The Posthumanist Subject in the Theory *Matrix*[1]

Posthumanism and the Ends of Man

> … dès lors que l'humain n'est plus le fin mot de l'histoire…[2]

These are hard times for (cultural) theory, (cultural) criticism and cultural studies.[3] But these are also the times in which the call for "new" theory, for a "renewal" of theory, is becoming more and more urgent, for example with the call for "new humanities" (Derrida, in Cohen, 2001), "new theory",[4] or various calls for "post-theory" and, most recently, the call for "posthumanist theory," to which this volume is we hope at least partially responding. Underlying this shift towards posthumanism in theory and posthumanity in social practice (what we referred to as "posthumanization") is the feeling that something clearly is happening, an event of a "humanitarian" scale which has maybe

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[1] Earlier and shorter versions of this chapter have appeared in Miriam Diocaretz and Stefan Herbrechter, eds., *The* Matrix *in Theory*, *Critical Studies* 29, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006, and in *Polygraph* 17 (2005).

[2] Jean Baudrillard, *Le Paroxyste indifferent – entretiens avec Philippe Petit* (Paris: Grasset, 1997), 15: "…as soon as the human is no longer the last and finest word of history…" All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are ours.

[3] It is interesting to note that all three of the main protagonists-thinkers in this chapter's fighting arena of "post(humanist)-theory" – Alain Badiou, Jean Baudrillard and Jacques Derrida – have questioned either theory's or cultural studies' "seriousness" in some form or other – and hence, implicitly, their capacity to be "critical." For Badiou, cultural studies, cultural criticism, cultural analysis etc., as it is being practiced in Britain and the US, would probably be nothing more than mere description of the social realm of "opinion" as opposed to philosophy whose task is to elaborate the nexus between event, situation, subject and truth. This is hinted at in Badiou's *Ethics* (Badiou, 2001: 61) when he says: "For whom is a truth absent? For the human animal as such, absorbed in the pursuit of his interests, there is no truth, only opinions." Together with Badiou's attack on identity politics, cultural relativism, postmodernism and constructivism, a lot of theory, cultural criticism and cultural studies, as they are practiced today, cannot help but feel addressed. Derrida, on the other hand, with his insider knowledge of the American theory and cultural studies scene, referred to cultural studies as precisely the kind of model that the "new humanities" should avoid: "These Humanities to come will cross disciplinary borders without, all the same, dissolving the specificity of each discipline into what is called, often in a very confused way, interdisciplinarity or into what is lumped with another good-for-everything concept, 'cultural studies'." (Derrida, in Cohen, 2001: 50).

[4] See for example the special issue of *Angelaki*, 4: 2 (1999) edited by John Armitage, "Machinic Modulations – New Cultural Theory and Technopolitics", in which Armitage argues for a "new theory" as "recombinant cultural theory of technology" (1-2).

already occurred, and which makes the need to think about and address this "posting" of humanity, the human and humanism an urgent task. The possibility of an evolution that might overcome and replace the "human" – especially through a scenario where humanity contributes to the development and installation of its own technological successor by blindly succumbing to the cultural and economic dynamic of techno-scientific capitalism[5] – is by now no longer pure "science fiction" or one occurring in "virtual reality". Its reality, in many domains, including the moral debate about genetic engineering, issues of surveillance ("Big Brother") and global terrorism, environmental sustainability, the next stage of "star wars" programmes and potential extraplanetary threats, etc., seems now so pressing that, from all sides, including (former) neoconservative "thinktanks" like Francis Fukuyama for example, the calls for restrictive and protective legislation in the new technological fields (bio, cogno, info, nano) can be heard in order to avert the ever more likely prospect of a technology-induced human apocalypse and attack on "human nature".[6] This new stage in apocalyptism, however, is only the flipside of the euphoric spectrum of discourses celebrating the coming of our "posthuman" condition as a kind of neocolonial and the ultimate (neo)imperialist project:

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[5] As rather emblematic of the "popular" posthumanism developed from this scenario see Jean-Michel Truong (2001) *Totalement Inhumaine*, Paris: Seuil. As Truong points out: "Whether or not it pleases the so-called representative of power, during humanity evolution continues" (12). This next evolutionary step, facilitated by technologies that lead to a separation between mind and body (20), cyborgisation intensifies (see e.g. Donna Haraway's work) and a posthuman horizon of an "enormous and *totally inhuman* hope" (26) opens up towards what Truong and others laconically call "the Successor".

[6] See Fukuyama's *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (London: Profile, 2002) and the whole controversial discussion it started. Bryan Appleyard, Fukuyama's (very positive) reviewer in *TLS* (May 17 2002, 13-14), points out that the science argument invalidates Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis because as long as there is techno-scientific progress liberal democracy seems far from being an inevitability. It is interesting that Badiou's critique of culturalism and his return to a political, philosophical and ethical universalism of a strong, "heroic" and "immortal" human subjectivity is in fact, in this context, very close to Fukuyama's attack on what he calls the "casual academic darwinians" (read cultural relativists/constructionists/cultural studies advocates who "attempt to reduce our humanity to an increasingly implausible and culturally neutral calculus") and the quite shameless liberal humanist reaction, reclaiming some human "essence" in the face of a threatening technological "other".

namely pushing our bodily and mental limits to the edge of virtuality and cyberspace.[7] The kind of "critical" posthumanism we are proposing here, therefore, while keeping in check the level of anxiety and moral panic, inevitably has to tackle the current desire for a posthuman ontology and epistemology. Strategically, it has to position itself as a reminder and defender of what this desire wants to obliterate by repressing it: the body and the subject. While the question of the posthuman body will be dealt with separately, the focus of this chapter will be on a critical discussion of posthuman subjectivity.

In respect to the question of (posthuman) subjectivity, however, the post-1968 generation of thinkers, including virtually all the "fathers" and "mothers" of cultural theory (as practiced in the Anglo-American academic context today) will rightly ask, what is so "new" about the posthuman spectre? "Man" had been declared as good as dead (or at least as "transitory") as early as 1966 by Michel Foucault (in *Les Mots et les choses*), and before him there were of course Nietzsche, Darwin, Freud and Heidegger, who are all in their way already "posthumanist" thinkers *avant-la-lettre*. While Foucault's turn against "man" led to a renewed interest in the body, modern "technologies of the self" and the questions of "biopower" and "biopolitics" which have been inspiring so many cultural analysts, many contemporary posthumanists seem all too eager to transcend the notions of body and subject altogether.

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[7] Compare for example one of many "transhumanist" declarations available on the most "posthuman" of places, the internet, which states: "We foresee the feasibility of redesigning the human condition… We seek personal growth beyond our current biological limitations… Transhumanism advocates the well-being of all sentience (whether in artificial intellects, humans, non-human animals, or possible extraterrestrial species) and encompasses many principles of secular humanims… (http://transhumanism.org/index.php/ WTA/declaration, 4-12-06). Against both this utopian transhumanism and the reactionary humanist essentialism (without, however, addressing humanist "speciesism), Michel Serres, restates that "the virtual is the very flesh of the human. A cow, however, is not in the virtual" (*Le Monde*, Tuesday 19 June 2002: 16). Serres, being a philosopher of science, rather sees an explanation in a "new kind of humanism" in the fact that science has become a streamlike "grand narrative" accessible to all. It is unclear, however, how this position will escape even the most naïve forms of technological determinism.

To take just one, emblematic, example of theory's "posthumanism *avant-la-lettre*": Derrida's early essay "The Ends of Man"[8] reveals the inevitably metaphysical (i.e. onto-theological) nature of humanism and exposes the "double-bind" of the "posting" process in its (double) desire for "end/ends" (i.e. teleology and finality). Derrida, in this text, already hints at the possibility of "posthumanist" (i.e. no-longer-anthropocentric) humanities-to-come:

What is difficult to think today is an end of man which would not be organized by a dialiectics of truth and negativity, an end of man which would not be a teleology in the first person plural. (121)

It also has never been a secret that the Derridean notions of writing and *différance* already inject humanity's technological "other" into its (unsurpassable) metaphysical core of the "subject" (see "Freud and the Scene of Writing, in Writing and Difference, 226-227).

From a post-68-theory point of view, there must thus be a certain eerieness in the contemporary talk of the posthuman. Something like a moment *déjà vu* which requires a return to that moment of recognition when "man" seemed possible in his finitude, as Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe pointed out in their introduction to *Les Fins de l'homme – à partir du travail de Jacques Derrida* (Galilée, 1981: 13): "the onto-theology of the Subject is tipping over into an analyis of finitude". Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, by targeting humanism's universalism based on a transcendental notion of the subject, anticipate current calls not only for the deconstruction of humanism but also for a transformation of the humanities (see conslusion).

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[8] Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982, pp. 109-136.

While the attitudes towards the multiplicity of the situation into which the supposed "posthuman event" has erupted and changed the structure of our situation seem multiple, in fact, they have barely changed since the first waves of "anti-humanism" swept France, the place of theory's lost origin. In 1979, Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, organisers of the Colloque de Cerisy, "Les Fins de l'homme", described the state of "the humanities" and the question of man in the following way:

> In between a "disappearance of man"… a general critique of humanism… and all the shameful, naïve and reactive humanisms that so many discourses fall back on all the same either for want of anything better or simply out of pique, it is possible that the question of "man" demands to be posed today anew, in philosophical, as well as literary, ethical and political terms, precisely as a question of the end. (20).

From a theoretical standpoint therefore, very little indeed has changed in the past twenty years. The questions outlined have been preoccupying cultural theory ever since and if anything, a lot of theory that describes itself as either "new this" or "post-that", "posthumanism" might in fact constitute a step backwards in terms of ontological thinking. It seems that a lot of ("uncritical" – in the sense of ignorant of theory's critical anti-humanist tradition) posthumanist theory has forgotten the critique of "destination" that *Les Fins de l'homme*, following Derrida and the whole "project" of deconstruction, posed as a powerful question. Most posthumanist approaches seem to have returned to a question about the "essence" of man: "qu'est-ce que l'homme?" Yet Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe and many others declared almost thirty years ago that the "real" question, or the question of the humanist "real", and thus the only one that is capable of tackling humanist

anthropocentrism, is "qui est l'homme?" Theory's task *vis-à-vis* the persistence of humanism (including in its many posthumanist forms) must still be to evaluate the state of this question, and the state of the forgetting of this question:

> Who is man?... It is precisely this question that the present epoch has forgotten. That is to say the epoch of anthropology's total dominance (practice included), busy continuing its blind exploitation of the "What is man?", which, as we are beginning to realize, is the most extreme advancement of the age of technics. For anthropology always knows in advance what, fundamentally, is the matter with man… and it is in the name of this prior identification that it achieves the extreme deidentification, or rather, general (almost generic) defiguration of man. (21)

As far as "anthropology" is concerned, cultural studies is of course particularly vulnerable, with its structural anthropocentrism and humanist culturalism. The question of "culture" is always accompanied by another, rarely articultated one, namely who or what is (a) culture for? Even the most radical constructivist and antiessentialist cultural analysis will have a hard time tackling the "real" that the culturalist model necessarily represses.[9] What is the end of culture? Is "man" culture's only addressee? Or are indeed other (non-human, e.g. animals or machines) among its possible receivers? Is culture the "letter" that humanism sends itself as its own destination and destiny? In this sense, posthumanism, as long as it remains culturalist-constructivist-anthropological, remains part of the humanist "problem" rather than being its solution. As is well known, a letter

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[9] CF. Catherine Belsey, *Culture and the Real*, London: Routledge, 2004.

always and at the same time never arrives at its destination (namely "intact").[10] There is always a doubling of the letter, its two "trajectories" that are constitutive of the very structure of "sending": the instance of subjectivation through interpellation, address and recognition, and the constant threat of (mis)identification, (dis)appropriation and *différance* (difference and deferral). It seems therefore all the more curious that, at the moment when "theory" – always a mixed blessing – is pushing for a further (posthumanist) "decentering" of the "subject", the question about the "ends of man" is transposed onto a global scale; or, why is it that precisely when there is for the first time, thanks to the technologies of virtualisation and telecommunication something like "humanity" (a global human community, the cosmopolitan dream) seems conceivable or even realisable, posthumanity and "global terror" arrive on the stage? This seems to be the main question that a theoretically informed cultural criticism has to ask the "posthuman". A critical posthumanism must (at least also) ask: has humanism somehow prevented "us" from achieving our human potential? Or, have we ever been "human" (enough)?

Following Bruno Latour's well-known statement, "We have never been modern", this would mean that posthumanism needs to investigate the current realization of the two movements of "purification" (i.e. the incomplete, "essentialist", question of "what does it mean to be human?") and "hybridization" (i.e. the ongoing cyborgisation of human and non-human through various technologies). In order to retain a critical stance these two movements need to be thought anew in a "nonmodern" (i.e. neither modern nor indeed postmodern) way, according to Latour (1991: 10-11): "a nonmodern is anyone who takes

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[10] At least since the epic exchange between Derrida and Lacan about Poe's "The Purloined Letter" and Lacan's famous seminar on it; collected in John P. Muller and William J. Richardson, eds., *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida, and Psychoanalytic Reading*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.

simultaneously into account the moderns' Constitution and the populations of hybrids that that Constitution rejects and allows to proliferate" (47).

This postulates indeed a very similar task for thinking (or theory) as the one advocated by Jean-François Lyotard in "Rewriting Modernity" (*The Inhuman*, Polity, 1991), who explains the ambiguity of the "re" in "rewriting" as: "a return to the starting point, to a beginning that is supposed to be exempt from any prejudice because it is imagined that prejudices result solely from the stocking up and tradition of judgments that were previously held to be true without having reconsidered them…" (26), and secondly: "the 're' in no way signifies a return to the beginning but rather what Freud called a 'working through', *Durcharbeitung*, i.e. a working attached to a thought of what is constitutively hidden from us in the event and the meaning of the event, hidden not merely by past prejudice, but also by those dimensions of the future marked by the pro-ject, the pro-grammed, pro-spectives, and even by the pro-position and the pro-posal to psychoanalyze" (26).

Theory's current task – or what we referred to as "critical posthumanism" – would therefore have to be at once a perlaboration of the traumatic "event" (i.e. how we became posthuman – N. Katherine Hayles's question) which is itself the (re)writing of (the truth of) this event. While this formulation seems close to a project that underpins Alain Badiou's work with its focus on how a subject is "created" by an event which gives rise to the "truth" and the political agency of that subject, the posthuman as a new beginning, the beginning of something "new", the embracing of some radically other, also resembles a Derridean approach. Keeping these two movements in mind, theory must ask again the question of the (posthuman) subject.

"Who comes after the subject?" – this question equally carries some theoretical baggage, of course. It was famously posed, once again by Jean-Luc Nancy, in 1986 (Eduardo Cadava, ed. 1991, *Who comes after the Subject?* London: Routledge). This event marks a turning point in the thinking of the subject, the beginning of a kind of "post-subjectivity" of which Badiou's work may be the clearest example, and which understands the "end of the humanist, metaphysical subject" as the arrival of "the some *one*, of the singular existent that the subject announces, promises, and at the same time conceals" (4), as the beginning of the "singular" one "less present to *itself* than present *to* a history, an event, a community, an oeuvre, or another 'subject'" (5). Badiou's essay, "On a Finally Objectless Subject", figures prominently among these reclaimings of an *evenemental* concept of the subject.

There seems therefore a real danger of anachronism in theory's tendency to see posthumanism merely as its "natural" next step. Instead – and this would be our understanding of a "project" for "critical posthumanism" – theory has to critically engage with posthumanist texts, phenomena, practices etc. and their proposed transformations or indeed forgetting of the body, on the one hand, and of the subject, on the other. This cannot be achieved if, at the same time, there is no serious rethinking of the "subject of theory" as well. The moment of "recognition", the arrival of the subject, is also in many ways the beginning of theory as it appeared in the Anglo-American academy at a specific time and a specific institutional and cultural context. What would it mean to see theory's return to the subject as "apotheosis" – namely as its (own) dissolution into a finally "subjectless" theory (i.e. all too human, all too idealist and uncritical versions of

posthumanism)? Can posthumanism be "rescued" by theory, appropriated as a chance of a critical return of and to the subject, namely as a project or process?[11]

This corresponds to Neil Badmington's claim that the turn from anti-humanism to posthumanism is regrettably (but also interestingly) dominated by a focus on technoculture (*Textual Practice* 16.1 (2002): 188). One could say that the often too simplistic technological determinism at work in many posthumanist readings is "undertheorised" in the sense of a forgetting of the complexity of humanism itself on the one hand, and theory's established work on the critique of the "liberal humanist subject" on the other. Instead, Badmington argues that (maybe in addition to the truly innovative work by some posthumanist critics) posthumanism can also be read, in deconstructive terms, as humanism's structural "other": a return of the (repressed and/or fetishised) "inhuman" which has been haunting its categories from its very conception. Theory's relation to posthumanism thus becomes similar to Lyotard's attitude to the postmodern – a rewriting modernity (or humanism) and claiming that we have "always already" been postmodern (or posthuman).[12]

Many posthumanisms also forget that by either renouncing or simply reinscribing subjectivity into the posthuman "condition" they are turning a blind eye to the very ambiguity of the subject's "subjectivization", or the paradox of the liberal humanist subject as such. ("British") Poststructuralism as developed and understood by Catherine

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[11] Examples of this approach can be found in Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) and R.L. Rutsky, *High Technē* (Mineapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) and Elaine L. Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture*, Manchester: MUP, 2002.

[12] See also Neil Badmington's "Pod Alighty!; or, humanism, posthumanism, and the strange case of Invasion of the Body Snatchers", *Textual Practice* 15: 1 (2001), 5-22; and his "Inroduction: Approaching Posthumanism" in Badmington, ed., *Posthumanism, Readers in Cultural Criticism*, Houndmills: Palgrave, 2000, 1-10.

Belsey, Antony Easthope and others (and thus a large part of what is usually referred to as "theory"), precisely addresses this ideological "fix" (through a combination of Althusser, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault, Kristeva, Bhabha and Derrida). The idea that individual agency in terms of freedom and choice could be safely located within an autonomous and "self-identical", unitary subject, who is also the point of origin for the production of meaning, is at once untenable *and* the default position of everything "anthropological", and is thus both *telos* and project of the traditional humanities. As an attack on liberal humanist "common sense", theory has therefore always been "posthumanist", but without ever being lured into believing that humanism can simply be "overcome". Instead theory continues to deconstruct the strange combination of empiricism, idealism and realism which constitutes liberal humanism, according to Catherine Belsey:

[C]ommon sense urges that 'man' is the origin and source of meaning, of action and of history (*humanism*). Our concepts and our knowledge are held to be the product of experience (*empiricism*), and this experience is interpreted by the mind, reason or thought, the property of a transcendent human nature whose essence is the attribute of each individual (*idealism*). These propositions… constitute the basis of a practice of reading which assumes… that literature [and arguably all "signifying practices"] reflects the reality of experience as it is perceived by one (especially gifted) individual, who expresses it in a discourse which enables other individuals to recognize it as true [*realism*] (Belsey, 1980: 7)

Liberal humanist "common sense" can still be seen to dominate the public sphere, regardless of how posthuman we may or may not have become (e.g. from a purely

technological or technocultural point of view), which makes the return to unreflected humanism more than likely, at the slightest hint of a crisis.[13]

Given this "unsurpassability" of the subject (of theory), however, it is not surprising that theory has become ever more speculative and thus increasingly has been making incursions into the territory of speculative (and science) fiction.[14] This was helped by psychoanalytic theory, on the one hand,[15] and postmodern "temporality" on the other. What postmodern and psychoanalytic theory and speculative fiction share is the strange temporality of the "future anterior", the future (im)perfect, the traumatic attitude to the present, always after the event, after the other, etc. As we will argue below, theory, the thinking of the "event" and of the (postmodern and posthuman) subject have a rather strong affinity with contemporary science fiction which, in turn, is an important source of representations of the posthuman within contemporary cultural imaginaries. The theorist who has been exploring this problematic nexus is, of course, Jean Baudrillard. While Badiou may be criticised for his somewhat utopian call for an "objectless" subject, Baudrillard seems to be obsessed with the psychotic theory-fiction of a "subjectless" object. Theory for Baudrillard is "paroxystic" – it takes place "just before the end", i.e. with the end firmly in sight and, what is more, it is joyfully nihilistic about it (its end and the end in general).[16] Knowing that without "fatal strategy" the end will never arrive,

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[13] For a good summary of this argument in the context of theory's relation to literature and cultural studies see Patrick Fuery and Nick Mansfield, *Cultural Studies and the New Humanities: Concepts and Controversies*, Oxford: OUP, 1997, chapter 1 ("Post-Humanism").

[14] As Hayles points out: "The literary texts often reveal, as scientific work cannot, the complex cultural, social, and representational issues tied up with conceptual shifts and technological innovations" (How We Became Posthuman, 24); and again (p. 247): "questions about the posthuman become increasingly urgent. Nowhere are these questions explored more passionately than in contemporary speculative fiction."

[15] See for example Maud Mannoni, *La Théorie comme fiction: Freud, Groddeck, Winnicott, Lacan*, Paris: Seuil, 1979.

[16] Cf. Jean Baudrillard's "I am a nihilist" in *Simulacra and Simulations*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994, 160.

Baudrillard's is a kind of inverted ascesis that would like to think from the position of the "inhuman".[17] The only true "radical" thought possible in the current state of capitalism-*cum*-media induced hyperreality and cultural exhaustion, according to Baudrillard, is theoretical "terrorism":

Emphasise the false transparency of the world in order to spread a terrorist confusion in it, the seeds or viruses of a radical illusion, that is to say a radical disillusion of the real. Viral thought, pernicious, corrupting meaning, accomplice of an erotic perception of the reality disorder.[18]

Thinking, in Baudrillard's understanding, itself becomes "demonic" and the "murder weapon" [*l'arme du crime*] (*Paroxyste*, 66-67). Baudrillard's version of post-theory, paroxystic theory in the state of "hypertelia" (of what goes further than its own end [*Simulacra and Simulations*, 161]), or, indeed, "fatal theory" working towards the "principle of evil" – the only theory that would still have consequences, is a theory that no longer desires its own object,[19] but rather takes its starting point from the object and the subject's "seduction" by the object: "What in the object is irreducible to the subject"

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[17] Cf. Baudrillard, *Le Paroxyste indifferent*, Paris: Grasset, 1997, pp. 50-51: "One has to accept one's part of the inhuman, of an inhuman form that we no longer even wish to accept or recognize today, and which is why, because of the erasure of this necessary relation between the human and the inhuman, we fall into total dehumanisation… The thought of the human can only come from elsewhere not from himself. The inhuman is his only witness. When the human wants to define, precisely through excluding the inhuman, he becomes ridiculous." This means, however, that, ultimately, Baudrillard is not vaccinated against a return to humanism proper. His version of posthumanism seems far less radical than the kind advocated by many techno-culturalists: "Thought has to play a catastrophic role and itself has to be an element of catastrophe, of provocation, in a world which absolutely wants to purge and exterminate death and negativity. But at the same time it has to remain humanist, mindful of the human, and to achieve this it has to restablish the reversibility of good and evil, of the human and the inhuman." (*Mots de passe*, Paris: Pauvert, 107).

[18] Jean Baudrillard, *La Pensée radicale*, Paris: Sens&Tonka, 2001, 26; see also "Theoretical violence not truth is the only resource left to us", Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*, 163, which sets him in clear opposition to Badiou (see below). Cf. also *Simulacre et simulation*, p. 129 for the necessarily "parodic" nature that theory has to embrace in order to become a "fatal strategy".

[19] Which is similar to science, cf. *Simulacra and Simulation*, pp. 7-8: "In any case, the logical evolution of a science is to distance itself increasingly from its object, until it dispenses with it entirely : its autonomy is only rendered even more fantastic – it attains its pure form."

(*Paroxyste*, 181). Since the object symbolises the "real world" but is, at the same time, effaced by the sign, the object world develops an "uncanny strangeness" (*Mots de passe*, 16), so much so that "[w]e are in an aleatory world, a world where there is no longer a subject and an object harmoniously distributed within the register of knowledge" (*Mots de passe*, 59). In such a "virtualised" world it is therefore the "subjectless" object which becomes the source of "seduction":

Virtuality only gets close to happiness because it surreptitiously withdraws all reference to things. It gives you everything but subtly, at the same time, it steals everything from you. The subject is perfectly realised in it, and it automatically becomes an object, and suddenly there is panic.[20]

Only seduction, for Baudrillard, is "fatal" and it must therefore coincide with the workings of (posthuman) theory: "It is the effect of a sovereign object which re-creates within us the original disturbance and seeks to surprise us. Fatality in turn is seductive, like the discovery of an unknown rule of the game… What is left then but to pass over to the side of the object, to its affected and eccentric effects, to its fatal effects (fatality is merely the absolute freedom of effects)? Semiorrhage" ("Towards a Principle of Evil", in Docherty, 360-61).

The purpose of this brief overview of contemporary posthumanism's attitude to subjectivity has been to evaluate the chances for critical and cultural theory to (re)constitute a critical posthumanist practice of reading cultural "texts". The kind of posthumanist cultural criticism we have in mind would be a projection of the critique of the subject and the political meaning of "its" texts into "posthuman" times. This is why,

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[20] Baudrillard, *Écran total*, Paris: Galilée, 1997, 203. See also "Toward a Principle of Evil", in Docherty, 355: "The subject's power derives from a promise of fulfillment, whereas the realm of the object is characterized by what is fulfilled, and for that reason it is a realm we cannot escape."

in the following section, we will focus in more detail on the role of Alain Badiou's work in the "posthumanization" process of theory.

Post-Theory and Posthumanism

> Il arrive que quelque chose arrive. Que quelque chose nous arrive. Et ces points d'exception, dont toute vérité procède, l'art a pour mission de les garder, de les faire briller, de les détenir, stellaires, dans le tissu reconstitué de notre patience.[21]

Alain Badiou's work has probably been more or less "strategically" introduced into the current Anglo-American theory context in the hope to produce some form of political "renewal" and a return to political activism of some form through reengaging with notions of "truth" and "event", and thus serve as an antidote to what, for (post)Marxist tastes, has become a rather stale combination of postmodern cultural constructivism and truth relativism underpinned by a deconstructionist ethics of alterity now serving neoconservative and neoliberal purposes. Since this desire to repoliticise the subject and its historical-materialist "scene" occurs within the social and cultural transformation we referred to as "posthumanisation", however, we would like to "test" the underlying assumptions of this "forward" move by taking Badiou to the movies -- to watch some science fiction, to be precise. However, in doing this, we are reassured by Badiou himself and his admirable study of Samuel Beckett's work (quoted above) where he explains that art (and therefore we assume all creative cultural signifying practices) is one of the four

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[21] Alain Badiou, *Beckett – l'increvable désir* (Paris: Hachette, 1995), 79: "It so happens that something arrives. That something happens and arrives to us. It is the mission of art to protect, to let shine forth, starlike, these exceptional situations, out of which every truth emerges, and keep them in the reconstructed tissue of our patience."

possible "truth-procedures" (the other three being politics, science and love) through which a (political and revolutionary) subject (of truth) can "arrive".[22]

Something or someone, it is hoped, will arrive in and for Badiou's work through its introduction within theory at the time of posthumanism. A translation, here and now, of Badiou's political thinking – a thinking that wants to dissolve any break or gap between theory and practice – cannot be a disinterested one. There is no such thing as disinterested translation, or translation without desire. Our concern, as stated above, rests with the survival of theory as critical practice within the current post-theoretical and posthumanist climate, through a transformation into "critical posthumanism". This would be a reversal from the current state of affairs in which rather than something happening through theory, something is happening to theory – the "subject" of theory seems to have shifted its focus towards the "object" of theory (which could serve as one way of understanding "post-theory"). What preoccupies us in this volume, instead, is a combination of several interests: in the context of the latest wave of apocalyptism about theory, that is the increasing intensity of the talk about "post-theory", what can be done to defend the successes of theory against a simplistic antitheoretical backlash on the one hand and a post-theoretical desire to "outdo" theory by some kind of simple "linear" succession and repression, on the other. The current candidate for this 'straightforward' succession is, if a certain pitch is to be believed, "posthumanism". Our standpoint,

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[22] Badiou has not failed to express himself on *The Matrix*, cf. Alain Badiou *et al.*, *Matrix – machine philosophique* (Paris: Ellipses, 2003), 120-129. Badiou here produces a sketch of a philosophical analysis of David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* (1999), Vincenzo Natali's *Cube* (1999) and *The Matrix*. Badiou ends by stating that for him *The Matrix* is, from a philosophical point of view, the strongest of these three films because it remains closest to Plato. Its main question is: "what is a subject who fights its enslavement by an appearance which is itself a subjectivated form of enslavement to biology?" (125).

however, will be to defend theory against both reaction and succession, while claiming instead that we have not yet been theoretical enough.

The re-theoreticisation of theory – for theory to become a subject again – it has to shake off the sclerosis that has befallen some aspects of its practice in its current, institutionalised form. Theory, itself a strange result of translation and politics, needs to return critically upon itself and rethink its relation to current cultural practice. It is around the notion of the subject that theory first established itself in the Anglo-American world, first in English and other literature departments and then in cultural studies, and it is therefore a re-membering of the subject that should inform any "post-theoretical" re-writing of critical practice.[23] The redefinition of theory and practice, the reconnection with a certain "radical" and speculative thinking needs to open up hardened positions within theory and thus reconnect with changing "radical" critical practices (some of the most interesting being "posthumanist" in aspiration).

Our project in returning to a political thinking about the subject, aided by the philosophical model provided by Alain Badiou (and others), and without rejecting previous insights about the necessary ambiguity of the subject as the "location" of both agency and subjectivisation, is based on a renewed critical practice that while inheriting the whole "critical tradition" of theory, extends itself to all cultural forms, and evaluates and creates possibilities for intellectual interventions in the current ideological debate about the future of "humanity" and the new cultural context "after" the supposed "event" or advent of the "posthuman". We are aware that posthumanism, in our argument, thus plays an ambiguous role: on the one hand, it is a discourse that comprises the

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[23] Cf. our *Post-Theory, Culture, Criticism, Critial Studies* 23, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004, and *Discipline and Practice: The (Ir)resistibility of Theory*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004.

controversial discussion about the increasing "prosthetization" of the human, the gradual replacement of essentialist humanism by "man's" technological other, his successor (a focus on techno-scientific and late capitalist or postmodern cultural practices which often leaves theory uncalled for and therefore somehow needs to be recaptured and rejoined by thinking and theoretical/philosophical questions (as in Latour's "hybridization"); on the other hand, posthumanism may also be seen as the current or "most advanced" form of a post-theory, namely as the latest "wave" and the most radical critique of the liberal humanist subject (which calls, in Latour's sense, for critical "purification").[24]

Science-Fiction-Theory

…there is no more fiction. (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 122)

We will explore this kind of cultural criticism – "re-theorised" and engaging with the posthuman subject – by performing a triple reading of some aspects developed in Badiou and his recent commentators, some core posthumanist theoretical texts, and, as their point of articulation, a recent mainstream science fiction film: *The Matrix*,[25] a filmic text that has almost instantly become a cult movie and has had enormous influence on the popular cultural imaginary.[26] If we therefore take Badiou (and others) to the movies it is to "test"

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[24] Cf. *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 10ff.

[25] *The Matrix* (1999) Groucho II Film Ptnrshp/Silver/Village Roadshow/Warner Bros., dir: Andy and Larry Wachowski; prod.: Joel Silver; cast: Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss, Hugo Weaving, Joe Pantoliano.

[26] See Herbrechter (2006) "Introduction: Theory in the Matrix", in Myriam Diocaretz and Stefan Herbrechter, eds. *The* Matrix *in Theory*, 7-23.

his thought on some critical practice, on a reading of cultural forms even if this may be against the grain of some of Badiou's own principles.[27] Our fundamental conviction is that change – be it political or cultural – can only occur through critical subjects performing critical and theoretically informed readings. Badiou's notion of the subject of truth is interesting for the kind of cultural criticism we are advocating because it adds (following Heidegger, Lacan, Deleuze, and, to some extent, Derrida) a very particular focus on truth as an event for a subject in a singular but concrete situation which nevertheless is not fixed but remains to be fulfilled. Our reading of this notion of the event is, in psychoanalytic terms, very close to being "traumatic", on the one hand, in the sense that it establishes a truth that has already happened by the process of "working through". On the other our reading is certainly not unrelated – despite Badiou's refreshing but also in many ways troubling polemic against all forms of "ethics" that involve notions of radical "otherness" – to an ethico-political thinking that sees the event as a dis-propriation of the subject which severs it from its (imaginary) unity and therefore its (imaginary) "identity" based on the illusion of autonomy and self-sameness (which, in that process, are revealed as being an untenable ground for any (political) decision without the acknowledgement of the irreducible precedence of a radical "other").

In a sense, and this is neither a secret nor a surprise, our reading of *The Matrix* through Badiou and others will try to show that a reconciliation between a political philosophy of the truthfulness of the event and an ethics of alterity can be productive for

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[27] See for example Badiou's hesitation when asked (by Peter Hallward) about the "autonomy of truth" in relation to the specificity of "a culture": "[d]oes the identification of procedures of truth always pass through philosophy, necessarily or unnecessarily, or is it a question of situation, of culture? It's an open question and a fairly complicated one" (*Ethics*, 139). Later on he nevertheless seems convinced that: "[i]n the end, a culture, to the extent that it can be thought or identified by philosophy [theory?], is a singular interconnected configuration of truth-procedures" (*Ethics*, 140).

the kind of (critical posthumanist) cultural criticism whose special strength has always been "the critique of the subject, and in the area of textual studies, the analysis of texts as offering a position to the subject".[28] We will thus introduce a Derridean fictional "as if (*comme si*)" into our argument at this stage as a base for our reading of Badiou through *The Matrix*, in the sense that, although texts do construct preferred subject positions, it is in the structure of textuality that an "other" reading is always possible, namely, for example by ironic mimesis, or an "as if". Referring to the "playfulness" of the signifier is not simply a frivolous gesture but is constitutive of meaning and criticism more specifically. Our claim is that a reading of *The Matrix* – and thus mainstream science fiction texts, and possibly popular culture in general – informed by a thinking of the event along Badiou's, Baudrillard's and Derrida's lines, can produce critical insights at once about their respective work, philosophy and theory and about culture as the sum of its signifying practices in general.

Science fiction (film) is of course a very specific form of fiction (a very specific form of the "as if"); it is a visualisation of what remains to-come, what is thinkable, envisageable. The borderline between "science" and "fiction" (or between fact and fabrication) has in fact never been as fixed and clear-cut as (liberal humanist) common sense seems to pretend. Both science and fiction, or literature, have lost their sense of what would constitute their respective essences some time ago: scientificity and fictionality (literariness) therefore need to be thought differently. If one has an interest in retaining a difference between science and culture, and if one's aim is to locate "progressive" radical politics precisely in this gap, as Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont do for example in their defense of "science" against the supposed culturalist "postmodern"

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[28] Antony Easthope, *British Post-Structuralism Since 1968*, London: Routledge, 1988, xii.

attack, one merely risks highlighting the constructed nature of the distinction even more.[29] In order to establish a true specificity (which is indeed eminently desirable and even absolutely necessary) a "radically" constructivist approach to begin with seems the only option. But only by subsequently establishing non-essential distinctions between fiction and science will it become possible to evaluate the hybridity and specificity of the genre of science fiction and what is happening to it (and what is partly happening thanks to it). It is only this view which allows an insight into science and fiction and their historically specific self-legitimating discourses (how they have defined their respective objects and developed their subject positions). The history of their respective influence on the cultural imaginary and our current posthumanist epistemological horizon – what they respectively have constituted as thinkable and representable (with SF causing a fusion of objects and of horizons in this context which under posthumanist conditions leads to a reconceptualisation of both science and fiction) – is the history of their respective ideological "work", their ways of positioning their subject-addressees and their subjects-supposed-to-know and their relation to their objects. A perspective that looks at science and fiction, and SF for that matter, under these three conditions no longer emphasises either of these traditional sources of knowledge production or "signifying practices": Subject/Author/Scientist (expert) and subject/reader/object (text, science). It would therefore no longer strictly speaking follow liberal humanist logic. Instead it would ask the question of the "human" anew in the form of a radicalised critique of the subject/object paradigm. This is precisely what many posthumanist readings of SF are celebrating, namely the arrival of a "new" (post)subjectivity within the posthuman (new) media, virtual reality and cyberspace.

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[29] Refer to Sokal Hoax and posthumanism here?

In terms of the posthumanist critique of the subject transposed onto the problematic of science, fiction and SF this means that behind the question of how science is related to fiction, and how fiction or literature is related to science, there is already another anxiety, namely about the leakiness of the very boundary between the two. What if the distinction between science and fiction breaks down? What if it never existed in the first place? What if there is something bigger behind the constitutive "discursive" or "signifying practices" which escapes all of these formations – science, fiction and SF – and which at the same time has allowed them to develop separately from each other while remaining fundamentally connected (for example through a humanist anthropocentrism)?

Despite all talk about posthumanism there remains, for example, something profoundly humanist about most contemporary science fiction films. What makes these films at once so enjoyable and fascinating and yet so frustrating and disappointing is their insistent promise of the "posthuman". Their posthuman is fascinating because it incorporates the very idea of freedom – the "essence" of man as projected into the future, the promise of "liberation" (from death, the body, poverty, ect.), self-redemption, self-realisation, self-transcendence etc. It is disappointing, however, because it inevitably returns us to the "human", even the "all-too-human". It promises an altogether other logic but cannot help returning to and reconfirming our basic "human condition". In the age of global techno-scientific capitalism it seems obvious that science fiction should become one of the major if not the most important playing field of our cultural imaginary. The part of the gatekeeper of what is currently imaginable and what remains unimaginable is played by "technology". Technology plays the role of a "*deus ex machina*" – good or evil, god or demiurge, utopian or dystopian – but even in its affirmation it is still,

inevitably, anthropomorphic. In the most recent science fiction films, virtualisation and cyborgisation are called upon to challenge and confirm traditional limits of the human. In that sense SF is "monstrous" – the usual terror involved in (con)fusing the possible with the actual, the virtual and the real, the fiction and truth.[30]

SF narrates stories about the transformation of subjectivity. It usually transposes these stories into an "other" place [u-topos] and an "other" time [u-chronos], which means it is concerned with a presence that always differs from itself and is already always deferred. It is the genre of Derridean *différance* par excellence. It thus repeats and reactivates the original trauma of identity as set out in Lacan's scene of the "mirror stage" (hence the persistence of SF's "nostalgic" closures, its self-protective returns to transformed/transfigured/purified images of humanity). What is at stake in the particular representational and signifying "economy" of SF is the reappropriation and repression of the "essence of man". A posthumanist reading of SF can only be "critical," therefore, if it is a deconstructive reading of these moments of negation, which is a negation of the

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[30] There is no doubt that the ways in which we will read film, and dystopian science fiction in particular, will have changed after the "invention" of "global terrorism" and the subsequent "war on terror". One cannot fail to be struck by the irony or the curious "belatedness" of the plane crashes into the World Trade Center, and the globally broadcast television pictures of this "perfectly orchestrated" inferno. The global trauma that paralysed most of the world for the three weeks after September 11 2001 until the airstrikes against Afghanistan started is one that finds its origin in the fact that it all looked so uncannily "familiar". Most people who have seen one or several Hollywood disaster movies will have wondered who had written the script for "bringing down" the twin towers. Who can deny this eerie feeling that the "Eventness" of this specific event had already taken place so many times? Who can deny that the boundaries between fiction and reality have not been fundamentally "shifted" since this day. We know these pictures to be true – it happened, but what exactly? – nevertheless, their shockingness lies not in their reality. The terror does not (at least not predominantly) lie in the physical threat terrorism poses, it lies in its "virtual fatality" or the "fatality of its virtuality". We are unable to dissociate fiction from science, illusion from reality, the media from their acts of representation while being conscious of the fact that the very essence of our human condition relies on this "nostalgic realism", however critical. The dilemma seems to be constituting the very "skin of our eyes. But it is also the sign of a profound crisis of the "human", of "humanity" as an organizing concept for "global(ised) culture" and of "humanism" as the foundation of our aesthetic, moral and political legitimation for our actions. This is what "global terror" stands for today. This is the "abyss" into which we stare, the current horizon of the "sublime" – filled as always with terror and desire (cf. Baudrillard, "The Despair of Having Everything", trans. Luke Sandford, *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 2002: 15.

otherness that "shows" in the inhuman, the non-human, the trans-human. Instead, this reading takes seriously by affirming the "monstrosity" of what is promised. This promise is very prominent in the first of the *Matrix* trilogy and our reading of this film will focus on Neo's posthuman transformation.

To combine at last what we said so far about critical posthumanist cultural criticism, the prospect of a (posthuman) subject and representations of the posthuman in SF: is the transformation of subjectivity – dissolution, displacement and re-subjugation (or "coagulation") of subject positions – involved in SF the expression of the desire for a "finally objectless subject" (following Badiou, for example in the sense of the arrival of a Nietzschen "More (human)-than-man" or Overman) or rather the fantasy of a "finally subjectless object" (a more Baudrillardian scenario of a world thoroughly "cleansed" of the "human" subject, as for example envisioned in the *Terminator* films)?

SF constitutes "a mode of awareness" that hesitates between the "belief that certain ideas and images of scientific-technological transformations of the world can be *entertained*" and "the rational recognition that they may be *realized*", and, on the other hand, "the belief in the immanent possibility… of those transformations" and the "reflection about their possible ethical, social, and spiritual interpretations".[31] SF seems thus caught in the middle of a politics of science – the possible, the inevitable, and an ethics of truth, following Badiou – the advent of a subject to a truth-process necessary for the "writing" of the situation that "saves" the "event". The posthuman character of this event and its subject of truth depicted in science fiction constitutes a new "reality":

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[31] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. "The SF of Theory: Baudrillard and Haraway", Science Fiction Studies, 18 (1991), 387.

SF… is not a genre of literary [or filmic] entertainment only, but a mode of awareness, a complex hesitation about the relationship between imaginary conceptions and historical reality unfolding into the future [similar to Todorov's conception of the fantastic]. SF orients itself within a conception of history that holds that science and technology actively participate in the creation of reality, and thus "implant" human uncertainty into the nonhuman world. (Csicsery-Ronay, 388)

It seems therefore that in posthumanist SF the "event" of science at once eliminates the nonhuman and at the same time helps incorporate it into the very "essence" of human "truth". Science is thus that "fictional" event (SF's "as if") that constitutes the posthuman "truth" under the conditions of what Baudrillard names our "hyperreality", or the "derealising" of human space.

What happens therefore when "philosophy [or theory] goes to the movies"? Christopher Falzon (in *Philosophy Goes to the Movies*) argues that since films "represent a kind of collective visual memory, a vast repository of images" (3), and since philosophy or theory, Badiou included, inevitably follow Plato in attempting to "grasp the true nature of reality" (4), film seems to be a privileged ground for thinking through the idea of Plato's cave. Cinema can at once illuminate fundamental questions of thought and representation, metaphoricity and experience, and, on the other hand, is very much a part of this experience itself. Asking philosophical questions about cinematic reality and truth may therefore "contribute to the cinematic experience" (15) as much as "going to the movies" may in fact change, as we will argue is the case with *The Matrix*, the very question about truth and reality.

In many ways, *The Matrix* is a philosophical film: it asks old philosophical questions and emplots philosophical scenarios. In doing so it also poses ethico-political questions. The premise of this film is that most of humanity has been enslaved by a race of intelligent machines who use human bodies as their power sources (an ironic twist to Foucault's notion of "biopower"). They are however completely unaware of their real situation. Everything seems normal because they are "jacked" into a supercomputer who feeds them a perfect simulation programme or a virtual reality ("the matrix") of a late-capitalist urban environment. Only a few rebels have managed to escape this enslavement and are able to offer resistance to the machines. Thus at the outset of the film, before he escapes from the matrix, everything that the central character Neo (Keanu Reeves) experiences and takes to be real is in fact a computer-generated illusion. (Falzon, 27)

The matrix programme is a simulation of 1999 late capitalist (American) city life which hides a "real" reality taking place in around 2199.[32] A.I. and its machines use "sentient programmes" called "Agents" to patrol within the matrix simulation and eradicate any human "doubts" as to the reality of the virtual lives of the matrix's "subjects". Neo, however, senses that something is wrong with his existence even before he is contacted and physically rescued by the group of cyber-rebels who follow their captain, Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne), and who live on a spaceship-like hovercraft called Nebuchadnezzar which cruises in the sewers of the destroyed megapolis. The last human refuge left, deep inside the Earth, and protected from the nuclear winter caused by humanity in the attempts to turn off the solar power supply of the machines by simply

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[32] The matrix – a classic Gibsonian SF idea – is a simulation programme which, following Baudrillard, is more real than reality. It "hides" the "desert of the real", the post-apocalypse, the "postmodern" truth, namely that the worst has (always already) happened, that the truth is void, that there is no truth.

obscuring the sun, is Zion. The rebel's cause, helped by the freed Neo, is to protect Zion while freeing as many humans as possible from their virtual bonds. While thus proselytizing, the cyberrebels await the arrival of the messiah-like revolutionary who will destroy the matrix for good and will restore humanity in its truth and freedom. Morpheus is convinced that Neo is this ONE who enslaved humanity has been waiting for. His education programme – his preparation for taking on the matrix with its fearsome and cynical main "Agent Smith" (Hugo Weaving) – therefore involves a gradual subversion through reinsertion into the matrix (via the "jack" in his head) and culminates in the "apotheosis" of his "becoming" (part of) the matrix.

Falzon uses *The Matrix* to illustrate the problem of Descartes' evil demon: when Morpheus asks Neo whether he has ever had a dream that he was so sure was real that he would not be able wake from that dream nor know the difference between dream world and real world. The "evil demon" – here played by the machines and their policing agents (Althusserian RSAs) – involves "both a malevolent, all-powerful agency working behind the scenes, and the possibility of our being completely, systematically deceived by this agency" (Falzon, 30). *The Matrix* is thus both a "philosophical film" and also a film of philosophy understood as the quest for the truth about reality (Plato's cave, Descartes' evil demon and Baudrillard's evil demon of images or the "precession of simulacra" constitute a major subtext of *The Matrix*, while marxism, (Christian) messianism, Gnosticism, buddhism and Greek mythology represent others).

More specifically, however, *The Matrix* is a film about the "event" (of truth and its inevitable change of reality). One could say that what Badiou, science fiction film, theory and posthumanism share is a certain irreducibly utopian thinking – a messianism

with or without messiah,[33] and a certain pre-occupation with the "as if (*comme si*)" and the performative. Fiction represents a reality of the "as if", speculative theory about the event (either as traumatic or "fatal") does so, too. In this sense, both areas share a recognition that the virtual is always at the heart of human reality, or as Derrida would say, an "as if" is always possible. It is always possible to assume an "as if" whose "performative force" in fact creates the event by pre-empting it. Derrida claims that it is with the history of the "as ifs" – in their undecidable performative and constative aspects – that the "humanities-to-come" will have to engage (Derrida, in Cohen, 2001: 52). "Critical" posthumanism's task is to deconstruct this performativity and constativity of the "as if" (e.g. SF's "as if" we were posthuman) whose dominant discourse occurs through fiction (which is "what *figures* but also what *makes*", 48). This is why fiction or literature, including science fiction, of course, must be the main source and target for posthumanist theory that wants to question the event by imagining its possibilities of arrival. The question is: can anything arrive from (science) fiction's "as if", or from posthumanist representations of "virtuality"?[34] What "*arrivant*" lies beyond this virtual? This is the question asked by *The Matrix*, and many other "post-representational" science fiction films – i.e. films whose posthmanism propels them towards imagining a future where cinematic (or any other form of visual) representation even of the most "virtual" and technologically sophisticated form threatens to break down.[35] While keeping in mind

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[33] On messianism without messiah, see Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, passim; and "The Deconstruction of Actuality".

[34] Cf. Derrida's notion of "invention of the other" (in *Psychē*) reiterated in "The University Without Condition" (in Cohen, 2001: 54), where he refers to: "this thinking of the possible impossible, of the possible *as* impossible, of an impossible-possible that can no longer be determined by the metaphysical interpretation of possibility or virtuality."

[35] See for example Tom Cohen's reading of the *Terminator* 2 as a fight against "the invasion, from a fantasized 'future', of an anti-representational and post-humanist logic" (*Anti-Mimesis from Plato to Hitchcock*, Cambridge: CUP, 1994, 260). What is at stake in posthumanism in general is the survival of this

the usually culturally and politically "conservative" turn given to these science fiction scenarios at their points of resolution (their moments of at least temporary closure), science fiction can undoubtedly inform the thinking of the "event" (and of the "as if") and its "subject" in terms of their "inventiveness" of an imaginary "other" space through which cultural change must arrive, as long as the distinction between the performative and the constative remains meaningful. But what if, as Derrida asks, the belief that an event usually "takes place" by breaking through the order of the "as if" - the place of the real that displaces the logic of the "as if" – what if the "the place itself becomes virtual, freed from its territorial… rootedness and when it becomes subject to the modality of an 'as if'?" (Derrida, in Cohen, 2001: 34).[36] Only the possible event arrives through the "as if" and Derrida therefore, logically, pushes this as if to its extreme, namely by positing that "only the impossible can (truly) arrive":

No surprise, thus on event in the strong sense… the pure singular eventness of *what* arrives or of *who* arrives and arrives *to me* (which is what I call the *arrivant*), it would suppose an *irruption* that punctures the horizon, *interrupting* any performative organization, any convention, or any context that can be dominated by a conventionality. Which is to say that this event takes place only to the extent where it does not allow itself to be domesticated by any "as if," or at least by any "as if" that can already be read, decoded, or articulated *as such*… It is too often said that the performative produces the

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representational logic. The question is whether the zero/one digital logic is still based on a representational "metaphysics" (death being the "absence of information"), and if so, how would one symbolize the absence of information on a (digital) screen?

[36] *The Matrix* partakes in the whole logic of the virtualisation of (the end of) work that Derrida discusses in "The University Without Condition", by providing a particularly bleak prospect of "telework", virtual community and communication for a humanity "blissfully ignorant" of its own enslavement – a "disembodiment" of work hailed by some utopians, but in fact merely constituting a new phase in capitalist exploitation and alienation (cf. Derrida, in Cohen, 2001: 43ff in particular). See also Baudrillard (Paroxyste, 41-42): "[in] a new logistics of human-machine interaction there is no longer a question of work. Human and machine form an interface. There is no longer a subject to or of work."

event of which it speaks. One must also realize that, inversely, where there is a performative, an event worthy of the name cannot arrive. (Derrida, in Cohen, 2001: 53-54)

A critical posthumanist reading of science fiction is thus concerned with SF's impossible, its unthought, its "real" – the point or place where the logic of the "as if" must break down and something altogether other *will have* arrived. This future anterior regulates the question of the "event" as it is being thought in theory today. Badiou, Derrida and Baudrillard all play with this "apocalyptic" logic, of how to speak so that the event can arrive: or, how to break out of "the matrix" (of representation) – whether it be interpreted as "metaphysics", "capitalism" or "hyperreality". The only hope of establishing a meaningful link with truth and reality lies in renouncing any link in exchange for a mere "possibility" of the truthful "event" (as if it were possible). The only subject thinkable is a "void" which establishes a link by cutting itself off ("*déliaison*"), by subtracting it(s)self.

Dire l'événement, est-ce possible?[37] Only as its impossible-possibility. In accepting the pertinence of this question we can project Badiou's specific problematic of "being and event" and their relation onto fiction and in particular science fiction. Cultural critcism's task in this specific context would then become a reading of the "event" and its "impossible-possibility" as articulated through the "as if" of fiction. In doing so we are following Badiou's own practice in relation to Beckett, whose work he reads in terms of the eventfulness of fiction – a kind of reading "for" the event. Badiou accepts Lacan's definition of fiction as that which "presents itself as the structure of truth". Fiction,

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[37] A question Derrida addressed in 1997, in Montreal, "Une certaine possibilité impossible de dire l'événement", in *Dire l'événement, est-ce possible?*, ed. Gad Soussana, Alexis Nouss, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001.

therefore, rightly has a privileged place in Badiou's and also Derrida's work because fiction is fiction about the eventness of the event, not because it is concerned about reality, or the border between fiction and reality, but it is about the (Lacanian) real, or the truth of a specific situation and in particular its unthought and unthinkable remainder, or as we would like to contend with Badiou, its other. It is no wonder that the "place" of fiction should be so closely related to democracy in Derrida and to politics in Badiou, since for both in a sense, fiction is that kind of discourse which is the most "democratic" in that it is called upon to say "anything". In its very structure fiction regulates the possibility of saying something at all. Both Derrida and Badiou seem therefore to share to some extent at least the idea of the event as incomplete inscription process, with on the one hand, a traumatic truth-to-come, as a kind of Kantian regulative idea, and on the other, a singularity and situationist specificity of a truth-for-a-subject that provides a possibility for an *ad hoc* and unpremeditated "*lien social*" – Badiou's "(la) politique"[38] – in the face of the general structural possibility of "*déliaison*".[39] In the section that follows, these differing conceptualisations of the event and its subjectivation will be mapped onto some key scenes in *The Matrix*.

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[38] Cf. Alain Badiou, *Peut-on penser la politique?*, Paris: Seuil, 1985, p . 12-13, 18.
[39] For this notion of "*lien social*" see Derrida in "Fidélité à plus d'un"; for Derrida's notions of "democracy-to-come" and "literature" see e.g. "This Strange Institution Called Literature – An Interview with Jacques Derrida", in Derek Attridge, ed., *Acts of Literature*, London: Routledge, 1992, 33-75.

In this way, science fiction would no longer be a romantic expansion with all the freedom and naïveté that the charm of discovery gave it, but, quite the contrary, it would evolve implosively, in the very image of our current conception of the universe, attempting to revitalize, reactualize, requotidianize, fragments of simulation, fragments of this universal simulation that have become for us the so-called world. (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 124)

What is this "event" in *The Matrix*? There are in fact two main events, occurring in the two central scenes, which together have the structure of an "anastrophe" and a "catastrophe" in this cosmic drama. The first event, at first glance, would probably not fulfill Badiou's criteria – it is Neo's moment of recognition, realising the true extent of human oppression by the machines. The second, the properly apocalyptic or catastrophic moment and "event of truth", is Neo's "becoming" posthuman (his digitalisation, complete "translation" into information and his "inhabiting" of the matrix's virtual reality, simulation or cyberspace). It is possible to read Neo's resurrection and his "second coming" as event in the context of current popular posthumanist thinking, i.e. as an event that creates the situation out of which the posthuman subject must derive its fidelity to the event as a truth-process. The question critical posthumanist theory may put to the text of science fiction is: in what sense is this "posthuman" an event? What happens to its subject? What happens to its body? What is its truth? And what is its "real"?

First, a brief return to the first scene, which is a fairly standard and utterly humanist occurrence of (self)recognition. It is an induced event in which Morpheus, the gatekeeper of reality and figure of benign paternal authority, proposes a "choice" to the liberal subject Neo, whom he nevertheless takes to be the "One",[40] i.e. the future saviour of the truth and freedom of humanity. The choice is between the blue pill of forgetting, of acceptance of continued enslavement in hyperreality, and the red pill of recognition, resistance and truth. Greek mythology, Christian messianism and marxist notions of ideology are all at play in this moment of recognition. Plato's cave, faith and knowledge, and subjectivation coincide here. The red pill initiates a tracing process necessary to find out the exact location of Neo's repressed and unconscious "real", his body, his true place or indeed place of truth. The scene of Neo's "virtual" death and "rebirth" into "real" reality is a kind of inverted mirror stage. He is literally liquified and turned inside out, and melts into his own mirror reflection in a form of psychotic self-annihilation and radical identification with the other. The next thing we realise is the apocalyptic scenario of mankind's true condition of enslavement. The world that the *Terminator* films had merely anticipated as projection has already been and gone, the apocalypse has already taken place without, as usual, arriving. Humanity has lost its battle against its successor, the machines, and is now in turn being exploited as a provider of natural and environmentally friendly human battery cells. In a later scene Morpheus holds up an example of a battery to Neo which looks distinctly like a "Duracell" copper top. Evidently, some things last longer than others (recalling the similar endurance of other brands in SF, like Coca Cola in *Blade Runner* for example). As a result of Neo's "awakening", his now conscious body has become useless to the machines. It is flushed

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[40] Note the anagrammatic logic at work between neo, one and eon.

out of its pod and is recuperated by Morpheus's group of cyberrebels, who greet him with the ominous words: "welcome to the real world" (later reinforced by the Baudrillard quotation: "welcome to the desert of the real").

The event structure of this scene of course has nothing to do with the significance given to the term in either Badiou's or Derrida's thought. A "simple" Althusserian reading of the subject's interpellation, misrecognition and ideology's necessary overdetermination seem to more or less cover the meaning of this scene.[41] Nevertheless it is an event that is based on a decision, not by a "free" subject, but rather a decision prestructured by the Other (the ideological Subject). However, it is a decision which clearly changes the subject's place in the imaginary and symbolic order and displaces his "real", even though it merely exchanges one master signifier for another. For Neo, it is an *Er-eignis*, a Heideggerian "enowning", through which a change if not in true subjectivity, then at least in identity takes place. It is a moment when the self rebuilds itself through an appropriation of its own "other", a moment of leakiness or "secretion" in which the otherness of this other is ejected and thus made "obscene". Neo's former "virtual" existence in the matrix now becomes his new "real" (unimaginable and unspeakable) of his "real" life among the rebels. The electronic sound sequence heard during the liquid mirror scene just as the mercury-like liquid engulfs Neo's "interior" (a scene which seems almost like the negative of the final moments of the T 2000 model in *Terminator* 2) indicates the "expiring" of this (digital) ghost in the machine which was Neo's virtual existence. Virtuality, from now on is what structures Neo's desire, the void inside his truth. In this sense Neo (re)becomes similar to a proto-posthuman cyborg living in and

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[41] Cf. Louis Althusser (1971 [1970]) "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards and Investigation", trans. Ben Brewster, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, London: NLB, 121-173.

out of cyberspace at will, celebrated by so many posthumanist texts. Ironically, it is now that Neo's situation resembles our own, facing an uncertain future of "posthumanity", the impossible-possibility of a "real" encounter with death in virtuality. Only the previous recognition of his virtual condition as "loss", however, can allow him to experience the reality of his desire. Although there is nothing that may be objectively called "truth" in all this – all this happens in a SF that anticipates a dystopian future 200 years from now (for us viewers the moment before Neo's recognition is just as real or unreal as the moment after) – the basic logic of identity formation holds, whether fictional or not. This is the peculiarity of the fictional "as if". The question is, should this logic be resisted? Should it be ignored? And are these valid ethical or political questions for a critical posthumanism?

The second scene could be read "as if" it fulfilled the criteria of Badiou's notion for an event. It is an event without decision. Something absolutely unforeseen happens: a miracle and an apotheosis. Neo's physical death is reversed. He becomes the "One", the Subject to truth who determines the situation by changing the matrix. Let us call this event "becoming posthuman" as envisaged by SF. Badiou's notion of the event is connected to a political subject: what seems appropriate here to claim the place of a subject for Neo is his very function as messiah, as the "One". Badiou himself uses the resurrection of Christ as narrated by Paul as an event and advent of a subject to truth.[42] Neo's subjectivity, his specific and singular future anterior (future im/perfect) lies in determining the universal truth out of the multiplicity that may constitute his being in this "posthuman" situation. The subjectivity of Neo is that which he will become as the result of the event and his fidelity to it. The event is that which acts as a supplement to Neo's being and forces him into a "truth process" that remains truthful to the event-supplement.

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[42] CF. his *Saint Paul: La foundation de l'universalisme*, Paris: PUF, 1997.

In that sense, Neo's subjectivity (re)creates the event, which ultimately depends on faith. Outside the subjectivity, the event does not exist. Neo's subjectivity depends, as the Oracle in the film claims, on his own belief. The event is also that which makes the world, i.e. the matrix meaningful for the subject and thus open to change and militant action. The structured but multiple character of this new situation we term "posthuman" is the result of the (unnameable) "event" as that which calls for truth. We could argue that the knowledge of the matrix's existence for Neo unfolds a "state of situation" which is interrupted by his becoming posthuman, by that which exceeds his being, his not or no-longer being but which is not death. This event seems to develop *ex nihilo*. The event is therefore the "truth" of the situation, its previous void or real which leads to a complete restructuring of the matrix – the matrix or the system turned against itself just like Neo was "turned inside-out" before. What has been defining Neo as subject is his fidelity to the event. Although, strictly speaking, Neo-subject comes after the event, and is a result of it, the truth process demands a trauma-like reinscription of its traces within the situation, very similar to what Slavoj Žižek refers to in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* as the traumatic logic of the symptom, which again shows the affinity between science fiction, posthumanism, theory and philosophies of the "event":

> From where does the repressed return?… From the future. Symptoms [events "for" a subject] are meaningless traces, their meaning is not discovered, excavated from the hidden depth of the past, but constructed retroactively – the analysis produces the truth; that is, the signifying frame which gives the symptoms their symbolic place and meaning. As soon as we enter the symbolic order, the past is always present in the form of historical tradition and the

meaning of these traces is not given; it changes continually with the transformations of the signifier's network. Every historical rupture, every advent of a new master-signifier [Badiou's event of truth], changes retroactively the meaning of all tradition, restructures the narration of the past, makes it readable in another, new way.[43]

The subject, however, cannot completely appropriate truth because it exceeds him or her in its irreducible multiplicity and eventfulness. The truth-event's repositioning makes it possible for the subject to perceive the former "blind spot" of the real, in Neo's case his being neither virtual nor physical but a cyborg "inbetween", his own "spectrality" of a metaphysical being as such.[44] This traumatic notion of subjectivity as truth process in Badiou might again be related to Žižek's Lacanian reading:

This, therefore, is the basic paradox we are aiming at: the subject is confronted with a scene from the past [an event that has (always) already occurred] that he wants to change, to meddle with, to intervene in; he takes a journey into the past, intervenes in the scene, and it is not that he "cannot change anything" – quite the contrary, only through his intervention does the scene from the past become what it always was: his intervention was from the beginning comprised, included. The initial "illusion" of the subject consists in simply forgetting to include in the scene his own act… (pp. 57-58).

The posthuman event is therefore not a revelation as such but an act of interventionist interpretion. As Slavoj Žižek claims: "Event is the traumatic encounter with the Real…

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[43] *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London: Verso, 1989, 55-56.
[44] Compare Derrida's work on "hauntology" and "spectrality" in *Specters of Marx*.

while its denomination is its inscription into language… In Lacanese, Event is object a, while denomination is the new signifier that establishes … for Badiou, the new readability of the situation on the basis of Decision" (p. 242). Badiou's subject, like Althusser's and Lacan's, is therefore never outside but always within ideology and hence political rather than ethical as such. Neo's "transsubstantiation" and apotheosis could thus serve as a sign of the "immortality" and universality that the subject has access to through his fidelity to the event.

Badiou's subject is the "wager" of a subject without an object, pure subjectivity that does not constitute itself on the "back" of an object. Badiou's starting point here is the claim that "the form of the object cannot in any way sustain the enterprise of truth."[45] Only a subject can. Badiou therefore wants to "de-objectify the space of the subject" (25) and his version of the post- or trans-humanist subject would be "the very same subject dissociated or subtracted from reflexive jurisdiction, un-constituting, untied from all supports unrelated to the process of truth" (25). Does not cyberspace promise a "locality" for a finally objectless subject?

On the other hand, of course, cyberspace is part of the ongoing delocalisation or dislocation of the subject, which contradicts Badiou's notion of truth for a subject; he calls "subject the local or finite status of a truth. A subject is what is *locally born out*" (25). Truth always precedes this local subject in the sense that "the subject is woven out of a truth, it is what exists of truth in limited fragments" (25). Truth arrives through the subject, it passes through it. Truth, following Lacan, is for Badiou "making a hole in

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[45] See Alain Badiou, "On a Finally Objectless Subject" in Cadava, 24-25.

knowledge" (25). The subject therefore as such is a (pre-ontological) "void"[46] that constitutes the "very gap filled in by the gesture of subjectivization" (p. 257). Badiou's axioms for a truth-event-subject complex are the following: a truth is "post-eventual" (a process that works its way backward from a naming of the event as a void, in our case, that would be the moment "we", like Neo, became "posthuman"); the process of a truth is fidelity to this event (Neo's posthuman subjectivity lies in his (future) fidelity towards the name and the event of his "becoming the matrix" – this may be an explanation why there was general dienchantment with the two *Matrix* sequels); the name of the event is connected to the "terms of the situation" which nevertheless ultimately remains infinite and can never be fully present (Neo's spectrality seems structurally necessary as symbolic of a new and posthuman cybersubjectivity); as long as the knowledge of a situation does not exceed its "infinity", that is as long as the situation remains open and accepted in its irreducible multiplicity there will have been truth (as long as the posthuman remains untotalisable as event, fidelity to its truth remains possible and hence "universal"). Neo remains a (posthuman) subject as long as his substance remains multiple or undecidable, as long as he resists the transcendental position of totalised "experience" as presence, as long he remains the "generic" subject of a truth process, as long as he is not seen as either the result or origin but rather as "in excess" of the posthuman situation, or as long as Neo remains a "faithful connection operator" between truth and the event as name. Neo's transsubstantiation, his becoming (part of) the matrix

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[46] As Žižek remarks in his critique of Badiou's combination of psychoanalysis and "post-marxism" in relation to (Oedipus's) "inhuman excess" in the human: "Don't these lines expose the elementary matrix of subjectivity: you become 'something' (you are accounted a subject) only after going through the zero-point, after being deprived of all those 'pathological' (in the Kantian sense of empirical, contingent) features that support your identity, thus being reduced to 'nothing' – 'a Nothingness counted as Something,' which is the most concise formula for *subject*." In "Psychoanalysis in Post-marxism: The Case of Alain Badiou", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 97: 2 (1998), 256.

could be described, following Badiou, as his "sujectivisation" (27): "the emergence of an operator that is consecutive to the interventional naming that decides the event".

It does not seem irrelevant that Neo's advent/subjectivization is in fact first triggered by the treason of a "false" operator, Cypher, who plays the Judas role in the story. But since cypher also relates to the numerical symbol (and especially the digit "zero"), symbolically, one could say, it is the digit or the void, that nearly spoils the posthuman event, or at least wrongly names it. Badiou, however, would resist the looming metaphysical closure involving truth, knowledge and subject here by positing that truth must remain unknowable to its subject. Neo, as posthuman subject, is a "local moment of the truth" which necessarily transcends his finality in being infinite: "every truth transcends the subject precisely because its whole being consists in supporting the effectuation of that truth" (30). However, this subject is confident through belief (which takes the form of "event-knowledge") and the generation of namings that only have referents in the "future anterior" (this could serve as another explanation for the general disappointment in the "namings" and explanations that the sequels, *Matrix Reloaded* and *Matrix Revolutions*, have to offer).

This naming process again forms the possible nexus between Badiou's thought, Christianity, science fiction and posthumanist utopia. Such names, Badiou asserts, "will have been assigned referents or meanings when the situation will have come to be", in which the indiscernible, which is only represented (included), is finally presented, as a truth of the former situation. Would it thus be possible to argue that Neo's posthuman adventure presents the truth of his former recognition, of his void and the annihilation of his virtuality? Does the posthuman name a truth that will have been, that the apocalypse

has already taken place, that the human never existed? This was our starting point in terms of posthumanism and (post)theory. Could it now be said that the truth of the posthuman will have been the naming of the "radically human" as question: have we ever been human (enough)? Again Badiou will resist closure here by claiming: "It is entirely impossible to anticipate or to represent a truth, as it comes to be only in the course of evaluations or connections that are incalculable, their succession being solely ruled by encounters with the terms of the situation" (31). But can we really have it both ways: a situation determining a truth which unfolds out of random encounters? The "objectless" subject as either the "real" of a situation or simply a mere "hypothesis"? Could Neo really be both, the "real" and the "namer" of the posthuman event, as Badiou claims: "A subject is … at once the *real* of the procedure… and that which uses names to make hypotheses about truth" (32)?

This is where we feel we need to return once more to the scene of what we called the "posthuman event" in *The Matrix* and introduce again the questions of politics and ethics. Is not Neo's (fictional, "as if") posthumanity also an invention "of" the other? It is, after all, through the encounter with agent Smith, the sentient programme which (or who) polices the matrix, that is with agency as such, that Neo's posthumanity comes into "being" as excess of the matrix, and therefore as its "truth"? It is not so much an encounter with agent Smith as imaginary other, as "other-than-*me*" (i.e. not his bodily similarity, his virtual humanity) but rather as "other-than-other" (agent Smith's unknown ontology: who or what is "he" (and what exactly is the status of his masculinity, his gender here)? His post-subjectivity? The "void" he represents in his undecidability of being neither human/body nor machine but pure anti-representation, in fact (similar to the

Terminator T2000 which inhabits any human but also non-human form) is what needs to be appropriated by Neo in order to make truth, in terms of political resistance, arrive. It is clear from the start that it is not their difference that separates Neo and agent Smith, it is their uncanny resemblance, their uncanny and ironic sameness which accounts for much of the viewer's fascination with Smith. In this context it is important to recall what agent Smith has to say about "humanity:

> Have you ever stood and stared at it [the matrix], Morpheus? Marveled at its beauty. Its genius. Billons of people just living out their lives… oblivious… 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 we lacked the programming language to describe your perfect world.[47] But I believe that, as a species, human beings define their reality through suffering and misery… The perfect world was a dream that your primitive cerebrum kept trying to wake up from. Which is why the Matrix was redesigned to this: the peak of your civilization… I say "your civilization" because as soon as we start thinking for you, it really becomes our civilization, which is, of course, what this is all about… Evolution, Morpheus. Evolution… Like the dinosaur. Look out that window. You had your time… The future is our world, Morpheus. The future is our time… I'd like to share a revelation that I've had during my time here. It came to me when I tried to classify your species. I've realized that you are not actually mammals… Every mammal on this planet instinctively develops a natural equilibrium with the

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[47] It would indeed be interesting to follow up this remark in the context of Burrough's thought of (human) language being a "virus", and in relation to the idea of a "perfect language" in Eco.

surrounding environment. But you humans do not. You move to an area and you multiply and multiply until every natural resource is consumed and the only way you can survive is to spread to another area… There is another organism on this planet that follows the same pattern. Do you know what it is? A virus… Human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet. You are a plague. And we are… the cure.[48]

The "real" of the posthuman out of which Neo's "emancipatory politics" could evolve, the "impossible" of the situation is thus humanity's (indeed very Heideggerian) lack of being(in-the-world). But what if the posthuman were just a perpetuation of this original lack? A renewed obliteration of the trace or the truth that long before the distinction between the human and the "inhuman" (the non-human, trans-human and post-human) the mark of distinction already existed in a kind of (Derridean) arch-virtuality more virtual and more real than any cyberspace, any space at all, virtual or real? What if the Matrix (as a kind of Baudrillardian object-world of seduction) always "precedes" the (post)human, and every event, every twist and turn of the subject (human or posthuman) has already been marked, written, codified following an absolutely irretrievable "origin" which is not only the birth of humanity, but of representation and space as such?[49] Would Badiou's (ethics of) truth be able to "recognise" this? Can one say, in the face of Badiou's imperative, "Keep going! (*Continuez*)" (which he derives from Beckett's

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[48] Film script available at http://dc-mrg.english.ucsb.edu/WarnerTeach/E192/matrix/Matrix.script.html (4-12-06)

[49] This is what is insinuated in the sequels, which go out of their way to "explain" both the existence of the Matrix and the resistance to it as being on the same ontological plane: Neo ends up being the "anti-virus" the system "needs" in order to overcome Agent Smith. In any case, Neo turns out to be neither human, nor machine but "merely" a software programme that is an integral part to the operation system.

(absurdist) existentialism)[50] as the ethical demand that interpellates the (posthuman) political subject: stay away from the three forms of evil! Don't betray the event of the posthuman! Don't confuse it with its simulacrum! Don't succumb to the terror of its absolutisation (by, like Morpheus, obsessively giving names to everything that arrives [cf. his insistent "He's the One"], which Badiou identifies as the true meaning of religion)!

In a sense, Badiou's "objectless" subject, as Peter Hallward points out (in "The singular and the specific", 15a), seems diametrically opposed to Baudrillard's thought, for whom, it would seem, posthuman hyperreality instead is characterized by a disappearance of the subject, and the threat of an "object without subject". Both of these – scenarios of subjectless objects and objectless subjects – are options that are being taken up within current posthumanist thinking, and indeed are at work within the logic of *The Matrix*.

For Baudrillard, the "principle of evil" is that in hyperreality the apocalypse can no longer happen: "The advent of the virtual itself is our apocalypse and it deprives us of the real event of the apocalypse. This is our paradoxical situation, but one has to pursue this paradox to the end (Paroxyste, 43). Posthumanist theory (a theory that takes its starting point from the "reality" of the inhuman in all its forms, including the virtual) therefore needs to anticipate the end (45) which is why theory and the theorist as paroxyst situates "himself" in the moment just before the end "in the one before last moment, just before the end, just before there is nothing more to say." Below, we will argue that the main character in *The Matrix*, Neo, could also be seen as a Baudrillardian paroxyst. For

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[50] More than Beckett, the "absurd heroism" that worries Simon Critchley in his review of Badiou's *Ethics*, the "*continuez*" seems to be close to Albert Camus' "Sisyphean" figure, in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Paris: Gallimard, 1942.

Baudrillard, the virtual is the "hysteria of our time": the hysteria "of the production and reproduction of the real" (*Simulacra and Simulation*, 23) which leads to the production of "hyperspace", VR or cyberspace which represent the "desert of the real itself" (1): "It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere" (2). *The Matrix*[51] shows this "virtual reality, the one which would be perfectly homgenised, digitalised, "operationalised", [which] acts as a substitute of the other because it is perfect, controllable and non-contradictory" (Mots de passé, 52). The virtual thus constitutes the current "horizon of the real" in which a subject is no longer necessary (Mots, 52-53): "In the virtual there is no longer any value, there is merely information, calculation, or generalised computation, where the effects of the real are disappearing" (Mots, 54). *The Matrix* partakes (but also to a certain extent tries to detach itself) from this "veritable fascination with the virtual and all its technologies" (54). Baudrillard is of course very sceptical of there being any question of "choice" involved in the "posthuman desire", namely of a whole species seemingly wanting to disappear into the virtual, the desire "to clone oneself body and soul into a new universe, to disappear as human species properly speaking in order to perpetuate oneself in the form of an artifical species with much more efficient and operational characteristics" (Mots, 54-55).

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[51] Other dystopian science fiction films similar to *The Matrix* like for example *Enemy of the State* – and also in a more light-hearted way *The Truman Show*, and *Bicentennial Man* – have thematised this "virtual fatality" by returning to representations of global surveillance and ideology. A critical posthumanist reading of these films would have to show how powerful contemporary (film-producing) institutions try to engage with but also shape our cultural imaginary in relation to the global terror perceived in virtuality, i.e. in a "post-realist" and "post-representational" world in which what it means to be human can no longer rely on the traditional humanist idea of subjectivity and on the traditional mind-body-person dialectic. A critical rereading of the crisis of the humanist values these films display should be instrumental in the discussion of the question by what the concept of humanity may be replaced, without giving in to either technological determinism, apocalyptic euphoria or simply dejection. When the boundaries of the human become fluid this may therefore be the moment not only to ask (in by now familiar fashion): "what comes after the human?" but also "have we ever been human?"

It is quite ironic therefore that *The Matrix*, famously, cites Baudrillard in a scene towards the beginning where the hacker Mr Anderson (Neo) illegally sells "virtual experiences" (the future of "drug dealing") to a client (similar to the movie *Strange Days*). He stores these disks in a hollowed out copy of Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* which opens at the starting page of the last chapter, "On Nihilism". So the film is at once inspired by and also comments on (i.e. "virtualises") Baudrillard – the hollowing out of the book is certainly to be taken as "symbolic". *The Matrix* describes "*le crime parfait*": the elimination of the real world, of the "original (fatal) illusion". In this sense the machines who (re)invented the world as illusion of an illusion, as a perfect copy, exterminate humanity by depriving it of its "evil": "to exterminate signifies depriving something of its proper end, depriving it of its term. It means eliminating the duality, the antagonism of life and death, reducing everything to a kind of unique principle – one could say a "unique way of thinking" – of the wolrd, which would translate itself into all our technologies, and, today, most of all our technologies of the virtual" (Mots, 77). The perfect crime destroys the very principle of "otherness". Neo could therefore be seen, in Baudrillardian terms as a paroxyt-terrorist, who situates himself within this apparent "impossibility of exchange" of one world for another (Paroxyste, 62) and thinks through the "undecidabilty between subject and object" (63): "one has to return to a kind of thought-event which would manage to turn uncertainty into a principle and the impossible exchange into a rule, while conscious of the fact that it cannot be exchanged for either the truth or reality" (Mots, 101). Neo, in exploding the matrix from inside, illustrates Baudrillard's impossible "nostalgia for (theoretical) terrorism". In trying to overcome the "terrorism of the system" and regaining the

possibility of finality and death, he also seeks the annihilation of the subject. It is not enough to be a nihilist/terrorist because: "to this active nihilism of radicality, the system [matrix] opposes its own, the nihilism of neutralization. The system is itself also nihilistic, in the sense that it has the power to pour everything, including what denies it, into indifference… In this system, death itself shines by virtue of absence… Death no longer has a stage, neither phantasmatic nor political, on which to represent itself, to play itself out, either a ceremonial or a violent one. And this is the victory of the other nihilism, of the other terrorism, that of the system" (*Simulacra and Simulation*, 163-64). Neo's final challenge to the matrix at the end of the first film, where he announces certain changes to the reality programme or the matrix system, could also be interpreted as resonating with the final sentence of Baudrillard's "On Nihilism":

There is no more hope for meaning. And without a doubt this is a good thing: meaning is mortal. But that on which it has imposed its ephemeral reign, what it hoped to liquidate in order to impose the reign of the Enlightenment, that is, appearances, they, are immortal, invulnerable to the nihilism of meaning or of non-meaning itself. This is where seduction begins. (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 164)

Neo's future kingdom may simply be that of the object, of immortal appearances independent from meaning which is "where seduction begins" (164).

On the other hand, *The Matrix* also necessarily "supplements" its implied Baudrillardian reading. After all, Baudrillard is rather sceptical of the genre of SF as such. There are two aspects to this: the problem of science fiction's obsession with its own (anti-representational) disappearance, and its own partaking in the "virtualisation" of the body.

"*[T]he cinema is fascinated by itself as a lost object as much as it (and we) are fascinated by the real as a lost referent*" (*Simulacra and Simulation*, 47; italics in original). As a result the imaginary (the fictional "as if") of the media implode within the real, producing a hyperreality in which the media themselves have been "volatilized as such" (82) leading to "*the catastrophe of meaning*" (83). For Baudrillard, SF has lost its imaginary, its "order of productive simulacra", its specific utopia of technology and (space) colonisation and is now part of a movement in which fiction has overtaken reality. It thus finds itself in competition with theory: "the good old imaginary of science fiction is dead and… something else is in the process of emerging (not only in fiction but in theory as well). The same wavering and indeterminate fate puts an end to science fiction – but also to theory, as specific genres (*Simulacra and Simulation*, 121). What does it mean therefore if SF (*The Matrix*) seizes upon theory (Baudrillard) as a source of inspiration? Is this still SF? Is it theory? How can (posthumanist) theory still comment upon SF?

Under the condition of this fusion of (posthumanist) theory and (science) fiction the posthuman already needs to have taken place; posthumanism therefore "postulates" the posthuman as an event: the (posthuman) event has already happened and it is now just a matter of "imagining" it. Hence the inevitable doubling of the event as described in *The Matrix*: the moment of recognition – that the event has taken place, and the moment of action – what to do with the event, or bringing about (the truth of) the event. One should not forget, however, that *The Matrix* is part of the "symptom" (not in the sense of pathology but of its underlying "structure" containing posthumanism's unthought "real"). The two moments we defined as double centre of the story are carefully prepared from

the start. The film opens with a visualisation of the digital "other", endless streams of green numbers and symbols running down the computer screens, a constant flow, which is the "code" or inscrption of the master programme called the matrix and which determines the "virtual" reality that we, like Neo, hold to be real. The ironic thing is that Neo, in the virtual reality he thinks to be real, is constantly escaping through his computer into another virtual reality – and is thus doubly alienated. In addition, as a dealer in virtual experience, by selling "pirated" copies of the matrix he also helps the system to maintain its subjugation over him and other humans.

Neo is, from the start, interpellated by a virtual authority that interrupts this equilibrium: his computer screen is controlled by a mysterious and prophetic Other: "Wake up Neo, the Matrix has you." The interpellation is thus double from the start: on the one hand, it is the Matrix that "has" Neo; on the other, there are the cyberrebels who "want" Neo and who tempt him through his own desire to know what the matrix is. Morpheus, the voice speaking through the void in Neo Other (the symbolic order constructed by the matrix), becomes his subject-supposed-to-know. Neo, in a sense, enters analysis and the game of transference and counter-transference. Morpheus as Neo's "master" in turn sees him as the "One". This interpellative narrative is punctured with moments of decision. In the first part Neo is confronted with (i.e. subjected to) three of these moments of apparent "free" choice (following Althusser's notion of the interpellation of the liberal humanist self). First, Neo is hailed by his boss, who puts before him the choice between being punctual or unemployed; second, Morpheus offers Neo "truth" and "freedom", ironically in the form of blind obedience to his instructions (an idea that later forms the reason for Cypher's defection and his desire to return into the

"self-incurred tutelage" offered by the matrix) or of alternatively being exposed to the totalitarian law of the agents who know about his double life as software pirate and hacker; and third, Neo is given the choice, by agent Smith, to either cooperate with the State (i.e subject himself to the Law and the symbolic order) against "terrorism" or instead be subjected to State terrorism (what Neo refers to as "Gestapo crap"). A third level of reality is introduced at this stage. Neo is (literally) "bugged" (the agents insert a "live" cyber-bug through his navel into his body to track his movements) but is then made to believe the whole interrogatory episode was a dream. Reality (i.e. VR as produced by the matrix) versus virtual reality "in" the matrix (and thus virtual VR) *versus* dream within the (matrix) reality which believes that reality is actually VR – while all of this is of course already happening already within the fictional ("as if") of another VR, namely SF film itself. From the start, then, *The Matrix* is a play of repetition (compulsion), "choice" and recognition. It asks "what is a subject?" and hence, like most science fiction, "who comes after the subject?" The truth Morpheus has to offer is that reality (i.e. the matrix) and truth do not coincide. The whole problematic of cyberculture and virtual reality therefore coincides with the general climate of "postmodern theory" with its anti-essentialism, and with antirealism, constructivism and truth relativism and Baudrillardian "nihilism".

Even Neo himself is not new. He is the One because he is the repetition of the first Neo, who was "born inside the matrix" but freed himself from it to such an extent that he could "change whatever he wanted" (an allusion to the sequels which will reveal that "our" Neo is in fact Neo 6.0 and the scenario that we witnessed in the first film is already the sixth loading of the matrix versus Zion virtual wargame). However, according

to this "myth of origin" as told by Morpheus, the first Neo also started the "resistance" by freeing his first disciples. Neo's arrival corresponds thus to the second coming of Christ, and the story of the first film is thus at once the reiteration of the "life of Jesus" and the preparation for "judgment day". But according to the posthuman situation, Christ must be at once inside and outside the situation, i.e. he must escape both human and machine and incorporate them both (on several occasions during the Neo is identified with a machine: first when he starts his "downloading process" and his virtual kung-fu training; and later when Trinity asks him how he manages to "move like they [the agents] do").

Posthumanism is of course also that kind of thinking that displaces the humanist idea of a radical difference between human and machine. What if the "machinic" has always already "inhabited" the human (i.e. body *and* soul, or *embodied* mind? What if we have always been cyborgs? What if "technē" is what constitutes us as human? Neo becomes the master of humanity and the machine by transgressing two boundaries at the same time: he overcomes his *physis* and he overcomes the rules of the digit. He has to free his mind from reality (see Morpheus' explanation of Neo's "bleeding": "your mind makes it real"). Humanity enslaved by the matrix-system, by (virtual) reality, is "our" enemy because at any moment the digital selves of enslaved humanity can be appropriated or inhabited by agents (who in their anti-representational allomorphic threat can slip into any "human" character). Morpheus reminds Neo of the frightening proximity between cyberrebels and agents. The human virus of the fight between good and evil has thus successfully been carried across into cyberspace: if you're not one of us you're one of them [namely agents].

The two opposites, good and evil, are mapped onto the two respective ideologies: that of the Matrix whose typical subject is Cypher (merely a "digit") and whose ignorance is bliss (why didn't I take the blue or "conservative" pill that keeps me in late capitalist society); and the enlightened "knowledge is all" of the humanist S/subject (all I am offering is the truth (or also the Oracle's "know thyself", a mere variation of Kant's *sapere aude*; or the truth spoken by the child-zen master at the Oracle's home: there is no spoon, thus your mind is bent not the spoon), which depends on recognition and "love" (truth is like "knowing that one is in love" – the Oracle, here, for once seems to echo Badiou; cf. also her: would you still have broken the vase if I hadn't said anything?). They are also mapped onto their respective drugs – inducives of "reality" and "truth": Cypher's cheap "spirit" which kills braincells; and the virtual training programmes (the VR games, the kung-fu scenes) to which Neo, like so many children of the postmodern version of the "posthuman" age, seems to be addicted, as a form of mind expansion. Getting hooked, however, seems precisely the condition for human recognition in the first place: "We shouldn't deny our impulses because they are what makes us human", says Mouse, a minor character, who later has to die for this unwanted hedonist wisdom. Whereas the matrix, as Trinity tells Neo, cannot tell you who you are.

Through Morpheus' presence the paternal logic of *The Matrix* reinscribes the law of the father in the new "hybrid" form of reality within cybercommunity. Neo therefore has to (symbolically) "kill" his father figure (Morpheus) first. Ironically he performs this by saving him from physical death. Through saving his live he performs his symbolic death as a leader. He becomes the One because he replaces the former surrogate-one (father) who is now merely part of the subordinate multiplicity. What legitimates this

dethronement and enthronement is a sheer act of will and belief which leads Neo to "outmachine the machines". It is when Neo starts "moving like they do" that he becomes the One, i.e. through mere belief, pure will, pure "idea", which is also pure experience ("there is a difference between knowing the path and walking the path", as Morpheus explains). The human(ist) virus of (absolute) idealism hence befalls the new cyberworld by appropriating the otherness of "its" other(s), giving an ironic appeal to agent Smith's radically (Nietzschean) posthuman speech:

> I'm going to be honest with you… I hate his place. This zoo. This prison. This reality, whatever you want to call it, I can't stand it any longer. It's the smell, if there is such a thing. I feel saturated by it. I can taste your stink and every time I do, I fear that I've somehow been infected by it.[52]

Ultimately this is precisely what precipitates the return of anthropocentrism. Agent Smith is evil because he wants to be free, but free is only what a human can be, and anyway, where would agent Smith go? Where do machines "live" since they are denied ontology?

This is also why human death is at once always a non-event (following Badiou) and the only event possible (for humans – *pace* Badiou). As agent Smith says to Neo in his supposedly final moments: this is the sound of inevitability. It is by denying the event and hence accepting the non-eventuality of death (you can't be dead because I love you) that Neo rises again (by reclaiming identity through language: "my name is Neo"). By "incorporating" the other, he fills in the void of the Other, he becomes the matrix, and,

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[52] It is of course legitimate to ask how a programme (who, in the third film will become a kind of virus himself) could live in be fear of human infection, or whether the reality Smith here refers to is "real" reality or the matrix, and how would he know the difference? Also interesting would be to know where Smith hopes to go once his job "here" (where exactly?) is finished. Is there life outside the matrix for programmes which would presuppose that the matrix is itself only part of some other reality or another matrix? Do programmes dream of teleology, progress, identity or home?

paradoxically, he "embodies" the matrix and thus truly becomes the digital self he always was. In the sequels we learn, accordingly, that he is a sentient programme himself and as such an integral part of the matrix. He is therefore neither human nor posthuman, strictly speaking, but simply "inhuman".

Of course cinema cannot but return to its own logic of representation. A purely digital vision, made explicit, would invalidate the very signifying practice of cinema at least as known by Hollywood. This has nothing to do with the existence of fully digitalised computer animation or indeed with the virtual reality of computer simulation which is of course still produced for an eminently human if not (liberal) humanist and thus narcissistic and thoroughly "spectral" subject. *The Matrix* inevitbly returns to its beginning and in closing opens and reaffirms futurity and self-legitimates the genre of SF as a "just" (or at least realistic) interpretation of "reality". A phonecall, for the first time, is thus made "to" the matrix – which is now subject to address. The Matrix has somehow become anthropomorphised addressee, an almost human "subject". It can thus be interpellated by its new Master Subject, Neo. In an interesting reversal it is now the machine/technology/VR that has a structure of truth (I know you're out there and that you are afraid of change). What returns is thus the human liberal subject projected onto and into the posthuman future as producing "system failure". The freedom of humanity lies in a "world without you" (without the machinic other), a "monstrous" world in which "anything is possible". However, it is actually subject to choice and thus to the reconfirmed and "purified" virtuality of an "as if" (I leave it to "you" – i.e. what you will make of humans' newly found freedom). However the price of this imitation and appropriation of an inhuman other is, as usual, the becoming other of the human in

posthuman terms. In order to overcome the technological threat, Neo has to become more machinic than the machines, or more like Smith than Smith himself. The only posthuman truth Neo has to offer, strictly speaking, is that there is no "real" other that could be addressed by "you". After all, who was Neo actually talking to on the phone at the end of the first film if not the implied human viewer witness of that film?

The phantasm that drives the SF/VR scenario of *The Matrix* thus corresponds to Baudrillard's question: "How can one think to be able to enter a video image and do as one pleases while thinking at the same time that there will still be facts, events, values able to resist this electronic imersion? Everything will cease in this absolute sensory isolation chamber that are screens and networks" (*Paroxyste*, 60). For Neo this seems the paroxysm *par excellence*: the only escape from the machinic virtual reality of the matrix is by becoming more virtual than the screen and cyberspace themselves. This may constitute a challenge to Baudrillard's "there is no beyond the screen as there is a beyond the mirror. The very dimension of time is there fused with real time" (*Ecran, 201*). Everything that is being produced or mediated by the machine is itself machinic. If one is to make sure to control the machine and its "logic" one has to incorporate that logic. The control over cyberspace becomes Neo's "obsession": "to control the image, the text, the body from inside somehow by playing with the code or the genetic conditions" (201). But this phantasm is only the confirmation of the fact that "it is the (virtual) machine that speaks to you, it is the machine that thinks you" (201) in the "desert of the social, the desert of work, the desert of the body, which the concetration of information will create" (*Ecran*, 70).

Baudrillard is of course not alone in his scepticism of virtual or cyberspace. Slavoj Žižek is equally sceptical about cyberspace's ability to provide *jouissance* and instead recommends a "conservative" attitude as long as cyberspace remains a "key symptom of our socioideological constellation": "Does [cyberspace] not involve the promise of a false opening (the spiritual prospect of casting off our 'ordinary' bodies, turning into a virtual entity which travels from one virtual space to another) as well as the foreclosure of the social power relations within which virtual communities operate?"[53] For Žižek fantasies of VR and cyberspace constitute a foreclosure of the body-real. For him, Neo's is a cyber-psychosis fantasising about an agent who has taken over his "ego programme".[54] In terms of *The Matrix*'s denouement it may be worth quoting Žižek's account of what constitutes a "virtual catastrophe" in full while linking it to Neo's Baudrillardian "overreaching":

> The prospect of the accomplished digitalisation of all information… [cf. Neo's "instant access" to the matrix at the end of the first and throughout the second and third film] promises the almost perfect materialization of the big Other: out there in the machine, "everything will be written", a complete symbolic redoubling of reality will take place. This prospect of a perfect symbolic accountancy also augurs a new type of catastrophe in which a sudden disturbance in the digital network (an extra effective virus, say) [cf. Neo's virus-like threat to "infect" the matrix and produce "system-failure"] erases the

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[53] In *The Plague of Fantasies*, London: Verso, 1997, 130.

[54] Cf, *Plague of Fantasies,* pp. 141-2 where Žižek, two years before *The Matrix*, speaks about "agents in cyberspace" which he sees as the "ego as the subject's supplement" with the prospect of a new form of "cyber-psychosis" (which seems to anticipate the matrix scenario with its split of "residual self image in the matrix programme and the "true" subject in its pod): "Since my cyberspace agent is an external program which acts on my behalf, decides what information I will see and read, and so on, it is easy to imagine the paranoiac possibility of *another* computer program controlling and directing my agent unbeknownst to me – if this happens, I am, as it were, dominated from within; my own ego is no longer mine."

computerized "big Other", leaving the external "real reality" intact [cf. Neo's achievement of humanity's liberation and rebirth into reality, and the fact that the majority of humanity throughout the series remains in their enslaved condition, i.e. in their "pods"]. (Žižek, Plague…, 164).

Again, Žižek's scepticism should act as a warning to Neo's idealism that the denegation of this "virtual" catastrophe may not lead to the desired result: "although, in 'real life', nothing whatsoever happens, and things seem to follow their course, the catastrophe is total and complete, since 'reality' is all of a sudden deprived of its symbolic support…" (164). What the posthuman subject Neo lacks is not reality but rather a "real", an Other.

The Posthuman Subject and "Its" Other

What brings about the "loss of reality" in cyberspace is not its emptiness (the fact that it is lacking with respect to the fullness of the real presence) but, on the contrary, its very excessive fullness (the potential abolition of the dimension of symbolic virtuality). (Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 155)

It thus remains for us to look at the actual prospects for subjectivity in the projected posthuman realm where SF and theory seem to converge through an appropriation of the notion of the inhuman. However, while Baudrillard remains critical or deeply sceptical of the inhuman and its representations – because, ultimately, thought from the position of pure alterity is impossible – there is, in many posthumanist texts, a curious "desire" for

this inhuman. But why should the "inhuman" think or even feel the need to symbolise or "represent"?[55]

On the one hand, the fusion between man and machine that preoccupies posthumanist SF as well as theory poses problems of "embodiment". In fact, shifting the focus from the old Cartesian body/mind duality-in-unity problem towards the body as "process" or "project" of "embodiment" is central to the posthuman as such (cf. Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman*). Baudrillard speaks of the "denial of the body" and the fusion between "intelligence" and the machine in *Échange impossible*: "It is not only the intellectual capacities but the entire repressed libido and the denegation of the body which are extended into the information machine, which has become an object of desire without desire… while the human becomes an inhuman excrescence of the machinic capacities" (149). "Man's" ultimate modern phantasm has been to create a machine that surpasses "him" in every respect. Ironically, "he" cannot envisage not retaining mastery over "his" creation. This is nevertheless precisely what is happening in the posthuman scenario with the kind of autonomy it provides to the machine-object: "man is thus captured within the utopia of an artifact superior to himself, but one that he nevertheless needs to overcome to save face" (Echange, 146). The problem is that, in our preoccupation with the subject, we never imagine: "the respective alienation of the technical object, its alteration, its disturbance by the too human phantasms projected onto it… This is an error of judgement, however: preserving the specificity of the human presupposes preserving that of the machine" (Echange, 149). This danger is thematised in

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[55] Compare Truong, 206: "Herein lies the last big illusion of those who advocate the infusion of matter with the spirit: like Narcissus they are fascinated with their own physical and mental forms which they obstinately wish to project onto the machine as if upgrading it towards an "incontestable humanity". But the Successor cares little about emulating man. No doubt it will be intelligent but of another intelligence" (206).

many posthumanist descriptions and many contemporary SF scenarios. A "critical" posthumanist stance for theory, however, has to be careful not to lose sight of the issue of subjectivity and subjectification in the process of "cyborgisation": "Freed from the real by the virtual, thinking can find itself where it thinks, where we are being thought. For the subject that claims to think without being thought in return is merely an organic prop that prefigures the inorganic intellection of the machine" (Echange, 151). This neatly corresponds to the ultimate paradox at work in many SF films, including *The Matrix*, namely that the "price" humans pay for projecting subjectivity onto the machine is that they themselves become (interchangeable with) that machine: a kind of suicidal anthropomorphism which makes humanity at once the ultimate utopian desire while fusing it with its machinic other (cf. Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 16-17).

In envisaging and epresenting this fusion posthumanism's dilemma is what to do with the body? As David Le Breton, in *L'Adieu au corps*, explains, the virtual reality of the posthuman seems to feed into humanity's long standing "hatred for the body": "The body is no longer in contemporary society only the allocation of an intangible identity, the irreducible incarnation of the subject and its being-in-the-world, but a construction, an effect of connectedness, a terminal, a transitory and manipulable object equipped for multiple extensions… The body today is an alter ego, a double, another me that is available for all kinds of modifications, as proof of radical and modifiable personal existence and the display of an identity chosen either provisionally or durably" (23-24). Posthumanism's shift from "the" body to processes of "embodiment" coincides with the theoretical shift from "a" text to generalised "textuality". In order to maintain a critical grasp on these two processes occurring in contemporary late-capitalist techno-scientific

culture, with its fictional representations which have become virtually interchangeable with the horizon of the contemporary cultural imaginary and with theoretical discourses about these two, N. Katherine Hayles (in *How We Became Posthuman*) advocates careful attention to the concrete embodiment of "posthuman" subjectivities and the material conditions of their emergence.

On the other hand, the fusion between human and non-human other which in our "post-biological" ("amorphous") age forces the body, according to Scott Bukatman, to become a cyborg ("to retain its presence in the world, resituated in technological space and refigured in technological terms. Whether this represents a continuation, a sacrifice, a transcendence, or a surrender of 'the subject' is not certain" (*Terminal Identities*, 247)) poses the question of alterity and its foreclosure, as Baudrillard so emphatically demonstrates. A double strategy is therefore necessary for a "critical" posthumanism – a seemingly "progressivist" political one as for example advocated by Badiou or also Hayles's "materialism". While embracing the posthuman transformation of the liberal subject through a rethinking of the relationship between thought and its specificities of embodiment (p. xiv), Hayles interrogates conceptions of virtualities in terms of their forgetting of the body and proposes to move towards thinking "embodied virtuality" as opposed to the phantasm of "bodiless exultations of cyberspace", an erasure of the body that would in fact constitute the danger for posthumanism of returning to a naïve form of idealist humanism.[56]

The other strategy is more "deconstructionist" and focuses on ethical implications of alterity and its displacements within posthumanism (cf. for example Elaine Graham's approach). The kind of critical posthumanism we are advocating here necessarily

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[56] This aspect is further explored in the chapter on "Posthumanism and the Body".

combines elements of Badiou and Baudrillard with a healthy dose of Derrida. For us it seems that something like the truth as attainable for a subject requires a combination of elements which nevertheless do not necessarily form a dialectic. It is for example not a question of fusing or collapsing the two moments we referred to in the *Matrix* and which both seem necessary for any narrative representing the "birth of a subject" whether posthuman or else. The moment of recognition needs to be analysed in terms of a (politically motivated) "ethics of truth", as formulated for example by Badiou. It is an ethics that specifically asks political questions about a subject and its access to the truth of a specific situation, it is a post-evenemental subject that nevertheless involves agency and a universal notion of truth. As such it is not strictly speaking dialogic and turned towards the other. Its "*lien social*" is pure "*deliaison*", its community remains a promise. As such it cannot escape a certain violence, and Badiou's "ethical" imperative of "keep going", of the demanding of the subject to be true to "himself" and to honour fidelity to the event (similar to Lacan's injunction to never give up on one's desire), is interestingly close to (Albert Camus') existentialism. As Simon Critchley remarks, it is the heroism which makes this ethical attitude vulnerable to the most reactionary forms of humanism.[57] On the other hand, everything Badiou says about the conservatism of an ethics of alterity translated into mutliculturalism, communitarianism, or "silly left culturalism" (as expressed in *The Red Critique* 3 March/April 2002)[58] with its identity politics, is absolutely pertinent and true.

However, since Badiou's subject has the structure of a trauma (its goal is to remain true to the traumatic event and to speak its truth) the actual moment of recognition

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[57] Simon Critchley, "Demanding Approval: On the Ethics of Alain Badiou", 16-27.
[58] "Euroamerican Left and the myth of 'New' Capitalism" at http://redcritique.org/MarchApril02/ euroamericanleftandnewcapitalism.htm (4-12-06).

in *The Matrix* is a moment of radical alterity which leads to a necessary "forgetting" of the real. This is where Baudrillard's "desert of the real", Lacan's "void" and Badiou's "event" differ somewhat from Derrida's notion of the other. "*Tout autre est tout autre*"[59] can of course mean that radical alterity is purely tautological and hence beyond any "logic" or philosophical enquiry, but it also means that this universalism is precisely not "pure" (e.g. mystical or anti-philosophical) because it is at the same time "specific" and singularly situated, one might say. The concrete other which is always other to a self and other to an other arrives through this structural opening. It is always a concrete other that is foreclosed by a subject. This makes the other "specifically" other. The second moment, the moment of self-appropriation as action or "self-transformation" – the event-apotheosis-miracle described above – therefore needs to be read in terms of an ethics of alterity, which is, strictly speaking, not a simple ethics, as Derrida says in his reading of Levinas, but an "ethics of an ethics", a specific "metaethics" that prevents (Levinasian) ethics from turning into moralising theology. Derrida's deconstruction of Levinasian ethics returns ethics towards philosophy and also towards politics. The best illustration for this is a brief statement in *Alterites*:

> Of course, in order to respect the entirely other of alterity, alteration itself — which always presupposes a contact, or an intervention, a socio-political, psycho- etc. transformation — alteration itself would have to be impossible. If the other remains at an infinite distance, and this is the condition on which the other is other, not only can the other not touch me, or affect me, but the other cannot even alter anything. This relation to the entirely other would ultimately leave everything unchanged, unaltered. And it is of an irrefutable logic that

[59] Cf. Derrida, *Donner la mort* (Paris : Galilée, 1999), 114-157.

pure alterity should be incompatible with the logic of alteration. There is a moment, I feel, when one must re-start negotiating — this is of a political, or historical concern. This means that if one restricts oneself to the pure respect for this alterity without alteration, one always runs the risk of lending oneself to immobilism, to conservatism, etc., that is to the obliteration of alterity itself… There is no reasonable, rational response to this question. There is no logic.[60]

To finally return to our initial question: why is it that at this historical moment, the human, just when technologically the invention of a global humanity becomes technically, this humanity disappears and is reflected back to us as "posthuman"? Does this announce a disappearance, a return or a re-invention of the human?[61]

The anxiety and desire of "becoming posthuman" (Hayles, 283), as for example "science-fictionally" illustrated by *The Matrix*, may thus signal the task of thinking the concept of the human by re-membering the location of thought and agency. As long as the subject is being thought as at once "emergent" [Hayles, 291] (i.e. we have always been posthuman *and* (therefore) "never human enough"), and as long theory doesn't forget a certain historical materialism (e.g. of the body and its processes of embodiment; Hayles, 193, 283-84). Subjectivity as process and the result of an event, to return to Badiou, is the unsurpassable of critical (posthumanist) theory, of thinking, which at the same time has to be worked through. The subject of theory refers to both these "events" that were seen to occur in *The Matrix*: the event of recognition which starts a process of

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[60] Derrida, in Derrida, Pierre-Jean Labarrière, Francis Guibal and Stanislas Breton, *Altérités* (Paris: Osiris, 1986), 31, trans. Stefan Herbrechter in *Parallax* 10.4 (2004).
[61] Cf. Baudrillard's cry of "frustration": "it is always the same. The moment one starts intellectualising a phenomenon it disappears into facts" (Paroxyste, 39).

self-reflection and "hybridisation" which always originates in the other – and occurs in the name of an absolutely Other; and the event as "apotheosis" – the projected but incomplete project of "purification", of becoming universal, immortal etc. of transcendence. Between these two poles, theory and reading, thinking and culture, carry out their interminable work of re-writing. Any posthumanism must be interrogated in terms of its "betrayal" of the event (its disavowal, imitation, or ontologization[62]). As long as the fidelity to the event allows for a critical interrogation by the same subject that is also the effect of the same event whose task it is to be truthful to, theory has a place in posthumanism – a place between politics and ethics, between a truth-event, and the question of the other.

What this means for our call for a critical posthumanist cultural criticism is that in relation to the question of technology and the future of the human we must avoid certain pitfalls through a parallel reading of "theory" (e.g. Badiou, Derrida and others) and cultural "practice" (e.g. posthumanist filmic texts like *The Matrix* as symptoms of current transformation of the cultural imaginary). With Badiou we must ask how truthful posthumanism in theory and practice is to the "event" that for lack of better words must be named "the advent of our posthuman condition". Against Badiou, however, and also against Lacan, we must equally recognize that any ethical moment of truth is always already split into an "internalised" and "externalised" other real which allows "the letter" of interpellation to always arrive at its destination but never fully so. It always goes astray, and remains "*en souffrance*". While the possibility for ethical choice, strictly speaking, lies in the possibility, the radical openness of the decision, the possibility for political action lies in establishing the truth of a specific situation which calls for a

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[62] See Zizek, "Psychoanalysis in Post-Marxism…", 239.

decision. What, however, causes the shift within the real and also the shift from one real to the next is radical alterity. It would seem that neither Badiou, nor Baudrillard, nor Derrida can tell the "full story" of the posthuman. Critical (posthumanist) cultural criticism must attend to a variety of (post)humanisms if it wants to avoid, on the one hand, a rather flat culturalism with a "conservative" notion of alterity, and on the other hand a self-fulfilling anthropo-logic that cannot prevent its own end from re-occurring by believing itself to be part of human "immortality" in the state of constant fixation on its own inhuman fetishised excess. The posthuman must be interrogated both as to its subjective "truth" and its other. A critical posthumanism, having asked Badiou's strong questions: "what is your critique of the existing world? What can you offer us that's new? Of what are you the creator?" (in 'One devides into two', Culturemachine), nevertheless has to rely on an a notion of otherness, and ultimately the reader-subject it is hoping to transform by relocating it in relation to the event, as Badiou explains:

> Any fiction however devoted it may be to establishing… the place of being, presupposes or binds [*enchaîne*] a subject. And this subject detaches itself [*s'excepte*] from the place by simply naming it while at the same time remaining distant from this naming. (Badiou, *Beckett*, 32)

In the co-incidence of the (posthuman) subject and the (posthuman) event a critical posthumanist reading remains both ethical or political and is already transformative.

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