Matrix* still contains queer utopian elements and queer resistance to the white heterosexual matrix. For instance, I identified the human resistance's fetish style, their time-bending physical performativity, and nonwhite spaces such as the dojo and the Oracle's apartment as filmic elements that queer not only the Matrix's normative physics, but also its white, heteronormative, and anti-relational modes of belonging. However, the film's queer utopian outlook through these elements is continuously compromised due to its strong focus on the development of Neo as the prophesied 'One' who is destined to save humanity from the enslaving machines. Most scenes thematize Neo's path to accepting his fate, which reflects traditional Hollywood tropes of heroism that construct an individual hero figure who is usually portrayed as a cis-white heterosexual male. As such, the film suggests that utopian liberation from the machines be the task of a chosen white male individual human rather than an open-ended relational effort. Subsequently, the film's nonwhite elements and spaces are largely reduced to secondary background props. Moreover, the centrality of Neo as humanity's martyr reinforces the film's notion of a clear racial binary between machines and humans. Though it challenges the gender binary to an extent, most explicitly through Trinity's character, the film's critique of the white heterosexual matrix fails to fully queer its binary nature, which ironically persists through the emphasis on the hegemony of Neo's heroic white masculinity.

As I have shown, the franchise's critique of white heteronormative social structures and its queer utopian outlook are implemented more effectively in *Resurrections*. While this sequel features an updated (white heterosexual) Matrix, it also develops its queer critique of this hegemonic system. Having learned from *Matrix's* shortcomings, *Resurrections* uses its past, that is, the original trilogy, as an archive of queer resistance, which Neo and Trinity continuously access through Neo's videogame, mental flashes and vague memories that gradually become clearer. The film thus metatextually historicizes itself, admitting to past failings and updating its critique of capitalist straight time and of binary structures of gender and 'race.' In terms of gender, my analysis has shown that especially Trinity, but also Neo, are suspicious of and eventually resistant to the hegemonic ideals of femininity and masculinity that the Matrix imposes onto them. As for 'race,' I demonstrated how the film deconstructs the human/machine racial binary and the animosity between them, which were left untouched in

the original films. *Resurrections* features friendly machines that help humans build the relational utopian community of Io together, thus blurring the former distinction between oppressive, white-coded machines and oppressed, nonwhite-coded humans. Taking the transcendence of these binary categories even further, the film also introduces so-called synthients, exomorphic human-like programs, that work alongside humans and machines. Significantly, I have located the main reason for *Resurrections*' more effective queer utopian outlook in its portrayal of the role of Neo, which profoundly diverges from his former heroism in *Matrix*. Through sharing the negativity in his new fake life, he creates a queer relational bond with a similarly unhappy Trinity. Together, they eventually break through their heteronormative lives, reconnect with their queer-resistant past, and foster their educated hope to actively anticipate a better, queerer future beyond the Matrix's restrictive normativities. As such, the film ultimately dismantles the original trilogy's myth of Neo as the 'One,' the individual white male savior of humanity, instead assigning him a place among equals in the queer resistance against the white heterosexual matrix. Heroism and liberation are thus depicted as relational and open-ended in that they require the continuous effort of many rather than of a single prophetic savior. In the end, Neo, Trinity and their peers set out to rebuild the Matrix with more care than before, to "paint the sky with rainbows" (02:15:15), hoping to be joined in this endeavor by more and more humans, machines, and beyond.

At the time of writing this thesis, a fifth Matrix film has already been announced. It remains to be seen to what extent this new sequel fulfills the utopian imagination created by *Resurrections*. Although *Resurrections* does not offer a definitive happy end to the Matrix franchise, it points to a new beginning, a point of departure into a better future that is not taken for granted, but actively worked for by everyone, together. Perhaps, the world needs queer utopian imagination now more than ever.

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Appendix

A1: Abstract (English)

Since its initial release, the *Matrix* film franchise, created by the sisters Lana and Lilly Wachowski, has received widespread attention in both popular culture and academia. Presenting a rather dystopian vision of humanity's future inside a simulated reality, the films have produced a great amount of academic discourse that interprets its central simulation, the Matrix, as a critique of contemporary capitalist society. This thesis adds a queer-theoretical perspective to this critique and investigates how the films, particularly *The Matrix* and *The Matrix Resurrections*, suggest a utopian future for humanity beyond the normative strictures in the machine-made Matrix. The Matrix, in both its filmic versions, is viewed as a heteronormative and white-coded construct of reality, leaving those who resist these norms in a state of negativity. Initially, I describe the Matrix's structure by employing Judith Butler's concept of the heterosexual matrix, illuminating how binary norms of gender, sexuality, and, by extension, 'race' are inscribed into it. Having identified the Matrix as a normative white heterosexual matrix, the focus then shifts to the notion of queer futurity in the films, which heavily relies on the work of queer of color theorist José Esteban Muñoz. Applying his queer utopian hermeneutics, I conduct close viewings of scenes to show how the films resist and queer binary hetero- and white normativity on various levels, including dialogue, physical performativity, style, temporality, and spatiality. Importantly, queer utopia figures as an open-ended, relational, coalitional effort. The analysis shows that while the first film, *Matrix*, creates a basis of queer utopian worldbuilding, its utopian vision fails to acknowledge the importance of relationality, instead presenting its protagonist, Neo, as the mythic hero and humanity's savior with an individual responsibility to create a better world. *Resurrections*, by contrast, addresses these utopian shortcomings and deconstructs Neo's heroic status, instead conceptualizing utopia as a community effort that queerly defies binary logics of heteronormativity, normative whiteness, and individual heroism.

A2: Abstract (German)

Das *Matrix*-Film-Franchise, welches von den Schwestern Lana und Lilly Wachowski kreiert wurde, zog seit Beginn weitreichende Aufmerksamkeit auf sich, sowohl im popkulturellen als auch im akademischen Kontext. Die Präsentation einer dystopischen Zukunft, in der die Menschheit in einer Simulation lebt, gab Anstoß zu zahlreichen akademischen Interpretationen, die diese zentrale Simulation, die Matrix, als Kritik zeitgenössischer kapitalistischer Gesellschaftsstrukturen aufnahmen. Diese Arbeit steuert eine queer-theoretische Perspektive zu dieser Sichtweise bei und untersucht wie die Filme, speziell *The Matrix* und *The Matrix Resurrections*, eine queer-utopische Zukunft für die Menschheit suggerieren, jenseits von den normativen Einschränkungen innerhalb der von Maschinen erzeugten Matrix. Beide filmische Versionen dieser Matrix werden als heteronormative und weiß-normative Realitätskonstrukte gesehen, in denen jene, die diesen Normen widerstehen, in einem Zustand der Negativität verbleiben. Zuerst wird die Struktur der Matrix mithilfe von Judith Butler's Konzept der heterosexuellen Matrix beschrieben, womit gezeigt wird, wie binäre Normen von Gender, Sexualität und, im weiteren Sinne, 'Race' darin eingebettet sind. Nachdem die Matrix als normative, weiße, heterosexuelle Matrix identifiziert wird, liegt der Fokus auf der Idee der queeren Futurität, was weitgehend auf dem Werk des Queer-of-Color-Theoretikers José Esteban Muñoz basiert. Mithilfe seiner queer-utopischen Hermeneutik betreibe ich Close-Viewings ausgewählter Szenen, um zu zeigen, wie die Filme der binären Hetero- und Weiß-normativität entgegenhalten und diese auf verschiedenen Ebenen 'queeren'. Dabei wird Bezug genommen auf Dialog, physische Performativität, Style, sowie auf Ebenen der Zeitlich- und Räumlichkeit. Queere Utopie wird dabei maßgeblich als ergebnisoffene, relationale und kollaborative Bestrebung aufgefasst. Die Analyse zeigt, dass der erste Film, *Matrix*, zwar ein Fundament für queer-utopisches Weltenschaftern kreiert, jedoch nicht die Wichtigkeit der relationalen Zusammenarbeit für seine utopische Vision anerkennt. Stattdessen steht der Protagonist Neo im Fokus, der als mythischer Held und Retter die alleinige Verantwortung für die Verbesserung der Welt trägt. *Resurrections* greift jedoch dieses Versäumnis auf und dekonstruiert Neos Heldenstatus. Utopie wird dadurch als gemeinschaftliches Bestreben konzeptualisiert, in dem die binären Logiken der Heteronormativität, der Weiß-Normativität, und des individuellen Heldentums 'gequeert' werden.