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Searching for the Origami Unicorn

The Matrix *and Transmedia Storytelling*

In Peter Bagge's irreverent "Get It?," one of some twenty-five comic stories commissioned for *The Matrix* homepage, three buddies are exiting a theater where they have just seen the Wachowski brothers' opus for the first time (fig. 3.1). For two of them, *The Matrix* (1999) has been a transforming experience:

"Wow! That was Awesome!"

"*The Matrix* was the best movie I've seen in ages!"

The third is perplexed. From the looks on the faces of the prune-faced older couple walking in front of them, his confusion is not unique. "I didn't understand a word of it!"

"You mean you were sitting there scratching your head through the whole thing?"

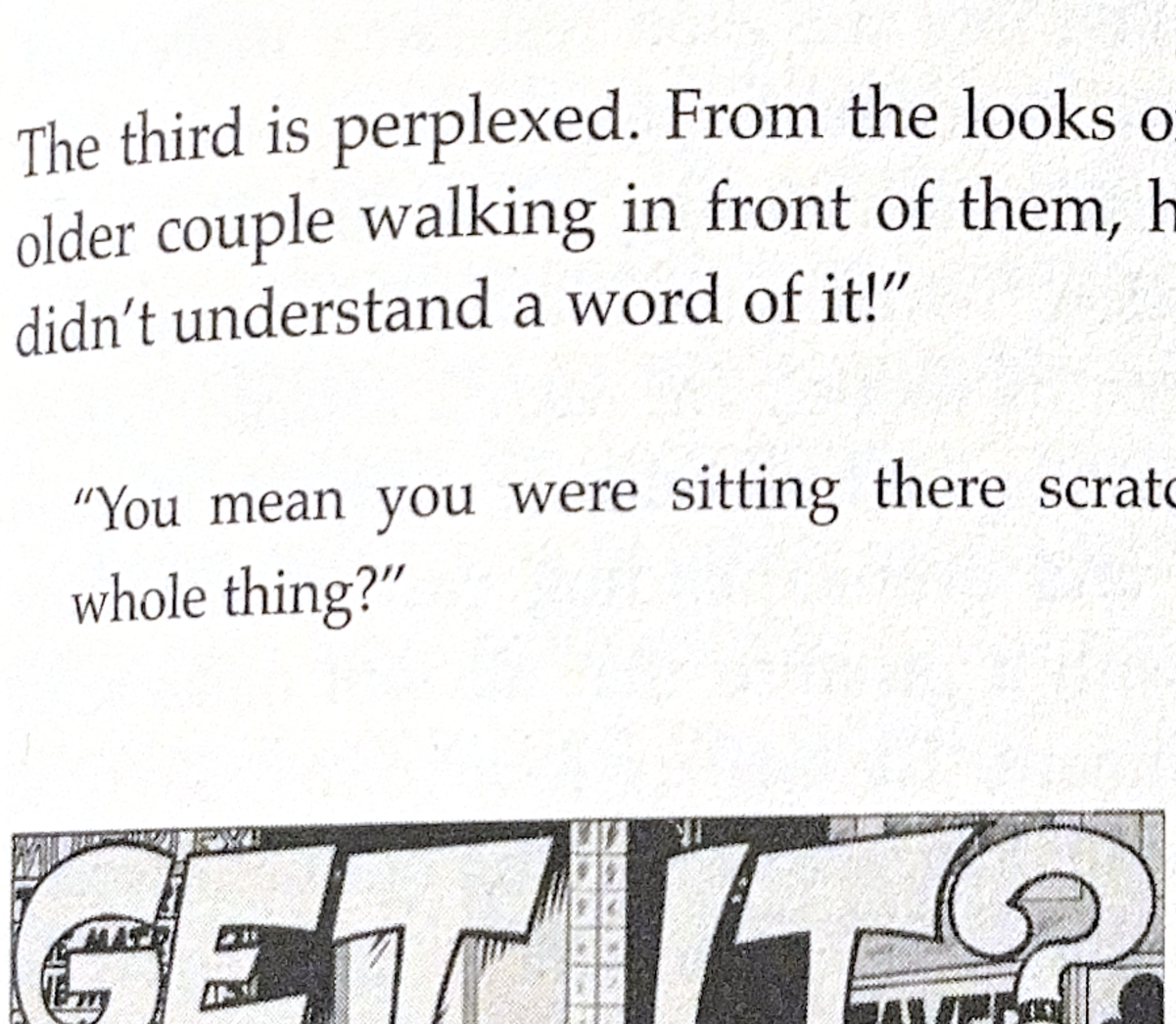

Fig. 3.1. Peter Bagge suggests how perplexing some viewers found *The Matrix*.

When they retire to a local bar, one buddy persists in trying to explain *The Matrix*, patiently clarifying its concepts of manufactured reality, machine-controlled worlds, and "jacking in," while the other, being more pessimistic, grumbles, "I don't think you'll ever understand it." As their hapless pal walks away, the other two turn out to be cybernetic "agents," who concede that it's a good thing most humans don't get this movie, since "the fewer humanoids who comprehend what's really going on, the fewer we will have to destroy."[1]

Noted for his sharp social satire in *Hate* comics (1990–1998) and, more recently, *Reason* magazine, Bagge contrasts between those who "get" *The Matrix* and those who do not. Something about the film leaves some filmgoers feeling inadequate and others empowered. Bagge wrote this strip immediately after the release of the first *Matrix* movie. As we will see, things get only more complicated from there.

No film franchise has ever made such demands on its consumers. The original movie, *The Matrix*, took us into a world where the line between reality and illusion constantly blurred, and where the bodies of humans are stored as an energy source to fuel machines while their minds inhabit a world of digital hallucinations. Neo, the hacker protagonist-turned-messiah, gets pulled into the Zion resistance movement, working to overturn the "agents" who are shaping reality to serve their own ambiguous ends. The prerelease advertising for the first film tantalized consumers with the question, "What is the Matrix?" sending them to the Web in search of answers. Its sequel, *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), opens without a recap and assumes we have almost complete mastery over its complex mythology and ever-expanding cast of secondary characters. It ends abruptly with a promise that all will make sense when we see the third installment, *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003). To truly appreciate what we are watching, we have to do our homework.

The filmmakers plant clues that won't make sense until we play the computer game. They draw on the back story revealed through a series of animated shorts, which need to be downloaded off the Web or watched off a separate DVD. Fans raced, dazed and confused, from the theaters to plug into Internet discussion lists, where every detail would be dissected and every possible interpretation debated.

When previous generations wondered whether they "got" a movie, it was usually a European art movie, an independent film, or perhaps an obscure late-night cult flick. But *The Matrix Reloaded* broke all box-office records for R-rated films, earning a mind-boggling $134 million

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in revenues in its first four days of release. The video game sold more than a million copies in its first week on the market. Before the movie was even released, 80 percent of the American filmgoing public identified *The Matrix Reloaded* as a "must see" title.[2]

The Matrix is entertainment for the age of media convergence, integrating multiple texts to create a narrative so large that it cannot be contained within a single medium. The Wachowski brothers played the transmedia game very well, putting out the original film first to stimulate interest, offering up a few Web comics to sustain the hard-core fan's hunger for more information, launching the anime in anticipation of the second film, releasing the computer game alongside it to surf the publicity, bringing the whole cycle to a conclusion with *The Matrix Revolutions,* and then turning the whole mythology over to the players of the massively multiplayer online game. Each step along the way built on what has come before, while offering new points of entry.

The Matrix is also entertainment for the era of collective intelligence. Pierre Lévy speculates about what kind of aesthetic works would respond to the demands of his knowledge cultures. First, he suggests that the "distinction between authors and readers, producers and spectators, creators and interpreters will blend" to form a "circuit" (not quite a matrix) of expression, with each participant working to "sustain the activity" of the others. The artwork will be what Lévy calls a "cultural attractor," drawing together and creating common ground between diverse communities; we might also describe it as a cultural activator, setting into motion its decipherment, speculation, and elaboration. The challenge, he says, is to create works with enough depth that they can justify such large-scale efforts: "Our primary goal should be to prevent closure from occurring too quickly."[3] *The Matrix* clearly functions as both a cultural attractor and a cultural activator. The most committed consumers track down data spread across multiple media, scanning each and every text for insights into the world. Keanu Reeves explained to *TV Guide* readers: "What audiences make of *Revolutions* will depend on the amount of energy they put into it. The script is full of cul-de-sacs and secret passageways."[4] Viewers get even more out of the experience if they compare notes and share resources than if they try to go it alone.

In this chapter, I am going to describe the *Matrix* phenomenon as transmedia storytelling. A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable

contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best—so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. Any given product is a point of entry into the franchise as a whole. Reading across the media sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption. Redundancy burns up fan interest and causes franchises to fail. Offering new levels of insight and experience refreshes the franchise and sustains consumer loyalty. The economic logic of a horizontally integrated entertainment industry—that is, one where a single company may have roots across all of the different media sectors—dictates the flow of content across media. Different media attract different market niches. Films and television probably have the most diverse audiences; comics and games the narrowest. A good transmedia franchise works to attract multiple constituencies by pitching the content somewhat differently in the different media. If there is, however, enough to sustain those different constituencies—and if each work offers fresh experiences—then you can count on a crossover market that will expand the potential gross.

Popular artists—working in the cracks of the media industry—have realized that they can surf this new economic imperative to produce more ambitious and challenging works. At the same time, these artists are building a more collaborative relationship with their consumers: working together, audience members can process more story information than previously imagined. To achieve their goals, these storytellers are developing a more collaborative model of authorship, co-creating content with artists with different visions and experiences at a time when few artists are equally at home in all media.

Okay, so the franchise is innovative, but is *The Matrix* any good? Many film critics trashed the later sequels because they were not sufficiently self-contained and thus bordered on incoherent. Many games critics trashed the games because they were too dependent on the film content and did not offer sufficiently new experiences to players. Many fans expressed disappointment because their own theories about the world of *The Matrix* were more rich and nuanced than anything they ever saw on the screen. I would argue, however, that we do not yet

have very good aesthetic criteria for evaluating works that play themselves out across multiple media. There have been far too few fully transmedia stories for media makers to act with any certainty about what would constitute the best uses of this new mode of storytelling, or for critics and consumers to know how to talk meaningfully about what works or doesn't work within such franchises. So let's agree for a moment that *The Matrix* was a flawed experiment, an interesting failure, but that its flaws did not detract from the significance of what it tried to accomplish.

Relatively few, if any, franchises achieve the full aesthetic potential of transmedia storytelling—yet. Media makers are still finding their way and are more than willing to let someone else take the risks. Yet, at the heart of the entertainment industry, there are young and emerging leaders (such as Danny Bilson and Neil Young at Electronic Arts or Chris Pike at Sony Interactive) who are trying to push their companies to explore this new model for entertainment franchises. Some of them are still regrouping from their first bleeding-edge experiments in this space (Dawson's Desktop, 1998)—some of which had modest success (*The Blair Witch Project*, 1999), some of which they now see as spectac-ular failures (*Majestic*, 2001). Some of them are already having closed-door meetings to try to figure out the best way to ensure more productive collaborations across media sectors. Some are working on hot new ideas masked by nondisclosure agreements. All of them were watching closely in 2003, which *Newsweek* had called "The Year of *The Matrix*," to see how audiences were going to respond to the Wachowski brothers' ambitious plans.[5] And, like Peter Bagge, they were looking at the faces of people as they exited the theaters, demanding to know if they "got" it.

What Is the Matrix?

Umberto Eco asks what, beyond being loved, transforms a film such as *Casablanca* (1942) into a cult artifact. First, he argues, the work must come to us as a "completely furnished world so that its fans can quote characters and episodes as if they were aspects of the private sectarian world."[6] Second, the work must be encyclopedic, containing a rich array of information that can be drilled, practiced, and mastered by devoted consumers.

The film need not be well made, but it must provide resources consumers can use in constructing their own fantasies: "In order to transform a work into a cult object one must be able to break, dislocate, unhinge it so that one can remember only parts of it, irrespective of their original relationship to the whole."[7] And the cult film need not be coherent: the more different directions it pushes, the more different communities it can sustain, and the more different experiences it can provide, the better. We experience the cult movie, he suggests, not as having "one central idea but many," as "a disconnected series of images, of peaks, of visual icebergs."[8]

The cult film is made to be quoted, Eco contends, because it is made from quotes, archetypes, allusions, and references drawn from a range of previous works. Such material creates "a sort of intense emotion accompanied by the vague feeling of a déjà vu."[9] For Eco, *Casablanca* is the perfect cult movie because it is so unselfconscious in its borrowings: "Nobody would have been able to achieve such a cosmic result intentionally."[10] And for that reason, Eco is suspicious of cult movies by design. In the age of postmodernism, Eco suggests, no film can be experienced with fresh eyes; all are read against other movies. In such a world, "cult has become the normal way of enjoying movies."[11]

If *Casablanca* exemplifies the classical cult movie, one might see *The Matrix* as emblematic of the cult movie in convergence culture. Here's science fiction writer Bruce Sterling trying to explain its fascination:

> First and foremost, the film's got pop appeal elements. All kinds of elements: suicidal attacks by elite special forces, crashing helicopters, oodles of martial arts, a chaste yet passionate story of predestined love, bug-eyed monsters of the absolute first water, fetish clothes, captivity and torture and daring rescue, plus really weird, cool submarines. . . . There's Christian exegesis, a Redeemer myth, a death and rebirth, a hero in self-discovery, *The Odyssey*, Jean Baudrillard (lots of Baudrillard, the best part of the film), science fiction ontological riffs of the Philip K. Dick school, Nebuchadnezzar, the Buddha, Taoism, martial-arts mysticism, oracular prophecy, spoon-bending telekinesis, Houdini stage-show magic, Joseph Campbell, and Godelian mathematical metaphysics.[12]

And that's just in the first film!

The film's endless borrowings also spark audience response. Layers upon layers of references catalyze and sustain our epistemophilia; these

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gaps and excesses provide openings for the many different knowledge communities that spring up around these cult movies to display their expertise, dig deep into their libraries, and bring their minds to bear on a text that promises a bottomless pit of secrets. Some of the allusions—say, the recurring references to "through the looking glass," the White Rabbit, and the Red Queen, or the use of mythological names for the characters (Morpheus, Persephone, Trinity)—pop off the screen upon first viewing. Others—say, the fact that at one point, Neo pulls a copy of Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981/1995) from his shelf—become clear only after you talk about the film with friends. Some—like the fact that Cypher, the traitor, is referred to at one point as "Mr. Reagan" and asks for an alternative life where he is an actor who gains political power—are clear only when you put together information from multiple sources. Still others—such as the license plates on the cars (such as DA203 or IS5416), which reference specific and context-appropriate Bible verses (Daniel 2:3 or Isaiah 54:16)—may require you to move through the film frame by frame on your DVD player.

The deeper you drill down, the more secrets emerge, all of which can seem at any moment to be *the key* to the film. For example, Neo's apartment number is 101, which is the room number of the torture chamber in George Orwell's *1984* (1949). Once you've picked up this number, then you discover that 101 is also the floor number for the Merovingians' nightclub and the number of the highway where the characters clash in *The Matrix Reloaded*, and from there, one can't help but believe that all of the other various numbers in the film may also carry hidden meanings or connect significant characters and locations together. The billboards in the backgrounds of shots contain cheat codes that can be used to unlock levels in the *Enter the Matrix* (2003) game.

The sheer abundance of allusions makes it nearly impossible for any given consumer to master the franchise totally. In this context, the Wachowski brothers have positioned themselves as oracles—hidden from view most of the time, surfacing only to offer cryptic comments, refusing direct answers, and speaking with a single voice. Here, for example, are some characteristic passages from one of their few online chat sessions:

Question: "There are quite a few hidden messages in the movie that I notice the more I watch it. Can you tell me about how many there are?"

Wachowski brothers: "There are more than you'll ever know."[13]

Question: "Have you ever been told that *The Matrix* has Gnostic overtones?"

Wachowski brothers: "Do you consider that to be a good thing?"

Question: "Do you appreciate people dissecting your movie? Do you find it a bit of an honor or does it annoy you a little, especially when the person may have it all wrong?"

Wachowski brothers: "There's not necessarily ever an 'all wrong.' Because it's about what a person gets out of the movie, what an individual gets out of the movie."

The Wachowskis were more than happy to take credit for whatever meanings the fans located, all the while implying there was more, much more, to be found if the community put its collective mind to work. They answered questions with questions, clues with clues. Each clue was mobilized, as quickly as it materialized, to support a range of different interpretations.

So what is *The Matrix*? As one fan demonstrates, the question can be answered in so many different ways:

- Is it a "love story"? (Keanu Reeves said that in an interview.)
- Is it a "titanic struggle between intuition and controlling intellect"? (Hugo Weaving = Agent Smith said that in an interview about *The Matrix Reloaded*.)
- Is it a story about religious salvation? (*The Matrix Reloaded* was banned in Egypt, because it is "too religious.")
- Is it a story about "Believing in something" or about "Not believing in something"?
- Is it a story about "artificial humanity" or "artificial spirituality"?
- Is it a story with elements from Christianity? Buddhism? Greek mythology? Gnosticism? Hinduism? Freemasonry? The secret society Priory of Zion (Prieure du Notre Dame du Sion) (and its connection to the use of chessboard imagery at the castle Rennes-le-Chateau)?
- Is Neo a reincarnated Buddha? Or a new Jesus Christ (Neo Anderson = new son of man)?
- Is it a science-fiction movie? A fantasy movie?
- Is it a story about secret societies keeping society under control?

- Is it a story about men's history or men's future?
- Is it just a visually enhanced futuristic Kung-Fu movie? A modern Japanime?[14]

Even with all of the film releases out on DVD, and thus subject to being scrutinized indefinitely, the most dedicated fans were still trying to figure out *The Matrix* and the more casual viewers, not accustomed to putting this kind of work into an action film, had concluded that the parts just didn't add up.

"Synergistic Storytelling"

The Matrix is a bit like *Casablanca* to the nth degree, with one important difference: *Casablanca* is a single movie; *The Matrix* is three movies and more. There is, for example, *The Animatrix* (2003), a ninety-minute program of short animated films, set in the world of *The Matrix* and created by some of the leading animators from Japan, South Korea, and the United States, including Peter Chung (*Aeon Flux,* 1995), Yoshiaki Kawajiri (*Wicked City,* 1987), Koji Morimoto (*Robot Carnival,* 1987), and Shinichiro Watanabe (*Cowboy Bebop,* 1998). *The Matrix* is also a series of comics from cult writers and artists, such as Bill Sienkiewicz (*Elektra: Assassin,* 1986–87), Neil Gaiman (*The Sandman,* 1989–96), Dave Gibbons (*Watchmen,* 1986–87), Paul Chadwick (*Concrete,* 1987–98), Peter Bagge (*Hate,* 1990–98), David Lapham (*Stray Bullets,* 1995–), and Geof Darrow (*Hard Boiled,* 1990–92). *The Matrix* is also two games—*Enter the Matrix,* produced by David Perry's Shiny Entertainment, and a massively multiplayer game set in the world of *The Matrix,* scripted in part by Paul Chadwick.

The Wachowskis wanted to wind the story of *The Matrix* across all of these media and have it all add up to one compelling whole. Producer Joel Silver describes a trip the filmmakers took to Japan to talk about creating an animated television series: "I remember on the plane ride back, Larry sat down with a yellow pad and kinda mapped out this scheme we would do where we would

The *Blair Witch* Phenomenon

The concept of transmedia storytelling first entered public dialogue in 1999 as audiences and critics tried to make sense of the phenomenal success of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), a small-budget independent film that became a huge moneymaker. To think of *The Blair Witch Project* as a film was to miss the bigger picture. *The Blair Witch Project* had created a fan following on the Web more than a year before it hit any theaters. Many people learned about the

Burkittsville witch and the disappearance of the production crew that forms the central plot of the movie by going online and finding this curious Web site that seemed to be absolutely real in every detail. The site provided documentation of numerous witch sightings over the past centuries, most of which are not directly referenced in the film but form the backdrop for its action. A pseudodocumentary investigating the witch aired on the Sci Fi Channel, with little to set it apart from the many other documentaries about supernatural phenomena the network periodically airs. After the film's release, Oni Press released several comic books that it claimed were based on the accounts of another person who had met the witch while walking in the woods near Burkittsville. Even the soundtrack was presented as a tape found in the abandoned car.

All of these elements made the world of the film more convincing, enhancing the immediacy the Haxans, as the film's creative team called themselves, had achieved through their distinctive hand-held-video style and improvisational acting. Dan Myrick, one of the film's producers, spelled out what the group called their "prime directive": "We tried to create a fake legend, complete with multiple points of view, skeptics, and unexplainable mysteries. Nothing about the legend could be provable, and everything had to seem like it could have a logical explanation (which the reader would be led away from as quickly as possible.)"[1]

Ed Sanchez, another member of the team, explained: "Everything was based

[1] FT Interviews, "The *Blair Witch* Producer-Director Dan Myrick and Production Designer Ben Rock," *Fortean Times*, November 1999, http://www.forteantimes.com/articles/128_haxanint.shtml.

have this movie, and these video games and these animated stories, and they would all interact together."[15] David Perry described the game as, in effect, another *Matrix* movie. The actors reportedly were uncertain which scenes were being filmed for the game and which for the movie.[16] The consumer who has played the game or watched the shorts will get a different experience of the movies than one who has simply had the theatrical film experience. The whole is worth more than the sum of the parts.

We may better understand how this new mode of transmedia storytelling operates by looking more closely at some of the interconnections between the various *Matrix* texts. For example, in the animated short *Final Flight of the Osiris* (2003), the protagonist, Jue, gives her life trying to get a message into the hands of the *Nebuchadnezzar* crew. The letter contains information about the machines boring their way down to Zion. In the final moments of the anime, Jue drops the letter into a mailbox. At the opening of *Enter the Matrix*, the player's first mission is to retrieve the letter from the post office and get it into the hands of our heroes. And the opening scenes of *The Matrix Reloaded* show the characters discussing the "last transmission of the *Osiris*." For people who see only the movie, the sources of the information remain unclear, but someone who has a transmedia experience will have played an active role in delivering the letter and may have traced its trajectory across three different media.

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Similarly, the character of The Kid is introduced in another of the animated shorts, *The Kid's Story* (2003), about a high school student who discovers on his own the truth about the Matrix as Neo and his friends try to rescue him from the agents. In *The Matrix Reloaded,* they reencounter The Kid on the outskirts of Zion, where he begs to join their crew: "It's fate. I mean you're the reason I'm here, Neo," but Neo defers, saying, "I told you, kid, you found me, I didn't find you. . . . You saved yourself." The exchange is staged as if everybody in the audience would know what the two are talking about and feels more like a scene involving an already established character than their first on-screen introduction. The Kid's efforts to defend Zion become one of the core emotional hooks in the climactic battle in *Revolutions.*

In *The Matrix Reloaded,* Niobe appears unexpectedly in the freeway chase just in time to rescue Morpheus and Trinity, but for people who play the game, getting Niobe to the rendezvous point is a key mission. Again, near the end of *The Matrix Reloaded,* Niobe and her crew are dispatched to blow up the power plant, but apart from the sense that the plan must have worked to enable what we see on screen to unfold, the actual details of her operation is not represented, so that it can be played out in more depth in the game. We reencounter Niobe at the start of *The Matrix Revolutions* where she was left off at the climax of *Enter the Matrix.*

on this one decision to make everything as real as possible. . . . Let's continue with the prime directive—the idea that this is a Web site put up by people interested in the case, trying to bring justice or closure or promote an investigation into the mystery. We set up the timeline, added details to the backstory. . . . We started fabricating artifacts, paintings, carvings, old books, and I would scan them in."[2] Sanchez added a discussion board and saw the emergence of a community of fans who were fascinated with the *Blair Witch* mythology: "What we learned from *Blair Witch* is that if you give people enough stuff to explore, they will explore. Not everyone but some of them will. The people who do explore and take advantage of the whole world will forever be your fans, will give you an energy you can't buy through advertising. . . . It's this web of information that is laid out in a way that keeps people interested and keeps people working for it. If people have to work for something, they devote more time to it. And they give it more emotional value." Sanchez freely acknowledges that they had approached the site and the spin-offs as marketing, but they became an integral part of the experience: "It was the kind of marketing which I would have gotten into as a consumer. . . . We ended up exploiting the Web in ways that as far as movies were concerned, nobody had ever done before."

[2] Ed Sanchez, interview with author, June 2003. All quotations from Sanchez come from this interview.

By the standards of classical Hollywood storytelling, these gaps (such as the failure to introduce The Kid or to explain where Niobe came from) or ex-cesses (such as the reference to "the last transmission

of the *Osiris*") confuse the spectator.[17] The old Hollywood system depended on re-dundancy to ensure that viewers could follow the plot at all times, even if they were distracted or went out to the lobby for a popcorn refill during a crucial scene. The new Hollywood demands that we keep our eyes on the road at all times, and that we do research before we arrive at the theater.

This is probably where *The Matrix* fell out of favor with the film critics, who were used to reviewing the film and not the surrounding apparatus. Few of them consumed the games or comics or animated shorts, and, as a consequence, few absorbed the essential information they contained. As Fiona Morrow from the *London Independent* explained, "You can call me old-fashioned—what matters to me is the film and only the film. I don't want to have to 'enhance' the cinematic experience by overloading on souped-up flimflam."[18] Those who realized there was relevant information in those other sources were suspicious of the economic motives behind what *Salon*'s Ivan Askwith called "synergistic storytelling": "Even if the new movies, game, and animated shorts live up to the high standards set by the first film, there's still an uneasy feeling that Warner Bros. is taking advantage of *The Matrix*'s cult following to cash in while it can." The *San Jose Mercury*'s Mike Antonucci saw it all as "smart marketing" more than "smart storytelling."[19]

So let's be clear: there are strong economic motives behind transmedia storytelling. Media convergence makes the flow of content across multiple media platforms inevitable. In the era of digital effects and high-resolution game graphics, the game world can now look almost exactly like the film world—because they are reusing many of the same digital assets. Everything about the structure of the modern entertainment industry was designed with this single idea in mind—the construction and enhancement of entertainment franchises. As we saw in the previous chapter, there is a strong interest in integrating entertainment and marketing, to create strong emotional attachments and use them to make additional sales. Mike Saksa, the senior vice president for marketing at Warner Bros., couldn't be more explicit on this point: "This [*The Matrix*] truly is Warner Bros.'s synergy. All divisions will benefit from the property. . . . We don't know what the upside is, we just know it's going to be very high."[20]

The enormous "upside" is not just economic, however. *The Matrix* franchise was shaped by a whole new vision of synergy. Franchising a popular film, comic book, or television series is nothing new. Witness

the endless stream of plastic figurines available in McDonald's Happy Meals. Cross-promotion is everywhere. But much of it, like the Happy Meal toys, are pretty lame and easily forgotten. Current licensing arrangements ensure that most of these products are peripheral to what drew us to the original story in the first place. Under licensing, the central media company—most often the film producers—sells the rights to manufacture products using its assets to an often unaffiliated third party; the license limits what can be done with the characters or concepts to protect the original property. Soon, licensing will give way to what industry insiders are calling "co-creation." In co-creation, the companies collaborate from the beginning to create content they know plays well in each of their sectors, allowing each medium to generate new experiences for the consumer and expand points of entry into the franchise.

The current licensing system typically generates works that are redundant (allowing no new character background or plot development), watered down (asking the new media to slavishly duplicate experiences better achieved through the old), or riddled with sloppy contradictions (failing to respect the core consistency audiences expect within a franchise). These failures account for why sequels and franchises have a bad reputation. Franchise products are governed too much by economic logic and not enough by artistic vision. Hollywood acts as if it only has to provide more of the same, printing a *Star Trek* (1966) logo on so many widgets. In reality, audiences want the new work to offer new insights and new experiences. If media companies reward that demand, viewers will feel greater mastery and investment; deny it, and they stomp off in disgust.

In 2003, I attended a gathering of top creatives from Hollywood and the games industry, hosted by Electronic Arts; they were discussing how co-creation might work. Danny Bilson, the vice president of intellectual property development at Electronic Arts, organized the summit on what he calls "multiplatform entertainment."[21] As someone who has worked in film (*The Rocketeer*, 1991), television (*The Sentinel*, 1996; *Viper*, 1994), and comics (*The Flash*, 1990), as well as in games, Bilson understands the challenges of creating content in each medium and of coordinating between them. He wants to develop games that do not just move Hollywood brands into a new media space, but also contribute to a larger storytelling system. For this to work, he argues, the story needs to be conceived in transmedia terms from the start:

> We create movies and games together, organically, from the ground up, with the same creative force driving them. Ideally that creative force involves movie writers and directors who are also gamers. In any art form, you have to like it to do well with it; in fact, you have to be a fan of it to do well at it. Take that talent and build multiplatform entertainment. The movie and game are designed together; the game deepens and expands the fiction but does not simply repeat material from the film. It should be organic to what made the film experience compelling.
>
> Going forward, people are going to want to go deeper into stuff they care about rather than sampling a lot of stuff. If there's something I love, I want it to be bigger than just those two hours in the movie theater or a one-hour-a-week experience on TV. I want a deepening of the universe. . . . I want to participate in it. I've just been introduced to the world in the film and I want to get there, explore it. You need that connection to the world to make participation exciting.

Bilson wants to use his position as the man who supervises all creative properties for the world's leading game publisher to create multiplatform entertainment. His first step is the development of *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent* (2004), a James Bond game where one gets to play the part of classic Bond villains like Dr. No or Goldfinger, restaging confronting 007 within digital re-creations of the original movie sets. Everything in the game is consistent with what viewers know from the Bond movies, but the events are seen from an alternative moral perspective.

This level of integration and coordination is difficult to achieve even though the economic logic of the large media conglomerates encourages them to think in terms of synergies and franchises. So far, the most successful transmedia franchises have emerged when a single creator or creative unit maintains control. Hollywood might well study the ways that Lucasfilm has managed and cultivated its *Indiana Jones* (1981) and *Star Wars* (1977) franchises. When *Indiana Jones* went to television, for example, it exploited the medium's potential for extended storytelling and character development: *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* (1992) showed the character take shape against the backdrop of various historical events and exotic environments. When *Star Wars* moved into print, its novels expanded the timeline to show events not contained in the film trilogies, or recast the stories around secondary characters, as did the *Tales from the Mos Eisley Cantina* (1995) series, which fleshes out those curious-looking aliens in the background of the original

movie.[22] When *Star Wars* went to games, those games didn't just enact film events; they showed what life would be like for a Jedi trainee or a bounty hunter. Increasingly, elements are dropped into the films to create openings that will be fully exploited only through other media.

While the technological infrastructure is ready, the economic prospects sweet, and the audience primed, the media industries haven't done a very good job of collaborating to produce compelling transmedia experiences. Even within the media conglomerates, units compete aggressively rather than collaborate. Many believe that much greater coordination across the media sectors is needed to produce transmedia content. Electronic Arts (EA) explored this model in developing its *Lord of the Rings* titles. EA designers worked on location with Peter Jackson's production unit in New Zealand. As Neil Young, the man in charge of the *Lord of the Rings* franchise for EA, explained,

> I wanted to adapt Peter's work for our medium in the same way that he has adapted Tolkien's work for his. Rather than being some derivative piece of merchandise along the same continuum with the poster, the pen, the mug, or the key chain, maybe we could turn that pyramid up the side of its head, leverage those pieces which have come before, and become the pinnacle of the property instead of the basement. Whether you are making the mug, whether you are making the key chain, or whether you are making the game, pretty much everyone has access to the same assets. For me, when I took over *Lord of the Rings*, that seemed untenable if you want to build something that captured Peter's unique vision, and Howard Shore's music, and the actors, and the look of this world, and . . . you needed much more direct access. Instead of working exclusively through the consumer products group, we built a partnership directly with the New Line Production company, 3 Foot 6 Productions, that functioned as a clearing house for the things we needed.[23]

This system allowed them to import thousands of "assets" from the film production into the game, ensuring an unprecedented degree of fidelity to the details of Tolkien's world. At the same time, working closely with Jackson and the other filmmakers gave Young greater latitude to explore other dimensions of that world that would not appear on screen.

David Perry has described his relationship with the Wachowski brothers in very similar terms: "The Wachowskis get games. They were

standing on the set making sure we got what we needed to make this a quality game. They know what gamers are looking for. With the power they have in Hollywood, they were able to make sure we got everything we needed to make this game what it is."[24] Perry's team logged four months of motion-capture work with Jada Pinkett Smith, the ac-tress who played Niobe, and other members of the *Matrix* cast. All the movements and gestures were created by actual performers working on the set and were seen as extensions of their characterizations. The team used alpha-mapping to create a digital version of the actress's face and still preserve her own facial expressions. The game incorporat-ed many of the special effects that had made *The Matrix* so distinctive when the film was first released, allowing players to duplicate some of the stunts that Woo-ping Yuen (the noted Hong Kong fight choreographer) had created through his wire work or to move through "bul-let time," the film's eye-popping slow-motion technique.

Collaborative Authorship

Media conglomeration provided a context for the Wachowski brothers' aesthetic experiment—they wanted to play with a new kind of storytelling and use Warner Bros.'s blockbuster promotion to open it to the largest possible public. If all they wanted was synergy, they could have hired hack collaborators who could crank out the games, comics, and cartoons. This has certainly occurred in other cases that

Across the Mangaverse

Writing in the London newspaper *The Guardian*, Indian-born filmmaker Shekhar Kapur (*Elizabeth*, *Four Feathers*) noted that Hollywood's worldwide revenues were down 16 percent and local filmmakers were reaping the benefits.[1] He predicted that in a decade we will just as likely be talking about a world dominated by Asian media. Using a then current box-office success as his example, he wrote, "Ten years from now, *Spider-Man* will make $1 billion in its first week. But when *Spider-Man* takes off his mask, he'll probably be Chinese. And the city in which he operates will not be New York, it will be Shanghai. And yet it will be an international film, it will still be *Spider-Man*."

Major media companies, such as Bertelsmann Media Worldwide, Sony, or Vivendi Universal, contract talent worldwide, catering to the tastes of local markets rather than pursuing nationalistic interests; their economic structure encourages them not only to be the intermediaries between different Asian markets but also to bring Asian content into Western countries. Sony, Disney, Fox, and Warner Bros. have all opened companies to produce films in Chinese, German, Italian, Japanese, and

[1] Shekhar Kapur, "The Asians Are Coming," *The Guardian* (U.K.), August 23, 2002, accessed at http://www.shekharkapur.com/guardian.htm. For a useful discussion of trends linking Asian and American media production, see Christina Klein, "Martial Arts and the Globalization of US and Asian Film Industries," *Comparative American Studies* 2, no. 3 (September 2004): 360–384.

have sought to imitate the *Matrix* model. More recent films, ranging from *Charlie's Angels* to *The Riddick Chronicles*, from *Star Wars* to *Spider-Man*, have developed cartoons, for example, which were intended to bridge between sequels or foreshadow plot developments. Of these, only the *Star Wars* shorts worked with a distinguished animator—in that case, Genndy Tartakovsky (*Samurai Jack*).[25] By contrast, the Wachowskis sought animators and comic-book writers who already had cult followings and were known for their distinctive visual styles and authorial voices. They worked with people they admired, not people they felt would follow orders. As Yoshiaki Kawajiri, the animator of *Program*, explained, "It was very attractive to me because the only limitation was that I had to play within the world of the *Matrix*; other than that I've been able to work with complete freedom."[26]

The Wachowski brothers, for example, saw co-creation as a vehicle for expanding their potential global market, bringing in collaborators whose very presence evoked distinct forms of popular culture from other parts of the world. Geof Darrow, who did the conceptual drawings for the ships and technology, trained under Moebius, the Eurocomics master noted for images that blur the line between the organic and the mechanical. The filmmakers hired the distinguished Hong Kong fight choreographer Wooping Yuen, who was noted for having helped to reinvent Jackie Chan's screen

other languages aimed both at their domestic markets and at global export. American television and film increasingly is remaking successful products from other markets, ranging from *Survivor* (2000) and *Big Brother* (2000), which are remakes of successful Dutch series, to *The Ring* (2002), a remake of a Japanese cult horror movie, or *Vanilla Sky* (2001), a remake of a Spanish science fiction film. Many of the cartoons shown on American television are made in Asia (increasingly in Korea), often with only limited supervision by Western companies. Many Western children today are more familiar with the characters of the Japanese *Pokémon* series than they are with those from the European fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen.[2] With the rise of broadband communications, foreign media producers will distribute media content directly to American consumers without having to pass by U.S. gatekeepers or rely on multinational distributors.

The flow of Asian goods into the Western market has been shaped by two competing forces: the corporate convergence promoted by media industries, and the grassroots convergence

[2] For useful overviews of the Asian impact of American popular culture, see Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (work in progress); Henry Jenkins, "Pop Cosmopolitanism: Mapping Cultural Flows in an Age of Media Convergence," in Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco and Desiree B. Qin-Hilliard (eds.), *Globalization: Culture and Education in the New Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Joseph Tobin (ed.), *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004); Mizuko Ito, "Technologies of the Childhood Imagination: *Yugioh*, Media Mixes and Everyday Cultural Production," in Joe Karaganis and Natalie Jeremijenko (eds.), *Network/Netplay: Structures of Participation in Digital Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005).

promoted by fan communities and immigrant populations. We will return to the role of grassroots convergence in the globalization process in chapter 4. For the moment, let's focus on corporate convergence. Three distinctive kinds of economic interests are at play in promoting these new cultural exchanges: national or regional producers who see the global circulation of their products not simply as expanding their revenue stream but also as a source of national pride; multinational conglomerates who no longer define their production or distribution decisions in national terms but seek to identify potentially valuable content and push it into as many markets as possible; and niche distributors who search for distinctive content as a means of attracting upscale consumers and differentiating themselves from stuff already on the market.

Kapur's image of a Chinese Spider-Man may not be too far fetched, after all. As comics and graphic novels have moved into chain bookstores, such as Barnes & Noble and Borders, the shelf space devoted to manga far outstrips the space devoted to American-produced content, reflecting a growing gap in sales figures as well. Seeking to reclaim the market they were losing to Asian competition, Marvel Comics experimented in 2002 with a new Mangaverse title, which reimagined and resituated their stable of superheroes within Japanese genre traditions: Spider-Man is a ninja, the members of the Avengers assemble into a massive robot, and the Hulk turns into a giant green monster.[3] Initially conceived as a one-shot novelty, the Mangaverse proved so successful that Marvel

[3] Rene A. Guzman, "Manga Revises Marvel Heroes," *San Antonio Express-News*, January 23, 2002.

persona, developing a distinctive female style for Michelle Yeoh, and bringing Asian-style fighting to global cinema via *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000).[27] The films were shot in Australia, and the directors drew on local talent, such as Baz Luhrmann's longtime costume designer Kym Barrett. The cast was emphatically multiracial, making use of African American, Hispanic, South Asian, southern European, and aboriginal performers to create a Zion that is predominantly non-white.

Perhaps most importantly, the Wachowski brothers sought out Japanese and other Asian animators as collaborators on *The Animatrix*. They cite strong influences from manga (Japanese comics) and anime, with Morpheus's red leather chair a homage to *Akira* (1988) and Trinity's jumpsuit coming straight from *Ghost in the Shell* (1995). Arguably, their entire interest in transmedia storytelling can be traced back to this fascination with what anthropologist Mimi Ito has described as Japan's "media mix" culture. On the one hand, the media mix strategy disperses content across broadcast media, portable technologies such as game boys or cell phones, collectibles, and location-based entertainment centers from amusement parks to game arcades. On the other, these franchises depend on hypersociability, that is, they encourage various forms of participation and social interactions between consumers.[28] This media mix strategy has made its way to American shores through series like *Pokémon* (1998) and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* (1998), but operates

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in even more sophisticated forms in more obscure Japanese franchises. In bringing in Japanese animators closely associated with this media mix strategy, the Wachowski brothers found collaborators who understood what they were trying to accomplish.

The Wachowski brothers didn't simply license or subcontract and hope for the best. The brothers personally wrote and directed content for the game, drafted scenarios for some of the animated shorts, and co-wrote a few of the comics. For fans, their personal engagement made these other *Matrix* texts a central part of the "canon." There was nothing fringe about these other media. The filmmakers risked alienating filmgoers by making these elements so central to the unfolding narrative. At the same time, few filmmakers have been so overtly fascinated with the process of collaborative authorship. The *Matrix* Web site provides detailed interviews with every major technical worker, educating fans about their specific contributions. The DVDs, shipped with hours of "the making of" documentaries, again focused on the full range of creative and technical work.

We can see collaborative authorship at work by looking more closely at the three comics stories created by Paul Chadwick, "Déjà Vu," "Let It All Fall Down," and "The Miller's Tale."[29] Chadwick's comics were ultimately so embraced by the Wachowski brothers that Chadwick was asked to help develop plots and dialogue for the online *Matrix* game. Chadwick might at first glance seem an odd choice

launched an entire new production line, Tsunami, which produced manga-style content for the American and global market, mostly working with Asian or Asian American artists.[4] Similarly, Disney's *Kingdom Hearts* (2002) emerged from collaboration with the Japanese game company SquareSoft, the creators of the successful *Final Fantasy* franchise. The game mixes more than one hundred characters from Disney's animated films with the more anime-style protagonists associated with previous SquareSoft titles.[5]

Japan is not the only Asian culture exerting a strong influence over American-made media. DC Comics created *Batman: Hong Kong* (2003), a hardcover prestige-edition graphic novel designed to introduce Western readers to the distinctive style of Chinese comic artist Tony Wong and the *manhua* tradition.[6] Marvel released a series of *Spider-Man: India* comics, timed to correspond with the release of *Spider-Man 2* in India and localized to South Asian tastes.[7] Peter Parker becomes Pavitr Prabhakar, and Green Goblin becomes Rakshasa, a traditional mythological demon. The graphics, which depict Spider-Man leaping over scooters in Mumbai streets and swinging past the Gateway of India, were drawn by Indian comic-book artist Jeevan J. Kang. Marvel calls it "transcreation," one step beyond translation. In creating these books, Marvel acknowledges that their superhero comics have done poorly outside of the

[4] "Tsunami Splash," *Wizard*, March 2003, p. 100.

[5] For more information, see http://www.kingdomhearts.com.

[6] Tony Wong, *Batman: Hong Kong* (New York: DC Comics, 2003); Wendy Siuyi Wong, *Hong Kong Comics: A History of Manhua* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002).

[7] Chidanand Rajghatta, "Spiderman Goes Desi," *Times of India*, June 17, 2004.

Anglo-American world, but there is some chance that the current films are creating an opening to tap that market. Even if the books bomb in India, however, they have generated a great deal of interest among Western comic fans.

We might describe *The Animatrix*, the Mangaverse, and *Spider-Man: India* in terms of corporate hybridity. Hybridity occurs when one cultural space—in this case, a national media industry—absorbs and transforms elements from another; a hybrid work thus exists betwixt and between two cultural traditions while providing a path that can be explored from both directions. Hybridity has often been discussed as a strategy of the dispossessed as they struggle to resist or reshape the flow of Western media into their culture—taking materials imposed from the outside but making them their own.[8] Here, hybridity can be seen as a corporate strategy, one that comes from a position of strength rather than vulnerability or marginality, one that seeks to control rather than contain transcultural consumption.

Christina Klein has examined the distinctly transnational status of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.[9] Its director, Ang Lee, was born in Taiwan but educated in the United States; this was the first film Lee had produced on Chinese soil. Its financing came from a mixture of Japanese and American-based media conglomerates. The film was produced and written by Lee's long-term collaborator,

to work on a major movie franchise. He is a cult comics creator best known for *Concrete* and for his strong commitment to environmentalist politics. Working on the very edges of the superhero genre, Chadwick uses Concrete, a massive stone husk that houses the mind of a former political speech writer, to ask questions about the current social and economic order. In *Think Like a Mountain* (1996), Concrete joins forces with the Earth First! movement that is spiking trees and waging war on the lumber industry to protect an old-growth forest.[30] Chadwick's political commitments are expressed not only through the stories but also through his visual style: he creates full-page spreads that integrate his protagonists into their environments, showing the small creatures that exist all around us, hidden from view but impacted by the choices we make.

Chadwick uses his contributions to the *Matrix* to extend the film's critique of the urban landscape and to foreground the ecological devastation that resulted from the war between the machines and the humans. In "The Miller's Tale," his protagonist, a member of the Zion underground, tries to reclaim the land so that he can harvest wheat and make bread. Risking his life, he travels across the blackened landscape in search of seeds with which he can plant new crops; he grinds the grain to make loaves to feed the resistance movement. Chadwick's miller is ultimately killed, but the comic ends with a beautiful full-page image of the plant life growing over the ruins

[8] For useful overviews on the literature about hybridity, see Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "Globalization as Hybridization," in Michael Featherstone (ed.), *Global Modernities* (New York: Sage, 1995); Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

[9] Christina Klein, "*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*: A Transnational Reading" (work in progress).

we recognize from their appearance in several of the *Matrix* movies. Of all of the comics' artists, Chadwick shows the greatest interest in Zion and its cultural rituals, helping us to understand the kinds of spirituality that emerge from an underground people.[31]

While he builds on elements found in the films, Chadwick finds his own emphasis within the material and explores points of intersection with his own work. The other animators and comic artists more or less do the same, further expanding the range of potential meanings and intertextual connections within the franchise.

The Art of World-Making

The Wachowski brothers built a playground where other artists could experiment and fans could explore. For this to work, the brothers had to envision the world of *The Matrix* with sufficient consistency that each installment is recognizably part of the whole and with enough flexibility that it can be rendered in all of these different styles of representation—from the photorealistic computer animation of *Final Flight of the Osiris* to the blocky graphics of the first *Matrix* Web game. Across those various manifestations of the franchise, there are dozens of recurring motifs, such as the falling green *kanji*, Morpheus's bald head and mirrorshade glasses, the insectlike ships, Neo's hand gestures, or Trinity's acrobatics.[32] No given work will reproduce every ele-

the American James Schamus. The cast included performers drawn from across the Chinese diaspora—Zhang Ziyi (Mainland China), Chan Chen (Taiwan), Chow Yun-Fat (Hong Kong), and Michelle Yeoh (Malaysia). Ang Lee describes *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* as a "combination platter," stressing its borrowings from multiple cultural traditions. James Schamus agrees: "We ended up making an eastern movie for western audiences and in some ways a more western movie for eastern audiences." These examples of corporate hybridity depend on consumers with the kinds of cultural competencies that could originate only in the context of global convergence, requiring not simply knowledge of Asian popular culture but an understanding of its similarities and differences with parallel traditions in the West.

While *The Animatrix* can be read, alongside *Spider-Man: India*, as an example of "transcreation," *The Matrix* feature films simply added various multinational and multicultural references largely invisible to Western consumers but designed to give people in many different parts of the world toeholds within the franchise. Some elements may move into the foreground or the background depending on the local competencies of media consumers. One of my graduate students, for example, shared with me this example: "Many friends in India told me about how discussions of the South Asian family in *Revolutions* ended up becoming discussions about labor migration to the U.S., the position of nonwhites in the high-tech software industry, outsourcing, etc." In Japan, where the tradition of "cosplay" (or costume play) is deeply rooted in fan cultures, and where fans of a particular show might all rally someplace like

Fig. 3.2. Japanese fans gather in Osaka to reenact scenes from *The Matrix Reloaded*.

Tokyo's Yoyogi Park on a Sunday afternoon, all dressed up and ready to play, there have been a series of *Matrix* reenactments (fig. 3.2). Hundreds of local fans arrive in costume and systematically stage key moments from the movies as a kind of participatory public spectacle.[10] These reenactments in effect localize the content by reading it through nationally specific fan practices.

That said, the political economy of media convergence does not map symmetrically around the world; audiences outside "developed" economies often have access only to the films and, in some cases, only to pirated copies that may have scenes missing. Even in more developed economies, because they tap different distribution circuits or because the rights may be acquired by different companies or simply because of different corporate goals and strategies, the parts may move separately and in different sequences—the games or comics following or preceding the films themselves. As information spreads from the film into other media, it creates

[10] Tobias C. Van Veen, "Matrix Multitudes in Japan: Reality Bleed or Corporate Performance?" *Hallucinations and Antics*, June 27, 2003, http://www.quadrantcrossing.org/blog/C1692035385/E1656161427/.

ment, but each must use enough that we recognize at a glance that these works belong to the same fictional realm. Consider one of the posters created for the *Matrix* Web page: an agent dressed in black is approaching a bullet-shattered phone booth, his gun in hand, while in the foreground the telephone dangles off its hook. Which of these elements is exclusive to *The Matrix*? Yet, anyone familiar with the franchise can construct the narrative sequence from which this image must have been taken.

More and more, storytelling has become the art of world building, as artists create compelling environments that cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium. The world is bigger than the film, bigger even than the franchise—since fan speculations and elaborations also expand the world in a variety of directions. As an experienced screenwriter told me, "When I first started, you would pitch a story because without a good story, you didn't really have a film. Later, once sequels started to take off, you pitched a character because a good character could support multiple stories. And now, you pitch a world because a world can support multiple characters and multiple stories across multiple media." Different franchises follow their own logic: some, such as the *X-Men* (2000) movies, develop the world in their first installment and then allow the sequels to unfold different stories set within that world; others, such as the *Alien* (1979) films or George Romero's *Living Dead* (1968) cycle, intro-

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World-making follows its own market logic, at a time when filmmakers are as much in the business of creating licensed goods as they are in telling stories. Each truly interesting element can potentially yield its own product lines, as George Lucas discovered when he created more and more toys based on the secondary characters in his movies. One of them, Boba Fett, took on a life of its own, in part through children's play.[33] Boba Fett eventually became the protagonist of his own novels and games and played a much larger role in the later films. Adding too much information, however, carries its own risks: fans had long debated whether Boba Fett could actually be a woman underneath the helmet, since we never actually got to see the character's face or hear its voice. But as Lucas fleshed out the character, he also closed down those possibilities, preempting important lines of fan speculation even as he added information that might sustain new fantasies.

As the art of world-making becomes more advanced, art direction takes on a more central role in the conception of franchises. A director such as Tim Burton developed a reputation less as a storyteller (his films often are ramshackle constructions) than as a cultural geographer, cramming every shot with evocative details. The plot and the performances in *Planet of the Apes* (2001), for example, disappointed more or less everyone, yet every shot rewards close attention as details add to our un-derstanding of the society the apes have created; a hard-core fan studies how they dress, how they designed their buildings, what artifacts they use, how they move, what their music sounds like, and so forth. Such a work becomes more rewarding when we watch it on DVD, stopping and starting

inequalities of participation within the franchise. *The Matrix* may be a global cult phenomenon but it is experienced differently in each country around the world.

Dawson's Desktop

Chris Pike was one of the media industry folks who was inspired by what the Haxans had created with *The Blair Witch Project*. Pike was part of a team working at Sony trying to explore new ways to exploit the Web in promoting television series. What they came up with was Dawson's Desktop, a Web site that modeled the computer files of *Dawson's Creek*'s (1998) title character, allowing visitors to read his e-mail to the other characters, sneak a peak at his journal, his course papers, his screenplay drafts, and, for the most intrusive visitor, even to dig around in his trash bin. The site was updated each day, filling in the gaps between the aired episodes. At its peak popularity, the site was drawing 25 million page views per week. As Pike explained,

> We considered our episodes to be a seven day arc starting one minute after the show ended. . . . Inevitably *Dawson's Creek* would end on a cliffhanger of some kind, we would expand on it,

tackle it, address some of the elements fans would be calling each other and discussing. We wanted to grab that energy right after the show and propel us through the rest of the week. At 9:01, an e-mail or an instant message would start to happen. It would take on the life of a real desktop. E-mail would come in at irregularly scheduled times. Through the middle of the week we would extend a long storyline which was being developed across the season or do some online exclusive arcs which would give us more credibility that as a teen, online, he would go to websites and have chat buddies who may or may not be represented on the weekly show but which will give the character a three dimensional feel. And then as we approached each episode, a day or two before, it was our time to enflame the viewership and start giving a few more clues as to what was about to happen. . . . We had to give all of the clues without giving away the actual events. Our job was to whet the appetites.

Part of what makes a site like Dawson's Desktop possible has been a shift in the ways narratives operate in American television. In the 1960s, most episodes of most prime-time shows were totally self-contained, introducing a temporary crisis in the life of their protagonists, but having to end more or less as they began. Anyone who grew up during that era knew that Gilligan and the other castaways were never going to get off the island no matter how vivid the promise of rescue seemed at the first commercial break. By the 1970s and 1980s, television producers such as Stephen Bochco (*Hill Street Blues*, 1981) were pushing for the chance to expand the narrative complexity of episodic television and facing some resistance from network executives who were not certain people would remember what had

to absorb the background. Some fans trace these tendencies back to *Blade Runner* (1982), where urbanologist Syd Mead was asked to construct the future metropolis on the recognizable foundations of existing Los Angeles. These visions could be fully appreciated only by reading through the coffee-table books that accompany the release of such films and provide commentary on costume design and art direction decisions.

New-media theorist Janet Murray has written of the "encyclopedic capacity" of digital media, which she thinks will lead to new narrative forms as audiences seek information beyond the limits of the individual story.[34] She compares this process of world-making in games or cinema to Faulkner, whose novels and short stories added together to flesh out the life and times of a fictional county in Mississippi. To make these worlds seem even more real, she argues, storytellers and readers begin to create "contextualizing devices —color-coded paths, time lines, family trees, maps, clocks, calendars, and so on."[35] Such devices "enable the viewer to grasp the dense psychological and cultural spaces [represented by modern stories] without becoming disoriented."[36] The animated films, the game, and the comics function in a similar way for *The Matrix*, adding information and fleshing out parts of the world so that the whole becomes more convincing and more comprehensible.

Mahiro Maeda's "The Second Renaissance" (2003), for example, is a richly detailed, rapid-paced chronicle that takes us

from the present moment
machine rule that opens th
movie. The animated short
documentary produced by
telligence to explain the eve
machines' triumph over
"The Second Renaissance'
timeline for the *Matrix* uni
context for events such
B116ER, the first machine t
the Million Machine Ma
"darkening of the skies"
tioned in other *Matrix* te
explains,

> In Part One, we see hur
> bots as objects, while in
> relationship between hur
> robot switches, as huma
> by the machines. I enjoy
> how the two sides change
> to show the broadness
> and how the robots we
> of the background of life
> treated as mere objects
> ings. . . . In exploring
> *The Matrix*, I wanted to s

To shape our respons
of human authorities c
chines, Maeda tapped th
twentieth-century civil
the machines throwing
the treads of tanks in
ananmen Square or dep
rolling over mass grav
bots in a nod toward A

"The Second Renai
much of the historical