

# Third Rail

The Political Arts Magazine of the College of Staten Island/CUNY - Summer 2003



## Confronting Staten Island Racism





prepare to free your mind

# Third Rail

Summer 2003 Contents

**4** CSI Student Confronts Racist Staten Island

**12** Suppression of Free Speech for People of Color at CUNY by Donna Lamb

**14** Matrix Counter-Revolutions:  
The Matrix & The Medium Message by  
Prof. Edward D. Miller  
There is no Spoon by Kelly L. Ross

**28** Prayer by Noam

**35** Israel and the New Anti-Semitism by  
Shalom Lappin

**40** The Zany Adventures of Dick 'n' Bush by  
Enrique Inocente

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Libertarian  
Socialism  
Chomsky  
Bertrand Russell  
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Poetry  
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# Third Rail

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# Scalped. Beaten. Harrassed by Police.

*In her own words . . . .*

The amazing story of how one *CSI student* confronted racism and paid the price. . .

*. . . now, she needs your help.*

## To Whom It May Concern

When I first moved to my neighborhood about 2 years ago I found out that there was one unwritten rule, which everybody had to obey. The rule was, never park your car in front of Mike and Linda's house. They enforced this rule by placing big giant polls and ropes in front of their house for everybody to see that it was their own personal property (even though it was public property). How they were able to get away with this I don't know but I do know that it is illegal and the City of New York hadn't done anything about it.

Personally I did not agree with this, so whenever I needed to park my car and the space was empty - I used it. This created a lot of disturbances because every time I parked my car, I would get visits from Mike and he would demand that I move my vehicle. I tried to argue that it was a public place but Mike insisted that I had to follow the rules or otherwise my tire would be sliced. Things soon got worse. After I had parked my car in front of their house,

Mike and Linda had my car towed in the middle of the night. I asked the neighbors how they were able to have my car towed from a legal public spot. I was told by my neighbors that Mike and Linda "are connected - they've lived here for so many years they practically own the block."

I did not understand at first but I soon came to learn their connection to power. In order to keep



**Ropes and polls designating Mike and Linda's "private" public parking spot.**

the peace I began respecting their wishes and never again parked my car in front of their house. In situations where I arrived home and there was no space in front of my house, I would drive to the next block – but would never dare park in front of Mike and Linda's house.

Some time later, a car come out of nowhere and smashed into both Mike and Linda's cars. After the incident they unilaterally decided that the cause of the accident was due to the location of their cars. Now they decided that they were not going to park their cars in front of their own house anymore, but would instead park their cars in front of my house.

On Wednesday, March 20th 2002, I arrived home with my kids, where upon I discovered that Linda had parked her car in front of my house. This wasn't the first time she or Mike had parked their cars in front of my house. I believed that they were acting as big bullies and were trying to be provoke and intimidate me – so I decided to go and talk to them.

I doubled park my vehicle and went to their house. I rang the doorbell and Mike opened the door. I greeted him in a civil manner and reminded him that when he asked me not to park in front of his house – that I had respected his wishes. I asked him why he would continuously park in front of my house, when he ha requested from me not to park in front of his house. I informed him that by parking in front of my house, that he was deliberately inconveniencing me and my family. I politely explained to him that as neighbors, we should try to be considerate and fair to each other, and that he was being very unfair to me. I requested that as a courtesy, that he should move his vehicle from my side of the street and park in spots that I pointed out were empty. Mike responded, "This is a public place I can park anywhere I want." I retorted, "you obviously don't believe that - otherwise you would not have those polls in front of your house blocking a parking spot because that's illegal. You're the one who started this territory business."

We were soon interrupted by his girlfriend Linda, who stormed out of the house and said, "He doesn't

have to move the car because he is a cop!" I responded, "even cops have to be fair". Linda then said, "get the fuck out of here you welfare recipient, you stupid crack head. Get the fuck away from my house you dumb nigger, you don't even have any fucking education you stupid bitch!"

I was shocked and extremely offended by her racial remarks. I responded, "lady, you don't know me, so stop passing judgment simply because I am black. And for your information am not on welfare, I am not a crackhead, I DO have a job and I am educated! So don't think every black person you see in this block is ignorant." She then told me, "wait, I will be back".

I turned to Mike who was standing next to me and I told him that his wife's behavior was totally unnecessary. He didn't seem to care, as he responded "So what? Just get the fuck out here!"

I realized that it was useless to try and reason with them. Obviously I was wasting my time and there was no need to continue talking to them. Therefore I decided to just leave. So I began to turn around and saw Linda charge at me like a ragging bull with something in her hand. It looked silvery and sharp – reminiscent of a knife or a scissors. She quickly hid it behind her back.

I began to panic and felt a great fear come over me. I attempted to run, but Mike grabbed my hands and pulled me back. He held both of my hands very strongly. He then said to me, "Where do you think your going little girl?"

I was trapped between Mike and his girlfriend, Linda. Linda began spitting on my face and said, "I'm going to teach you a lesson". She struck my face with immense force. I felt the impact on my left jaw. I instantly felt woozy and out of balance - it felt like I was going to lose consciousness.

I dropped by head down and tried to protect my face from serious damage. I was afraid she was going to slash my face. I felt Linda grab my hair and with



all her strength I felt her uprooting it. She was pulling it out. I felt her cutting it as the razor touched my scalp. The pain was excruciating. I was crying.

I remember exclaiming, “please let me go, please let me go!” I was pleading with them to release me, but Linda kept on replying, “who told you to come here?” I feared that I was going to die and the thought of my children witnessing the murder was heartbreaking.

I knew I had to save myself for the sake of my children (who were watching the whole attack). It was a matter of life and death. I tried to move my arms but Mike was too strong. I tried to move my body but there was no space. I was in the middle of these two gigantic people and they overwhelmed me. It was hopeless. I started to scream in the hope that someone might hear me. I was kicking and shouting very loudly.

Mike quickly released me, but Linda was still beating me. I used my hands to defend myself and finally, by the miracle of God, I pushed Linda away and ran outside their gate. I reached the middle of the street and the first thing I did was touch my head.

The whole right side of my scalp was bald. I was in shock. I felt free and I couldn't believe what had just happened to me. Everything seemed like a dream. I saw people in figures. I heard Mike telling Linda to call the cops. I heard Linda screaming at me, “your going to go to jail.”

I shouted back “you are not better than me, if you feel above everybody over here then why don't you move out?” Mike yelled, “shut up you stupid bitch! Shut up!” But I would not stop.

I saw him open his gate and he started to come after me. I ran inside my vehicle and I heard my children crying. I tried to parallel park my vehicle, but I was shaking frantically. I hit one of Mike's polls in front of his house and then I accidentally tapped the vehicles behind and in front of me.

Mike pointed and shouted at me and began approaching my vehicle. He began to kick and punch my car. I was so scared, my children and I were trapped inside. I locked all the doors. I didn't know what to do. He continuously was kicking the car like a crazy man and screaming something. I wanted to get him out of the way, so I bumped his vehicle - but he would not move.

He began shouting, go ahead hit me! I want you to hit me!” I sat inside the vehicle trapped until he decided to stop. Eventual he left us alone and I rushed my children inside our house.

My whole body was trembling. I was in shock and the children were devastated. They were both crying. I immediately called the police and explained my situation over the phone. I waited anxiously for the cops to arrive. I stared through my living room window until I saw them.

At first it was one police car and soon after there were about 20 police cars outside - some were unmarked cars. I watched them as they all went to Mike's house and shook his hand. They talked for a long time and I began to wonder if anybody actually cared about my children and me.

Finally after a long time, several of them crossed the street and came to my house. They knocked at the door. I opened my door and they asked if I had called, to which I replied “yes.” Without any formal introduction or greetings, they then stormed inside my living room. I was very much offended because I never allow anyone to step on my carpet with their shoes. I explained to them my “carpet policy” and requested that we talk outside my house. They laughed and some of them started to search the house.

They were asking me if there was someone else in the house. I said “no.” They opened my bedroom doors and checked everywhere. One of the police officers, named Campbell, bent down to my face and said, “Listen honey, we don't have time to waste

with you so I'm gonna ask you this once - do you have someone who can stay with the kids?" I was puzzled. I started to explain my story, but they shouted at me and said, "we will take you down with your kids!"

I became frightened as there were about ten police officers in my house. I decided to obey their instructions do as they said, even though I did not under-

stand what was going on. I walked to the kitchen and called my mother. The cops followed me to the kitchen. When I asked them why they were following me, they answered, "we have to make sure you don't pick up any weapon." After I got off the phone, one of the officers asked me for my identification. I gave them my CSI college I.D..

The police officer looked at it and then took it outside with him. He returned and said he needed an identification with my date of birth. I told him "one moment"; my son was crying and needed my attention. I opened the refrigerator to get him something and Officer Campbell slammed the door very hard and said "give me the I.D now!"

I had to leave my son and go look for it. I heard my son crying again, this time he was screaming very loud. The cops did not even care to talk to him. I tried to attend to him but he was too scared. My daughter was also frightened. I tried to comfort her by putting on a tape of a cartoon and sat



her in the living room - but it was impossible because the door was wide open and she complained that it was too cold. I asked the police officers who were standing outside with their hands on their guns if I could shut the door. They said, "no, we have to leave it open."

Officer Campbell was still asking for my I.D and also getting very impatient with me. He began to shout saying, "I am trying to be very nice to you, but if you don't give me your I.D with your date of birth, I am going to take you with your fucking kids." At that moment the telephone began to ring. Due to the confusion, my daughter picked up the phone and then called me and said, "it's daddy."

My husband was on the phone and our daughter told him that "those neighbors cut mommy's hair." I explained to him what happened and he said he would leave his job right away and come home. I then decided that it was time to call my attorney. All the police officers laughed and said, "She has a pre-paid legal lawyer. Oh we are scared."

I reached a lawyer on the telephone and I explained my situation to him. I told him that I didn't know what was going on and he asked to speak to the cops. They all moved slowly one by one, refusing to speak to the lawyer. Officer Campbell was the first one to go outside, saying he has to call his sergeant.

I waited for his sergeant to arrive. When the sergeant appeared, he took the telephone and told the attorney, "we gonna take her." The attorney explained to me that there was nothing he could do and that I have to go to the precinct. The sergeant said, "Take her now!"

Since my husband had not yet returned home from work, the sergeant took it upon himself to ask my neighbor if she could stay with my children. She agreed and he directed his underlings to, "take her right away." An Officer Lockhart arrested me and began searching me. He took everything out of my pockets, then held my hand and took me outside.

Without even being told the reason for my arrest or being read my right, he simply said "turn around, I am gonna put handcuffs on you."

We arrived at the precinct. I continued to tell them that I was assaulted with a weapon and I would like to report it - but nobody listened. I was fingerprinted and photographed and made to wait until everything come back clear. I sat in a cell for about three hours and was then released.

I appeared in court on April 24, 2002 and my attackers are actually going forward with charges. They are also asking for restitution money.

This whole incident has caused me a tremendous amount of mental and physical anguish. I experienced a mental breakdown and had to be treated at the Emergency Psychiatric ward of Bayley Seton Hospital on Marsh 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>.

After the incident, my left jaw was severely damaged (I am currently under medication) and I still have to follow up with psychiatric treatment (I am taking anti-depressant medication and sleeping pills). My whole life has been affected by this and yet I am the one who now has to be put on the defensive while Mike and Linda get treated like victims.

I occasionally break down and I have the Mobile Crisis Team visit me and only God knows how much these people help me. I am not a bad person. I am a married woman with two beautiful children; Ana is 3 and Fedor is 1 years old. My husband works two jobs because we believe in working hard and not taking handouts. I go to school full time at College of Staten Island and I work full time at C.F.S in Somerville N.J..

I am a respected member of my community and I get along with everybody. I am a born again Christian who loves the Lord and is a member of the Victory Church of Jesus. My only mistake was to question injustice in my community. Mike and Linda have gotten away with a lot in my neighbor-

hood - simply because they are connected to the people in the police department. They are very nasty, evil people who always abuse neighborhood children and everybody else they feel like annoying.

Please help me. I don't have a lot of money for a good attorney and I am afraid. This is injustice and it is not about black or white it is about a hard working person who lives life doing the right thing. Again, I am asking for your help bringing the story to the media because I believe it is the only chance I have to beat this injustice.

The Police don't see me as a person – just as a black girl from the ghetto. The police actually think that I attacked Mike and Linda. I am only 5 ft 2 inches and weigh only 114 pounds while Linda is about 260 pounds and Mike is around 6 ft 5 inches.



My father has written a letter to the District Attorney but we have received no response. Please help. I am a desperate victim who has been going to court for the last eight months. The prosecutor have offered me an A.C.D with \$400 in restitution money. I refused and went forward with the trial. My lawyer, Jay Duskin was excellent and he exposed the lies that my neighbors (Mike and Linda) had concocted. The prosecutor brought Officer Lockhart to testify, but he did not recall anything except that only two police cars responded to my call (an obvious lie). On November 8th we went back for the judges verdict and for the charge of Assault in the third degree, I was found not guilty. I was also found not guilty on the charge of criminal mischief. However, I was found guilty for harassment in the 2nd degree (which is just a violation, so I not have a criminal record). Obviously, this made the prosecutor very upset. By the time we were recalled, three prosecutors (including the supervisor) were in the courtroom observing my case.

They actually have the nerve to bring a bill for \$400.00 dollars, claiming that I had broken Linda's glasses. My attorney argued that in the beginning the prosecutor was asking for restitution money for damage to the vehicle. Now that the prosecution could not win restitution for the vehicle, they were altering their story and requesting restitution for glasses. Secondly, where was this receipt all the time during trial and why did judge set another hearing for the restitution money. Again my nightmare continues . . . .

*If you would like to help this fellow CSI student, please contact Third Rail at (718) 982-3105 or via email at editors@ThirdRailMag.com*

# LEGAL UPDATE

## Suppression of Free Speech for People of Color at City University of New York

by Donna Lamb

Students at Hostos Community College in the Bronx held a demonstration protesting cuts in Spanish and bilingual programs. During this protest Miguel Malo was arrested for holding up a sign in a public atrium that had traditionally been the "free speech area" on campus. Now, he faces a possible year in jail on the trumped up charges of assaulting two officers and resisting arrest.

If it were only about Miguel Malo it would be bad enough. The most troubling thing is, it's about much more: the first amendment rights of Blacks, Latinos and other students of color at the City University of New York (CUNY..)

In August 2001, students at Hostos Community College in the Bronx held a demonstration protesting cuts in Spanish and bilingual programs. During this protest Miguel Malo, the Student Senate President, was arrested for holding up a sign in a public atrium that had traditionally been the "free speech area" on campus.

Others were also arrested that day, but the charges against them were eventually dropped. However, CUNY has continued



to prosecute Malo, claiming that this 5 foot 2 inch dignified and self-possessed young man had "assaulted" two 6 foot CUNY "peace officers" - even though numerous faculty and student witnesses saw that it was Miguel who was assaulted by seven campus cops who threw him to the ground. Now, he could be sentenced to a year in jail for the totally ridiculous charges of assaulting these officers and resisting arrest. He is also charged with disorderly conduct and harassment.

Clearly CUNY wants to make an example of Miguel Malo in order to intimidate other students of color who are thinking of standing

up for their rights and protesting tuition hikes, budget cuts, and all the attacks on the working-class students at this, the largest urban university system in the United States.

Stated Malo's attorney, Ron McGuire, "Miguel's story is really an example of what's happening to Black and Latino students at CUNY where they're being essentially locked down and deprived of their rights. His case is not the only one where students are being arrested or told that they can't demonstrate. Students at Hostos are not allowed to give out leaflets in public places on the campus like they used to and like students are

permitted to do at most colleges."

McGuire told of the glaring disparity he's seen between the way students are treated on different CUNY campuses depending on whether they're in wealthy white neighborhoods and attended mainly by white students - such as Queens College and Hunter - or in predominantly non-white neighborhoods and attended by people of color - such as Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn, City College in Harlem, and Hostos.

In the colleges where the students are mostly white you can drive right onto the campus, enter any door of any building, and just walk around anywhere without being challenged. But at places like Hostos you have to go through gates to enter the campus, most of the entrances to the buildings are permanently locked, and you've got to make it through security check points to get in. It's extremely repressive, feeling more like a prison than a campus.

Furthermore, when the students hold their protests at majority white campuses there's more of the attitude "Well, that's what students

do." He told of a sit-in at Hunter. The students had asked him to be present. The angry students came in with their list of demands and sat in at the President's office. She came out and spoke with them. Then, the students were told, "Ok, you can spend the night. Just don't mess up the furniture." Next, the Dean of Students came in with two trays of fruit so they wouldn't get hungry during the night, and the Vice President gave \$15 when the students took up a collection for food.

But, stated McGuire, "When Pedro Rivera and other students tried to march on the president's office at Hostos, they weren't even allowed near the office. At campuses like Hostos and City College when students protest there's a fear of domestic insurrection. They call out this incredible security force. We have gotten documents about their deciding whether or not they need to wear guns to control the students. There's a very intense kind of racial profiling going on, and that's what Miguel is caught up in."

Miguel Malo's line of defense is very simple: that it's not against the

law to hold up a sign in a public place, which is what he was arrested for. But he's been dragged through the courts for almost two years now as CUNY and the DA have "amended" their story and charges over and over, refused to turn over their videotapes of the protest where he was arrested, failed to bring key witnesses to court, and even tried - unsuccessfully - to throw the lawyer of Malo's choice, Atty. Ron McGuire, off the case. That little maneuver even shocked some jaded court personnel.

But despite everything he's been put through, Malo has steadfastly and courageously maintained his stand. He says that a student's right to free speech shouldn't end at the schoolhouse door. He is grateful for the public support that his case has received and confident that justice will prevail and he will be found innocent. And Malo has said that he hopes his case will establish that Black and Latino students at Hostos and all CUNY campuses have the same constitutional rights as white students.

# MATRIX COUNTER REVOLUTIONS

With the release of *Matrix Revolutions* this Fall, progressives and leftists have openly embraced the Matrix phenomenon. But is *The Matrix* revolutionary or regressive and counter-revolutionary.

CSI's own Professor Edward D. Miller may have the answer.



# The Matrix and the Medium's Message

by Professor Edward D. Miller

Combining science fiction with kung fu, *The Matrix* was one of the most successful, innovative, and timely Hollywood-made films of 1999. (It is also the biggest-selling DVD ever in that new, mass-market medium.) The film cleverly incorporates recent cultural theory into its plot line and reflects millennial fears and hopes about the role of technology.

In academic circles, *The Matrix* has captured much attention: At two recent conferences on film and media that I attended, panels were devoted to locating the subversive moments and revolutionary potential of the film. For all its innovation in terms of use of digital technology (it won four technical Academy Awards this spring) and genre, *The Matrix* is all too traditional. It insists—as Hollywood films concerned with injustice usually do—that social change is possible only through the heroic action of a hyperkinetic individual. In the film, a sustained social movement does not prevail—a savior triumphs.

Like much of science fiction film and literature, *The Matrix* is a tale of a young man waking up to a confining reality and fighting for freedom. The dystopia in the film is particularly gruesome and especially technophobic for a film that revels in digital special effects. In the future, the machines have taken over (again, typical for sci-fi). They “farm” human beings to use them as batteries in a world that has been drained of other sources of power due to (yes, you guessed it) human folly. In order to pacify the minds of their dormant prisoners (who lie in vast fields of amniotic fluid encased in artificial wombs, digesting the liquefied remains of the dead), the artificial intelligence creates an elaborate virtual reality. In this coordinated and micro-managed realm, the digital selves of the imprisoned live and work in cities not unlike our own. Except for a few bands of rebels, no one knows that their minds are operating inside a dream that is programmed for them. This realm is known by the artificial intelligence and the resistors alike as the matrix.

The directors and producers of the film, the Wachowski brothers (who also directed *Bound*, a lesbian-themed thriller), pay homage to the French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard by having a book called *Simulacra and Simulation* visible in the home of the hero, Neo (Keanu Reeves). Indeed, the film quotes Baudrillard's earlier text, *Simulations*, when the leader of the rebels, Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne), instructs his younger convert, Neo, that he is

living in the “desert of the real” and not in reality at all.

Baudrillard argues in *Simulations*, using America as his example and Marshall McLuhan as his inspiration, that reality is in fact a copy of a copy, or a simulation that has pulled the wool over our eyes. For Baudrillard, Disney's danger is not that it produces synthetic and appealing environments in Florida, California, Times Square, and in spectacles of animation or puppetry. The danger of Disney is that it tricks us into thinking that there is a difference between that which is Disney property and that which is not. For Baudrillard, all of the United States is a theme park. In this corporate-sponsored illusion, authentic experience is in fact nostalgia. “Reality” can only appear in quotes and the original is all but replaced by copies.

*The Matrix* picks up on Baudrillard's insistence and makes manifest the latent paranoia in his vision. In the film, virtually all of the masses are hoodwinked and complicit with a system that is total and invisible. It suggests that we are all somnambulists who mistake the narcotics of routinized sleep as wakefulness where we can exercise our freedom. What fools these mortals be as they drowse in a false consciousness!

Luckily, *There's a Resistance*

Unlike rebels of the past, who are often depicted as wearing worn berets, torn combat fatigues, and beards, the rebels in *The Matrix* sport '90s high fashion when they go to battle in the virtual reality. They are clad head to toe in form-fitting black leather or vinyl Prada-wear. Their chicness suggests that commodity fetishism is a defense against the blandness of everyday consumerism. The rebels are a multicultural

group, led by the African-American Morpheus (named for the Greek god of sleep) who is a mystical kung-fu master. Morpheus and Trinity (an aerobicized lieutenant who could be Keanu Reeves's female twin) are convinced that Neo is the “one”—a Jesus-like savior who can navigate and disassemble the matrix using pure will.

The rebels fight the sentient programs inside virtual reality. The appearance of these agents proves the old Hollywood saying that costume is character. The enemy, all Caucasian (and quite pale at that) with receding hairlines, wear the requisite suits of middle management, off-the-rack and by-the-book dull gray-green. They patrol the virtual reality. They, too, know martial arts, but have unnatural speed and superhuman strength. As embodiments of artificial intelligence, they do not die no matter how often they are kicked and punched. (Luckily for special-effects enthusiasts, they can be blown up!)

*The Matrix* flirts with showing how an organized, multicultural movement can sustain resistance to a system run by “suits.” This sets it apart from much recent Hollywood fare. In mainstream cinema, aberrance from the norm is usually punished within the film (see, for example, *Boys Don't Cry*, where the gender-confused hero/ine is murdered, or *American Beauty*, where the closeted homosexual neighbor kills himself after

shooting dead the nonconforming straight white male hero). Indeed, *The Matrix* is clever in concept and rich with allusions—not only to Baudrillard, but also to the more popular Alice in Wonderland and the Bible as well as to earlier sci-fi films.

*The Matrix* is also intelligent, if contradictory, concerning technology. It warns that far from freeing us from the doldrums of ordinary life, new technology may be aligning computer stations as the assembly lines of the recapitalized western world, allowing the masses to be controlled by the “techno-bosses.” The film urges its audience to wake up to power dynamics and recognize the illusion of balance and propriety that corporate and governmental forces put forward.

In the end, *The Matrix* reverts to a time-proven and particularly American device: the individual, acting heroically and alone, prevails and modifies the system. Keanu Reeves' character, finally accepting that he is the “one,” destroys a trinity of devilish agents. This signals that the matrix is vulnerable. Neo catches and darts bullets with the greatest of ease, and starts to fly through the dissolving simulated realm. Due to expert effects, this is exciting to watch as a moment of personal triumph and power, but disappointing politically. Where collective action and resistant strategies fail, the force of the hero succeeds.

In this way, *The Matrix* moves to a more conservative position, preserving America's insistence on the individual as the agent of change. This agent of change is goodness itself and can identify the shrouded face of evil. In this hope for a hipper America, every day is casual Friday, and the clothes still make the man. The nonconformist hero-hacker eschews the suit and wears designer garments in order to master the pathways of the Internet and the corridors of corporate capitalism. He is in all ways committed to seeking truth and reality—with a gym-buffed body. In other words, Neo is an emblematic male hero of the late '90s.

Perhaps with Julia Robert's Erin Brockovich, we have the '00s female counterpart. Armed with an always-revealed cleavage, she single-handedly takes on corporate polluters and wins, using her wits—and her fetishized body—to advantage. The message from Hollywood is clear: the many must wait for the heroic and attractive few to bring about social justice. Part of the reason for Hollywood's conservatism is box-office economics. Collective action is just not sexy enough and unsuitable



for depiction by stars. Films that are about sustained political movements remain scarce, even as the use of civil disobedience increases and the efforts of unions intensify in the contemporary United States.

*Edward D. Miller teaches media theory and cultural studies at The College of Staten Island, City University of New York. He is a contributing editor for the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Culture*, published by Routledge, and writes on broadcasting history and policy and the cultural politics of music, sound, and technology. He has just completed a manuscript on American radio in the 1930s.*

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## FURTHER PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS:

# There Is No Spoon: The Matrix

by Kelly L. Ross

### Warning:

Like another great movie of 1999, *The Sixth Sense*, *The Matrix* contains a very surprising plot twist. Anyone who has not seen the movie and who wishes to be surprised should see it before reading this review and analysis. The DVD version, with multiple commentaries, a documentary on the film, and other extensive footage of the production, is warmly recommended.

The central philosophical interest of *The Matrix* lies in its exploitation of the classic fear of René Descartes: What if all of life is actually just a dream? Armchair philosophical speculation is turned into terrifying reality in this movie. But there is more. If the “Cartesian fear” applies to one level of reality, why not to the one that is, we think, subsequently revealed to be genuinely and ultimately “real”? Beyond Descartes is still Platonism and Buddhism, echoes of which we find in this movie.

*The Matrix* is classic science fiction, one of the box office giants of 1999, a powerful movie and a disturbing one in many ways. Besides the mind-bending revelations about reality, the level of violence is significant, and might

appear gratuitous to some, especially when the “lobby” shootout may now remind viewers of the horrific Columbine High shootings. But the violence is surreal and relatively sanitized. There is nothing like the gore of the true high school massacre movie, *Carrie* (1976); nor are we quite at the level of the climactic shootout in *The Crow* (1994), but *The Matrix* is definitely in that aesthetic category — and was intended to be, with the most slow motion falling shell casings since *Rambo* (1985) [note]. Most of the action, however, is not shooting at all but sophisticated martial arts, for which the actors themselves trained intensively with professionals from Chinese martial arts movies. This is becoming a trend, as George Lucas also wished to dispense with stuntmen and have the actors do the fighting themselves in *The Phantom Menace*. While *The Matrix* is of greatest philosophical interest for other reasons, it cannot be denied that it is very definitely both a science fiction and a martial arts/action movie and that much of its emotional and aesthetic punch comes from the violence. The explosive beginning of the film, with “Trinity,” played by Carrie-Anne Moss, running up walls, taking out five armed policemen with her hands and feet (in no more than twenty seconds), and leaping between buildings like Superman (or Superwoman), sets the stunning physical tone for the whole. That she also appears to vanish into thin air deepens the initial mystery about what is going on.

Keanu Reeves, as “Thomas Anderson” or the computer hacker “Neo,” the Messianic “One,” although laden with Christian imagery, and actually called “Jesus Christ” by one character, here gets to play the Buddha again — as he did in *The Little Buddha* (1994). The Buddha is the one who “woke up,” as Reeves literally does, discovering that he has been a comatose prisoner, kept in a vat, his entire life, with the world he thought he was living in, where he had a boring computer programming job, fed to him as a virtual reality computer simulation through a probe directly into this brain. He is rescued from this by a person the authorities regard as an international terrorist, “Morpheus,” played by Laurence Fishburne. Unplugged and flushed from his vat, Neo is taken up by Morpheus and his associates into a ship that travels through caves deep beneath the surface of a scorched and mostly lifeless earth — now ruled by computer intelligences who grow human beings merely to function as sources of power, keeping them docile with the virtual reality world, the



"Matrix," that is fed into their brains.

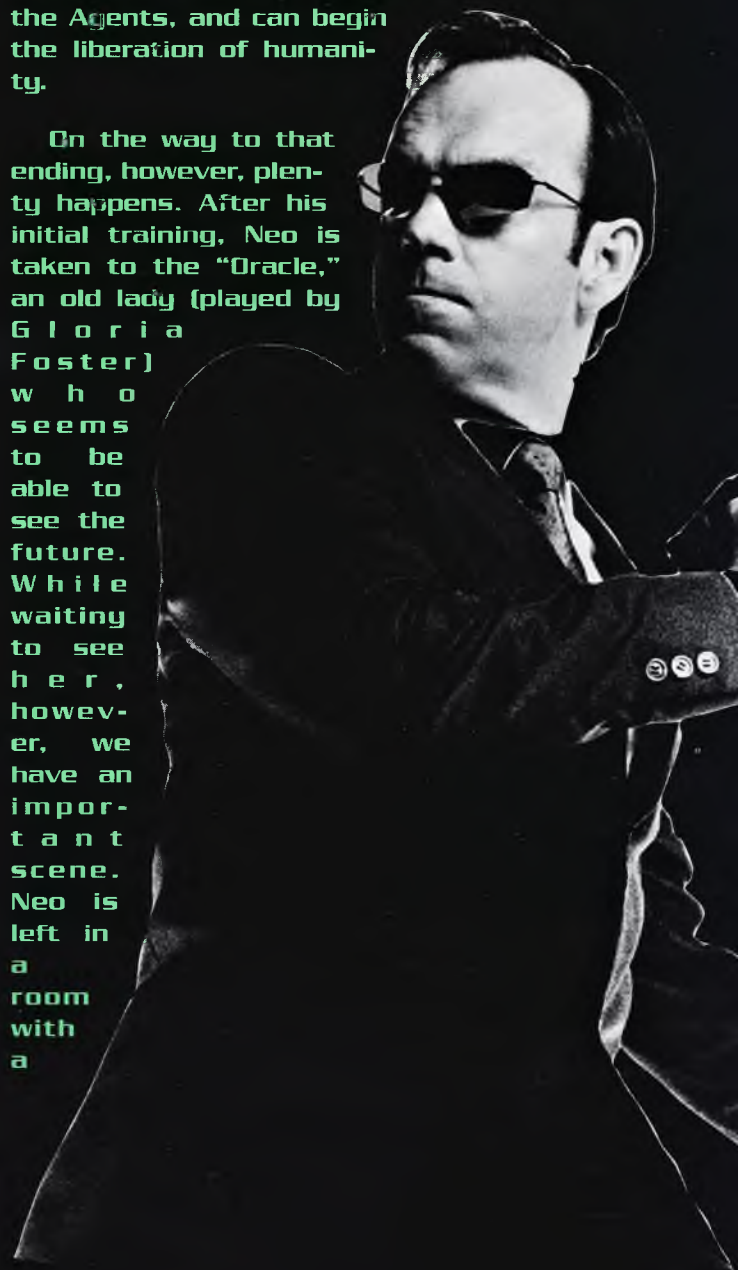
Wait a minute... "Caves"? To anyone familiar with Plato, this sounds suspicious. The theory in Plato's Republic divides reality into four levels with the device of the Divided Line and the imagery of the Allegory of the Cave: We are all like prisoners tied up on the floor of a Cave. But usually we don't even see the Cave itself — all we can see are shadows on the wall. Thus, Neo is such a bound prisoner, looking at the shadows of the Matrix. If Plato's prisoner is released, however, he can get up and look around. He sees the cave, sees a fire burning in the back, and so now can know that the reality he formerly esteemed is produced by the fire throwing shadows from puppets that are paraded in front of it. Plato doesn't say who has been parading these puppets. Neo learns that it is the sentient computers. He sees how, because of this, he has been manipulated rather like a puppet himself. At first it is hard to believe, and the depth of the revelation makes him physically ill, but he cannot deny it.

Another aspect of The Matrix with Platonic overtones is the frequent appearance of reflected images. We often see Neo reflected in the sunglasses of Morpheus, or in various metallic surfaces. A common theme in Plato is how we mostly deal with images in life. The shadows on the wall of the Cave are images of the puppets, which themselves are images of the Forms. Plato is famously unhappy with art, which creates images, not of the Forms themselves, but of the other things that are already images. Art based on the Cave's shadows is no less than three steps removed from reality. The world in the Matrix is itself a reflected, shadow reality, dimly, biliously (all the colors have a green tinge) reproducing the "real world."

Now, The Matrix contains no overt references to Plato, but it does suggest the question that is raised by following the Platonic analogy. The Cave, after all, was not ultimate reality for Plato. The freed prisoner leaves the Cave and discovers the genuine reality outside, the World of Forms, capped by the Form of the Good. Is it possible that the "real world" to which Neo awakes is itself a virtual reality computer simulation also? This would be an interesting twist for The Matrix II, but there is no hint of it here. Instead, by other clues The Matrix leads us to wonder whether, even if the "real world" is the real world, the real world might not actually be so "real" after all.

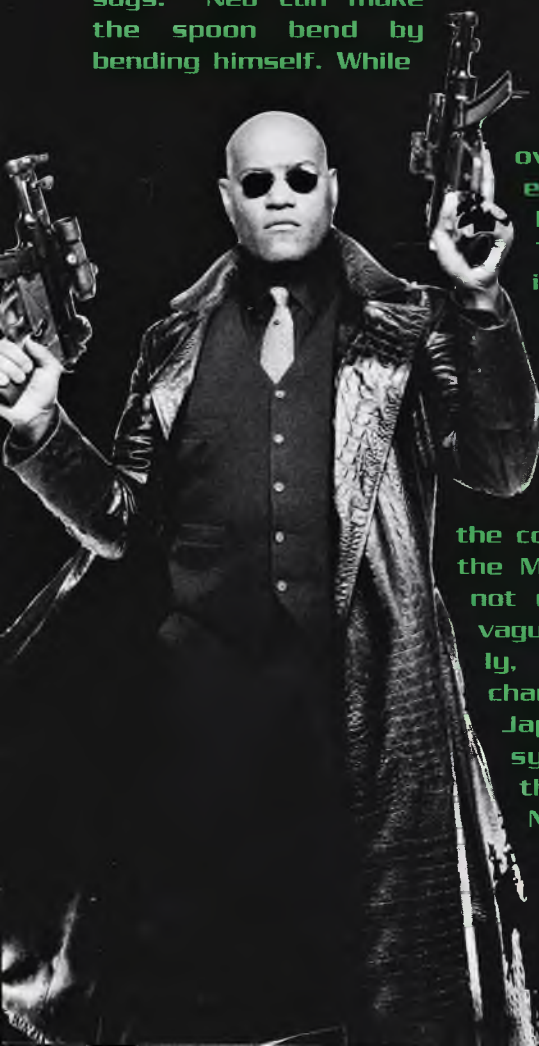
Morpheus teaches Neo that, once one is aware that the Matrix is a computer simulation, one can begin to manipulate it. Morpheus, Trinity, and others in the "Resistance" have developed this ability, which is why Trinity could dodge bullets, run up walls, and jump impossible distances — her vanishing into thin air, of course, was simply the result of her virtual self being removed from the Matrix. What Morpheus is really looking for, however, is someone, "The One," who can manipulate the Matrix at will to produce any result, i.e. make bullets stop in mid air or defeat the "Agents," who are invincible "sentient programs" whose job is to kill people like Morpheus, Trinity, and Neo (who cannot survive even a "virtual" death) and destroy the Resistance. The climax of the movie, of course, is when Neo develops this ability, is revealed as The One, defeats the Agents, and can begin the liberation of humanity.

On the way to that ending, however, plenty happens. After his initial training, Neo is taken to the "Oracle," an old lady (played by Gloria Foster) who seems to be able to see the future. While waiting to see her, however, we have an important scene. Neo is left in a room with a



group of children, who appear to be adepts doing impossible things. One is also reading a book in Chinese. One young boy, who is dressed and groomed rather like Mahâtma Gandhi, is calmly sitting, in a Lotus position, making spoons bend through telekenesis. The extraordinary thing about the world of The Matrix is that we have no difficulty understanding how this is possible. Paranormal abilities are no longer miraculous when we know that they are just computer simulations. But Neo, living in this world, of course, has a little more difficulty grasping exactly how to do it. So the boy explains with perhaps the most important line of the movie, "There is no spoon." Now, that is not exactly something that Plato would say. It might be Bishop Berkeley, but there is nothing in The Matrix to suggest a mere empiricist scepticism. What perhaps more weighty tradition would enable us to make such a statement about the "real" world?

That would be Buddhism. The spoon is "empty." It has "no self nature," no essence or enduring reality. It exists only relative to everything else ("relative existence" and "dependent origination"). This is what the boy says: Neo can make the spoon bend by bending himself. While



there do not seem to be overt references to Buddhism in The Matrix, it is hard not to think of it because of (1) the martial arts context, (2) the book in Chinese, (3) the code we see of the Matrix itself is not numerical but vaguely, or actually, like Chinese characters or the Japanese kana syllabary, (4) the fact that Neo "woke up" — what B u d d h a means, (5)

the fact that Keanu Reeves actually did play the Buddha once, (6) the Gandhi or Buddha-like child, and (7) characteristically paradoxical statements that could be made on the basis of Buddhist doctrine, like "There is no spoon." The importance of this statement is reinforced when Neo deliberately repeats it, as he and Trinity proceed in their task of freeing Morpheus after his capture by the Agents.

But this opens up a prospect: Could everything that Neo learns about the Matrix actually be true of our very own "real" world? This is no less than what Buddhism teaches. The Buddha is supposed to have acquired supernatural powers, just like Neo's, when he achieved Enlightenment. The movie, therefore, need not be just a science fiction story about human slavery to sentient machines, but an allegory of human slavery to Sam.sâra, the illusory world of birth, death, and suffering. Plato would not say "There is no spoon." The prisoner leaving the Cave could see the Spoon Itself, the eternal and unchanging Form of the Spoon. Only a Buddhist could say about all of reality what the boy says about the spoon: We leave the Cave to discover that behind the spoon there is Emptiness.

This would all be intriguing enough, but there is more. The Oracle represents an element in the movie that has nothing to do with Buddhism. She is not an adept at martial arts but instead draws Neo's attention to a Latin motto on the wall of her kitchen, "Know Thyself" (Temet Nosce). Of course, "Know Thyself" was not originally in Latin, but in Greek (Gnôthi Seauton). It was one of the Delphic Precepts, along with "Nothing In Excess" (Mêden Agan), or the mottos of the Oracle at Delphi, where a priestess, the Pythia, was possessed by Apollo and foretold the future. The Oracle is thus a function, not of Buddhism, but of Classical Western religion (the elevator up to the Oracle's apartment seems to have the Greek letter Omega written on the wall, complete with circumflex accent and iota subscript). What our Oracle does, as we see, is to tell Neo what he "needed to hear," as Morpheus puts it. Neo makes decisions, based on what she has said, that enable him to rescue Morpheus and then to achieve the abilities of The One.

Why don't the machines have an Oracle? Why, for that matter, don't the Agents have the same abilities as The One? It is, after all, their computer. So why can't they manipulate the Matrix just any way that they like? The

implication here, and a very un-Buddhist implication at that, is that there is more to human beings than to the "sentient programs" and the Artificial Intelligence world. The Oracle tells Neo, "You have a good soul." But there is no soul, no self in Buddhism (the doctrine of anâtman or anatta), for this would be an essence or a self nature. When we see the code of the Matrix in one scene, indeed, what looks just like the Chinese character for "self" is very conspicuous. "Know Thgself" is a somewhat paradoxical instruction in Buddhism. If Neo has any kind of soul, and the machines do not, this explains the unique human abilities, and it puts us in a religious universe with rather more than what Buddhism tries to account for. And none of this is readily explained by the virtual reality nature of the Matrix.

Much more overt in *The Matrix* than the Platonic or even Buddhist overtones are the Christian ones. Neo actually is addressed early in the movie as "my own personal Jesus Christ." It turns out that his ordinary life name is Thomas Anderson — Thomas the Doubting Apostle. The Oracle tells him that he is not The One, but then says in "your next life, maybe." Well, Neo dies (flatline and all) and then is Resurrected. We have already been given to understand that there is reincarnation, since Morpheus is looking for someone who has actually lived before; but Neo is now reborn, without doubts, still in the same body, as The One. "Neo," indeed, is from Greek *neos*, "young" or "new."

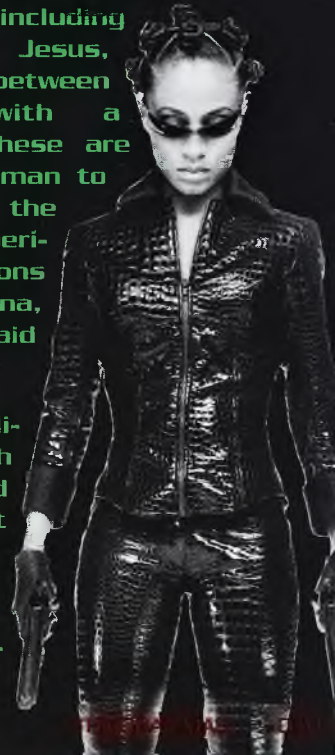
But besides Neo we have Trinity, named after the entire Christian Godhead. It is she who effects the Resurrection of Neo. As far as she knows, he is really dead, like all the others we have seen killed in the Matrix and die in the real world. But she loves him, and now simply believes, with the help of the Oracle, that he cannot be dead. We have seen Trinity as a very reserved, perhaps sceptical person. But we have already had glimpses and clues about her real feelings and beliefs. Now, with a kiss of pure faith, she breaths life, like the Holy Spirit, back into Neo. He is reborn. Trinity thus becomes the Mother of God — like the Virgin Mary. Now, Mary was not a member of the original Trinity, but C.G. Jung thought she should be counted as the fourth in the Godhead. Trinity, indeed, seems to combine the Holy Spirit with Mary. We already have, indeed, a Father, namely Morpheus, who has not only been acting like a father but is then

called that explicitly by Tank (Marcus Chong). So we end up with a Trinity indeed: Father (Morpheus), Son (Neo), and Holy Spirit/Mother (Trinity).

What are we to make of this? Is *The Matrix* a Christian movie? That seems unlikely. Keanu Reeves is not playing the real Jesus Christ. What it is, to be sure, is a powerful aesthetic synthesis of Greek, Buddhist, and Christian elements which clearly takes them all seriously. It is, indeed, unusual to take Christianity seriously without accepting all of it, or to reject the premise of the divinity of Jesus without reducing it to a secular and moralistic allegory in which everyone is the Son (or Child) of God. The comparison with Buddhism, again, may be instructive. In principal, especially in the later stages of the history of Buddhism, anyone can become a Buddha, but most have not, and will not for a very long time yet. The achievement of the Buddha was rare and stupendous. He was not just a philosopher, but the "Blessed One," the Tathâgata or the "Thus Come" One, whose relics were objects of veneration. Even as the Mahâyâna began to see everyone as perhaps already Buddhas, we also get the idea that there is an eternal cosmic Buddha, Mahâvairocana, of whom we are all a part.

A Christian equivalent to this would be a Christ who is relatively, but not entirely, unique. Not the one and only Son of God, but a rare thing, a Savior, who has a special and powerful spiritual function. A similar notion actually occurs in the Baha'i Faith, where periodic "Manifestations" (including Moses, Krishna, Zoroaster, Jesus, and Muhammad) mediate between God and humanity, with a Christianizing sense that these are God-like to us while still human to God; or in Hinduism, where the supreme Godhead of Vishnu periodically takes on Incarnations (Avatars), like Rama, Krishna, and even the Buddha to aid humanity.

*The Matrix* suggests a religion, like Buddhism, in which ultimate reality is bracketed or incomprehensible, but where there is also a divine and miraculous quality to human life that can produce Christ-like Saviors of extraor-



dinary achievement and power. As in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, when many religions developed offering the promise of salvation and immortality, we are in a period of this same kind of religious exploration, with themes from all of world religion to draw on and cross-fertilize. In an indirect artistic and unconscious way, *The Matrix* suggests some of the kind of thing that people may be looking for.

While notably powerful for its action and its religious/philosophical themes, *The Matrix* suffers a bit in the science department. The fundamental idea in the movie that human beings end up being used as batteries by the sentient machines, which explains Switch (Belinda McClory) calling Neo a “coppertop” — Morpheus later displays the familiar “copper-top” Duracell battery to Neo (a practice called “product placement”) — will not stand a moment’s examination. Human bodies are not batteries, they are fires. Very slow fires, to be sure, but ones that must be constantly stoked, with what we call “food.” The food we get, animal or plant, ultimately contains energy usually derived from the sun. Morpheus’ explanation that the machines “liquify the

dead” and feed this to the living implies a kind of perpetual motion machine. There are only two known sources of energy for living things on earth, (1) the sun and (2) geothermal venting. The only other source of energy intrinsic to the earth is (3) nuclear. Beyond that we are in (4) fossil fuels, which simply store (like batteries, actually) old solar (or perhaps geothermal) energy. If the machines fed humans oil and liquified coal, this would make more sense, but it would also be very inefficient: the oil and coal would be better burned directly for energy.

This fundamental flaw in the scientific basis of *The Matrix* is serious, but it still makes for a good story. As with many good stories, we just must suspend our disbelief. It does make a good premise for the situation of humans used for industrial purposes but kept in a state where they think they are living ordinary lives.

There are other loose ends in the physics and technology of *The Matrix*. We never do learn why members of the Resistance need a “hard line,” rather than just a cell phone, to “get out” of the Matrix, when it seems like both ultimately just consist of the same bina-





ry numbers as anything else in a computer program. Also, at the beginning of the movie, it is not obvious why Trinity needs to be in the Matrix at all to be monitoring Neo. That can be done from the ship, where the code of the Matrix, which can be read by those familiar with it, is on constant display. That code itself poses a problem. A computer program simultaneously processing the perceptions of billions of people could only very selectively be displayed on three small computer screens, but everyone acts like they're seeing the whole thing.

Another problem is how it is that solar energy has been cut off. Morpheus simply says that we were able to "scorch the sky," which doesn't really explain anything. What we see in the sky are just clouds, but clouds imply rain, which is something that doesn't seem to fall anymore on the desert of the earth. A nuclear winter would come the closest to what the story requires, but that would call for a rather featureless and dark sky, more like smog than like thunderstorms. But that would not be very dramatic cinematographically. It also wouldn't last as long as the timeframe of the story. So some liberties have been taken.

While Morpheus tells Neo that his muscles have atrophied and that his eyes hurt because he has never used them before, the real life case would be far more dramatic and permanent. Eyes and muscles would all have atrophied to the point where they would have been ruined and useless. Of course, it is the muscles that generate the heat and electricity that supposedly power the powerplant, so we might speculate that the muscles are artificially stimulated with the connections that we see to maintain their function. But then they

might not have atrophied at all, contrary to what Morpheus says. The eyes, however, are clearly unstimulated, and this would have rendered Neo permanently blind, not just sensitive.

Another scene displays a grave misunderstanding of the mechanism of evolution. Agent Smith is interrogating the captured Morpheus and tells him that humans are not really mammals. "Every mammal on this planet instinctively develops an equilibrium with the surrounding environment," he says, while humans consume all the resources wherever they are and then move on. This makes them a virus. But there is no creature in nature that "instinctively develops an equilibrium with the surrounding environment." A population of any living thing expands until, indeed, it overburdens its food sources, its environment, and then the population dies back. This is the insight that Darwin got from Thomas Malthus (1766-1834). The least hardy and adapted of the population will die first, which gave Darwin the mechanism of "natural selection." Agent Smith has been reading, not biology texts, but environmentalist tracts. Since humans have occupied most of the earth for thousands of years, and Western civilization has reexpanded to transform the human culture of most of it in the last five hundred years, the idea that humans somehow "move on" doesn't seem to refer to any actual events. The image presented rests on a fantasy that an area of land is stripped of anything useful (like a strip mine), which means it must then simply be abandoned. This is something that really almost never occurs. Even a strip mine can be recovered for some productive use. Since nature can devastate land more thoroughly than any

human activity, as in catastrophic volcanic eruptions, or asteroid impacts, it would be extraordinary if removing some trace minerals from a location permanently ruined it. In general, the idea of exhausting “natural resources” is bogus. This was demonstrated by Julian Simon, who bet environmentalist and doomster Paul Ehrlich that after ten years a basket of commodities, of Ehrlich’s own choosing, would cost less. Ehrlich took the bet and lost. Since Ehrlich had previously predicted that starvation would be widespread in the 1980’s, it is hard to see how anyone would take him seriously any more. However, when Bjørn Lomborg reexamined and defended Simon’s thesis in *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, the environmentalist and sympathetic scientific establishment threw a fit, personally attacking Lomborg with various spurious, irrelevant, and ad hominem arguments. But Lomborg, and Simon, were right.

As with a lot of science fiction movies, we cannot push the science too hard without finding problems; but *The Matrix* does present a fairly coherent picture that is suitable for its story.

Although one of the most successful movies of 1999, *The Matrix* is a complex work, in plot, aesthetics, and meaning, and some critics found it more than a little confusing. A good example of that was the March 29, 1999 *Daily Variety* review by Todd McCarthy, which begins:

It’s Special Effects 10, Screenplay 0 for “*The Matrix*,” an eye-popping but incoherent extravaganza of

morphing and superhuman martial arts.

The screenplay, in fact, is clever and effective. The story begins, in a sense, in medias res, in the middle of things, with statements, references, and events that will only make sense in light of what we learn later. This may be confusing, but it is also a classic and subtle device. Otherwise, the plot is fairly straightforward: Neo is rescued, trained, tested, and proven. There is nothing “incoherent” about this. And, apart from the narrative human element, there is, as we have seen, a considerable subtext of important philosophical and religious issues. Perhaps unjust one sitting, Mr. McCarthy was too distracted by the special effects and the martial arts to pay enough attention to everything else. There is, indeed, much to pay attention to in *The Matrix*.

McCarthy’s attitude towards the deeper issues comes out next:

Ultra-cool visuals that truly deliver something new to the sci-fi action lexicon will make this time-jumping thriller a must-see among genre fans, especially guys in their teens and 20s, for whom the script’s pretentious mumbo-jumbo of undergraduate mythology, religious mysticism and technobabble could even be a plus rather than a dramatic liability.

“Pretentious”? When movies don’t even try to tackle such issues, they are faulted as shallow, but when *The Matrix* takes *The Meditations on First Philosophy* by the horns, it is “pretentious”? Give me a



break. *The Matrix* very deftly is able to address its philosophical and religious themes without breaking out of its science fiction context. The device of the Matrix itself enables the movie to talk about the technology, while leaving the philosophy and the religion as an implication. This is a very great achievement.

Economically made in Australia for about \$60 million....

The Australian context may contribute to the subtext of *The Matrix*. Australia is the land of *Walkabout* (1971), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), and *The Last Wave* (1977), all evocative movies about kinds of alternative realities. In *The Matrix* itself, as Neo and Morpheus enter a building to see the Oracle, there is a very old, bearded Aborigine man sitting in the lobby, looking like he has just stepped out of *The Last Wave*. This may be a deliberate reminder of the Australian “dreamtime” as we enter the realm of the Oracle’s paranormal powers.

Andy and Larry Wachowski...were grafting on surplus ideas during that time rather than subtracting and synthesizing. Not only is it a good half-hour too long, but there are so many elements here — Christian motifs and mysticism, half-baked Eastern philosophy, Lewis Carroll refs, ambiguous oracular prophecies, the co-existence of two realities, pod-grown babies, time travel, creatures capable of rebirth and, all importantly, the expectation of the arrival of the Chosen One — as to prove utterly indigestible.

*The Matrix*, indeed, is rather sparing in its overt

references, most of which are to *Alice in Wonderland* rather than to the themes discussed above. “There is no spoon” is the closest it really comes to “half-baked Eastern philosophy.” *The Matrix* is a rich synthesis that works at many levels. There is no good reason why McCarthy should find this “indigestible.” He doesn’t really have to think about it at all. The movie is so strong aesthetically that one could, as William Hurt says in *The Big Chill* (1983), just “let art flow over you.” Perhaps McCarthy was irritated by the juxtaposition of Greek, Buddhist, and Christian themes; but then this is the most striking and intriguing thing about the vision presented in the movie. And if he thought that there was “time travel” in the movie, then he actually just wasn’t paying attention.

But Morpheus inhabits a different universe, one situated some 2000 years in the future....

Well, yes and no... and no. McCarthy may not want to give away the central plot device in the review, but there is only one overt “real world” universe in *The Matrix*. But to say “2000 years in the future” is, again, not to have been paying attention. Morpheus tells Neo that, while he may believe it is the year 1999, it is really more like 2199. That is 200, not 2000, years; and of course the “1999” of the Matrix is a fiction and a deception.

...travels through this oceanic Other World with a lonely band of followers in a techno-heavy Nautilus-like sub.

Not an ocean; not a sub. When the hull is breached, no

water comes in. The caves are empty. The Nebuchadnezzar is a "hovercraft" with, evidently, an anti-gravity technology like that of several of the machines that we see.

The young man agrees to be refitted to cybertronic specifications in a gruesomely spectacular sequence in which his natural body parts are replaced or reinforced by metal and synthetic material.

No. Neo is already like that. McCarthy has gotten this all backwards. Morpheus actually has a lot of the stuff taken out, not put in. All that is left is an intravenous tube and the socket to plug Neo's brain into the computer. And none of this has anything to do with "reinforcing" his "natural body parts." That was the Six Million Dollar Man, not The Matrix. In the Matrix, it is Neo's mind, not his body, that has the strength.

He emerges from all the morphing with the name Neo as well as a plug in the back of his head through which he can instantly be uploaded with vast amounts of knowledge.

Already Neo. Already with plug.

Thus reconstituted, Neo is ready to do battle with the forces that made the world what it has become.

The real "reconstitution" was simply to

restore physical health and mobility to his hitherto unused body. But he would not then be ready to face the Agents without training in how to manipulate the Matrix, either a little, like Trinity, or a lot, like The One.

These errors might be forgiven if McCarthy is merely trying to avoid giving away too much of the story, but he does go on to mention the basic point:

...the Matrix, a power field controlled by humanoid computers that have created a "virtual" real world fed by laboratory-controlled human energy.

That pretty much tips off the reader. In the movie, what the Matrix really is is not explained until Neo has been rescued and is well enough to face the truth.

A full hour in, the script is still entirely devoted to exposition...

No, the movie is mostly action, with a couple of talkative moments, for about 40 minutes. Then the nature of the Matrix is revealed to Neo. At about 46 minutes, Neo's training begins, and the action starts again. To say that the script is "still almost entirely devoted to exposition" for an hour is absurd and deceptive.

Even at that point, there remains the hope that some kind of focused story will

finally get on track, but it never really happens.

It is hard to see how this could be written with a straight face.

Instead, things settle into a muddle of showdowns resulting in deaths and resurrections that confoundingly answer few questions and follow no rules, not even those specified by the film itself.

The basic plot line of the last part of the movie is about the betrayal of the Resistance by Cypher (Joe Pantoliano), foreshadowed from the beginning, and then the capture and rescue of Morpheus. This does indeed lead to a "showdown" between Neo and Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving as an increasingly frustrated and so increasingly human sentient program), but we have already been given to understand that this will be Neo's ultimate test. That it comes at this moment is adventitious, but it is an opportunity that does follow seamlessly and logically from the events, like Meade stumbling into Lee at Gettysburg. There is no "muddle," and only one death and resurrection — the climactic moment for Neo. What internal rules of the film this all violates is

mysterious.

All this is frustrating and ultimately wearying, given that any number of the story strands could have been developed to profitable effect with sufficient rigor and concentration.

The plot really only has two parts: (1) the setup, which is the rescue and training of Neo, and (2) the payoff, which is the confrontation of Neo with Agent Smith occasioned by the betrayal and capture of Morpheus and then his rescue by Neo and Trinity. Whatever it is that McCarthy wanted explained or developed, he doesn't say.

As it is, one gives up making any sense of it...

This may have called for paying a little more attention to the movie, perhaps with a second viewing, than McCarthy may have been willing to devote. The simple errors he makes in describing the story, detailed above, may indicate a level of distraction that is not the movie's fault.

...and settles for what the picture undeniably wields in spades: which is a smorgasbord of effects that in some cases goes beyond what the sensation-seeking sci-fi audience has ever seen before.

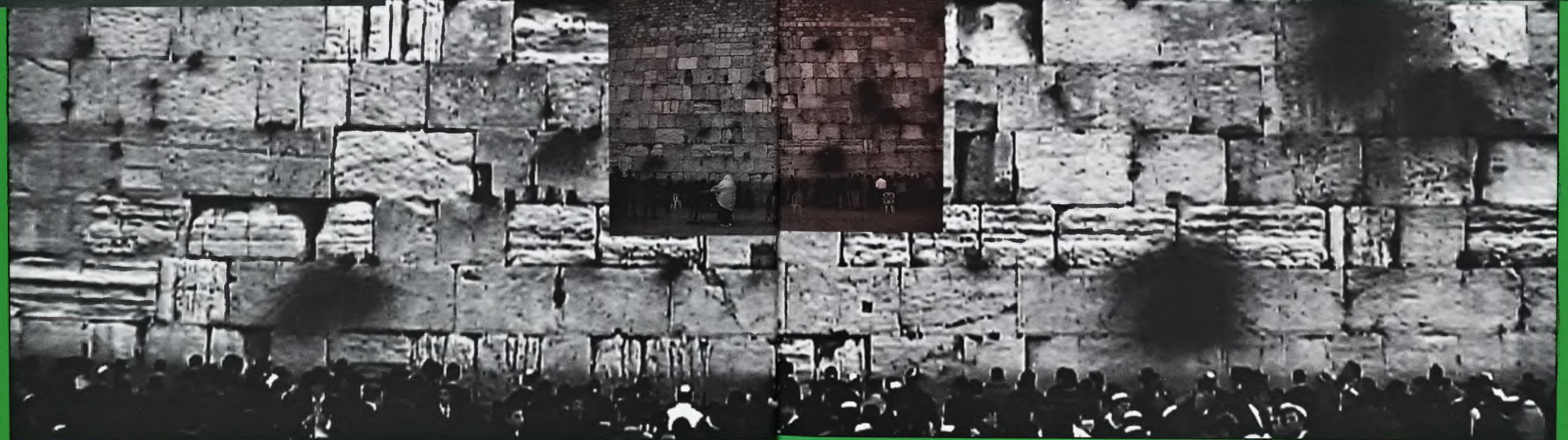
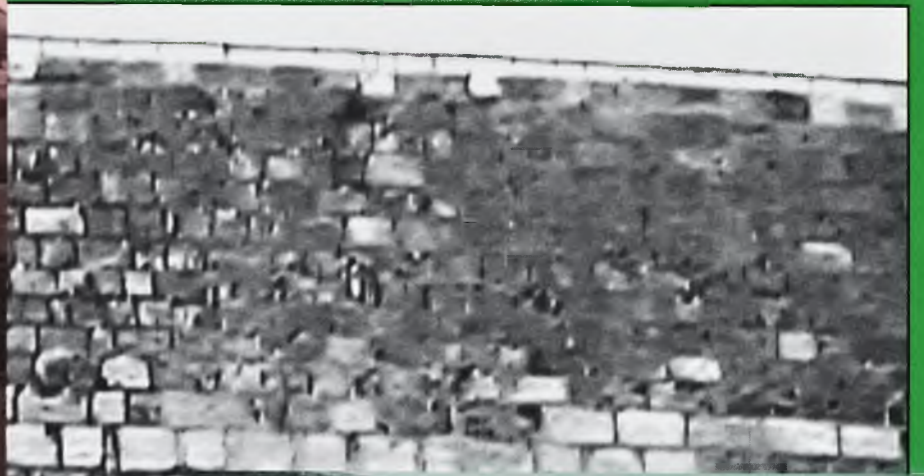
Indeed, the effects are stunning.

The obviously obsessive attention that has been devoted to the visuals has paid off from top to bottom. The sinuous visual style the Wachowskis and cinematographer Bill Pope displayed to arresting effect in "Bound" is magnified many times here, and the gleaming skyscrapers of the big city (Sydney) are dramatically contrasted in Owen Paterson's production design with the murky, threatening future of the bold crusaders.

McCarthy cannot praise without faint damnation: "obsessive"? There are some technological innovations here, extraordinarily realized, that are aesthetic breakthroughs. It's all on the screen.

McCarthy's similarly sour review of *The Phantom Menace* left him equally off base with one of the year's other great successful movies — and one of the most successful of all time. Perhaps his problem is with the genre, which may not be science fiction as such, but science fiction with mythic or philosophical and religious themes. He clearly doesn't want to be bothered.





# ISRAEL AND THE

# NEW ANTI-SEMITISM

BY SHALOM LAPPIN

Since the collapse of the Oslo peace process and the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has generated an increasingly hostile view of Israel throughout Western Europe. Much of this reaction consists of sharp criticism of Israel's conduct in suppressing the Palestinian uprising in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. To the extent that this response is directed at Israel's actions and policies, it is legitimate comment on the behavior of a state and its government. The severity of the criticism can, in part, be attributed to the fact that Israel is a relatively strong, developed country that is using its army to sustain the occupation of a large Palestinian population that is politically dispossessed and suffering economically. As the current violence has become increasingly brutal on both sides, the asymmetry of power between Israel and the Palestinians and Ariel Sharon's determination to entrench the occupation through settlement expansion while forcing the Palestinians into virtual capitulation have seriously undermined European support for Israel.

There are, however, good reasons for doubting whether all the hostility directed at Israel can be construed simply as opposition to its policies. The obsessive focus of European journalists and opinion makers on Israel's war with the Palestinians contrasts sharply with the relative indifference of (much) liberal opinion to other recent, as well as ongoing human rights violations on a significantly larger scale. Slobodan Milosevic's bloody campaigns in Bosnia and Kosovo attracted little if any organized protest in Europe until the United States initiated a NATO bombing campaign to force the Serbian army out of Kosovo in 1999. At that point, European peace groups launched a series of large protests against

the intervention. The fact that many European Union countries actively collaborated with the Milosevic government during the Bosnian War and did virtually nothing to stop its onslaught produced no apparent outrage among most purveyors of progressive politics in these countries. While the mass murder of more than six thousand Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica shocked some people, there was no demonization of Serbia, no calls for academic boycotts of Serbian universities. The International War Crimes Court in the Hague is prosecuting indicted Balkan war criminals, Milosevic foremost among them, while popular opinion in Europe, particularly on the left, has remained largely detached from the events that led to the court's creation.

Russia's unrestrained assault on Muslim separatists in Chechnya has been met with little more than occasional censure from human rights activists. It goes largely unreported and causes little if any concern in Europe. In both the Balkans and in Chechnya the level of violence and severe human rights abuses has been, to date, far higher than in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although this doesn't justify Israel's actions in the territories, it does raise serious questions concerning the motivation behind some of the current hostility to Israel. Both the Balkans and Russia are natural areas of European interest. They are close to home and involve countries with which Western Europe is closely involved. Why, then, is there such a stark contrast between the relative calm with which the Balkan and Chechen wars have been received on one hand and the intense reaction to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the other?

One explanation for the current

European view of Israel runs as follows: Israel was established as an act of compensation to the Jews on the part of Western countries burdened with the guilt of the Holocaust. This guilt allowed them to disregard the cost that Israel's creation inflicted on the Palestinians, who were innocent of the Holocaust. Now that several generations have passed and Israel has become a regional superpower, the Europeans no longer wish to relate to Israel as a nation of victims. They insist on redressing the dispossession of the Palestinians.

The historical claim on which this view is based is incorrect. The United Nations partition plan of 1947 that established Israel was adopted largely because of American and Soviet support. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union suffered Holocaust guilt in 1947, nor should they have. They, together with Britain, were responsible for destroying Nazism and ending its genocide against the Jews. Stalin was staunchly anti-Zionist but supported the creation of Israel as a way of gaining political influence in a strategically important region still dominated by Britain. Truman remained undecided about partition until shortly before the vote, with both the State Department and the Pentagon split on whether or not to support the plan. Although historical and moral considerations seem to have played a role in Truman's decision, the desire to deepen American influence in the Middle East, displace Britain, and block Soviet penetration was probably the decisive factor in determining his position. Britain, the other major player in the partition debate, did its best to prevent the emergence of a Jewish state in Palestine. After the war it took the view that Jewish Holocaust survivors and refugees should be repatriated to

the countries from which they had come. This included Polish Jews at a time when postwar pogroms were taking place in Poland against returning survivors. Britain blocked the immigration of Jewish refugees to Palestine right up until the end of its mandate in 1948. It abstained from the UN partition vote, and it actively supported the Jordanian Legion in the 1948 war. It changed its policy and supported Israel only in the early 1950s. The idea that the creation of Israel was the product of Western guilt over the Holocaust is, then, largely unfounded.

Nonetheless, the idea that Israel was created through Holocaust guilt has gained widespread currency in Europe. This idea is used to impose moral conditions on Israel that are not generally applied to other countries. If Israel was created as an act of expiation for crimes against the Jews, so this reasoning goes, then its legitimacy depends upon its not oppressing other people. The idea of Israel as a conditional concession wrung from the West through Jewish suffering in Europe goes some way toward explaining the glee (relief?) with which Israel's more strident European critics insist on comparing its treatment of the Palestinians to the Nazi persecution of the Jews. The obvious perversity and inappropriateness of the comparison is the source of its attraction. Not only are the victims of the Nazis transformed into the oppressors, but the basis of their collective legitimacy is undermined. The power of the comparison has not been lost on Arab nationalists and Islamic fundamentalists, who invoke it regularly.

More significant than Holocaust fatigue in shaping European responses to the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict is, I suspect, the

anti-Western sentiment in the Islamic world will bring large-scale terrorist violence to Europe, as it did to the United States on September 11, 2001. With the end of the cold war and the creation of a more integrated European Union in the 1990s, West Europeans embraced a vision of prosperity and human rights promoted through an expanded framework of international institutions. The shock of September 11 and the Bush administration's aggressive, often unilateral "War on Terror" have replaced this optimism with a profound fear that Europe will once again be drawn into bloody ethnic conflicts that it thought belonged to its past. This danger is not only external. The existence of large communities of Muslim immigrants in Europe, where Islamic activism flourishes, turns this into a local issue. To the extent that Israel has become the focus of a massive wave of Islamic anger, many Europeans have come to see it as a major liability. They hold the country responsible for the terrorist threat that they wish to avoid. Intense European criticism of Israel is, in part, aimed at heading off this danger and purchasing security by deflecting Arab and Islamic hostility.

## ISRAEL AS A JEWISH POLITY

But even granting the role of Holocaust fatigue and fear of Islamic terrorism as important factors in conditioning the current European reactions to the Middle East, there is another element that surfaces with increasing frequency in the discussion of Israel. That is a general discomfort with the notion of Israel as a Jewish polity. Even when Israel's right to exist is affirmed, a common complaint among both European and Arab critics is that Israel's characterization of itself as a Jewish country is exclusionary and racist. Although

this criticism has always been raised by the anti-Zionist left, it is now often expressed as a mainstream view in the European media. We should consider it carefully.

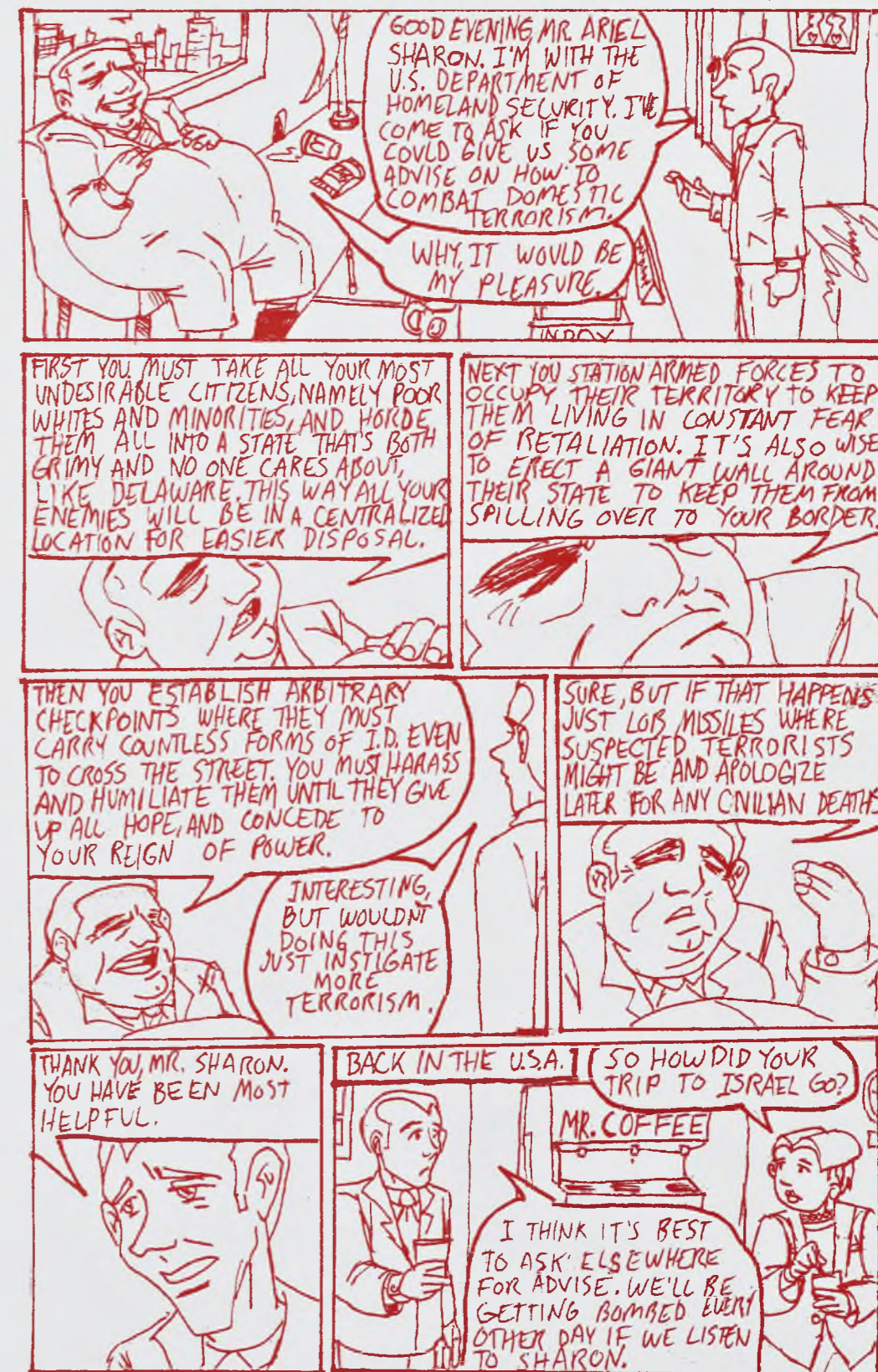
Laws and institutions that reserve rights and privileges for one ethnic group while excluding others are indeed discriminatory and incompatible with liberal democratic values. Unfortunately, discriminatory legal structures do exist in certain parts of public life in Israel, specifically in the use and development of land owned by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), which accounts for most public land in the country. These restrictions date back to the pre-state era, when the JNF was the instrument through which the Jewish community in Palestine acquired land for settlement and development. Arabs are still excluded from leasing and building on this land.

The Law of Return is a more complex case. It grants the right of residence and citizenship to Jews (and immediate non-Jewish family members) from abroad. This law recognizes as extra-territorial nationals Jews living in the diaspora. It has approximate parallels in the nationality laws of other countries (China, Japan, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Germany) that confer the right of citizenship or residence on people connected to the country by culture or descent. Unsurprisingly, the Palestinian Liberation Organization Charter proposes a similar law of return for Palestinians in the diaspora. For both Israeli Jews and Palestinians a law of return is regarded as a legal instrument for rehabilitating a nation of refugees in its national home. In general, laws that establish special rights for Jews derive from the formative period of the country when it was in the process of absorbing Jewish immigrants.

Many Israelis of the liberal left who are committed to the existence of Israel as a Jewish country support the abolition of all these laws, with the possible exception of the Law of Return. Most Israelis regard the latter as still necessary for the protection of Jews living in unstable or repressive countries.

Critics of Israel who object to its identity as a Jewish state are, for the most part, not exercised by the fact that Iran and Saudi Arabia define themselves as Islamic states. They may reject their governments as theocratic and reactionary, but they do not regard these countries as illegitimate. They do not, in general, have problems with the religiously based partition of the Indian subcontinent between Pakistan and India, which took place at the same time as the creation of Israel. The implementation of this partition was accompanied by intense political violence that produced hundreds of thousands of refugees on both sides, most of whom have never returned to their homes. Most significantly, they have no difficulty whatsoever with Arab states that purport to be both secular and Arab. They see these states as natural political frameworks for the national groups that con-

cartoon by Enrique Inocente



cartoon by Enrique Inocente



BUT FIRST I'D LIKE TO KNOW WHAT BENEFITS I GET FOR BEING A MARTYR. I MEAN, WILL YOU GUYS PROTECT MY FAMILY FROM ANY RETALIATION.

I PROMISE YOU NOTHING, BUT I AM AT LIBERTY TO SAY THAT SEVENTEEN VIRGINS WILL BE WAITING FOR YOU IN THE AFTERLIFE IF YOU ARE A MARTYR.



REALLY?! THEN SIGN ME UP!

THAT'S THE SPIRIT, THERE'S A BUS DEPARTING IN FIVE MINUTES. YOU KNOW THE DRILL.



6 MINUTES LATER

GEEZ, THAT WAS ONE WILD RIDE.



stitute their populations. The obvious question, then, is why they have such difficulty with a country that provides for the political independence of a Jewish population.

Assume the following utopian scenario. An enlightened liberal democratic government comes to power in Israel and reaches a peace agreement with the Palestinians: a full withdrawal to (the equivalent of) the 1967 borders and the establishment of a Palestinian state. This government then proceeds to eliminate all discriminatory legislation and institute a full separation of religion and state. It implements reforms to integrate the Arab minority into the social and economic mainstream of the country. Israel would still be a Jewish country in that it would have a decisive (80 percent) Jewish majority, its culture and history would continue to reflect the experiences and concerns of this majority, and its first language would remain Hebrew.

I suspect that many of its critics would continue to object to Israel in this fully democratized format. These are the same people who reject as racist the proposal advanced by some on the Israeli left for a partition of Israel/Palestine along demographic lines; that is, that Israel should return as much territory as possible to the Palestinians, including areas currently within the green line that contain large numbers of Israeli Arabs. Many reject a two-state solution and favor a single coun-

try, "a secular democratic state of all its citizens." In fact, as they must know, such a state would either dissolve into civil war or become an Arab country with a subordinated Jewish minority. What lies behind their critique is less a concern for secular democracy than a deep hostility to the very idea of a Jewish state, even when it is cast as political independence for a large Jewish population under conditions of genuine democracy for all and equality for the non-Jewish minority. The objection to a Jewish polity of any sort in the territory of Israel/Palestine lies at the heart of Arab nationalist and Islamic hostility to Israel. It also informs much of the more extreme criticism of Israel that has recently entered the mainstream of political discourse in Europe.

The sense that much of the Arab and Islamic world simply cannot accept a Jewish political presence under any conditions has driven many Israelis to despair. After Oslo had raised hopes of a final peace agree-



WAIT! THERE'S GOTTA BE A MISTAKE. I'M SUPPOSED TO BE IN PARADISE DEFLOWERING SEVENTEEN VIRGINS.

NEWS FLASH, YOU DON'T GET INTO PARADISE BY BLOWING UP BUSES FILLED WITH QUADRUPLE GICS. YOU SHOULD'VE BEEN MORE SELECTIVE ABOUT YOUR TARGET, SMART GUY.



BUT, HEY, DON'T WORRY KID. ETERNAL DAMNATION AIN'T ALL THAT BAD. I PERSONALLY FEEL IT GETS A BUM RAP. BESIDES, I GOT A HOT SPOT FOR YOU RIGHT NEXT TO TIMOTHY McVEIGH. I'M SURE YOU BOTH HAVE A LOT IN COMMON.



ment and reconciliation, the virulence of Palestinian and Arab hostility have persuaded a not insignificant part of the Israeli population that peace is impossible whatever concessions they make. This has produced a dangerous sense of helplessness and victimhood that effectively paralyzes the electorate into acquiescence in the brutal, expansionist policies of the right, even when most Israelis reject these policies. The specter of widespread European complicity in this challenge to Israel's basic legitimacy has further intensified its sense of isolation and reinforced de facto support for a disastrous right-wing adventure.

The rejection of a Jewish polity is closely related to a refusal to recognize the collective legitimacy of the Jews as a people who are entitled to a place among the nations of the world. This idea is deeply rooted in both European and Islamic sources. It has assumed a variety of religious and political forms in the past, and we may well be witnessing the emergence of a new version of this traditional theme.

#### MESSIANISM AND REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

Late biblical and rabbinic Judaism introduced the idea of a messianic age in which peace and justice would be established for all humanity in real historical time. The concept of the messianic age is the result of a remarkable evolution from the demand for a national savior to deliver the people from external oppression (as in the period of the judges and the kings) to a universalist vision of a redeemer who ushers in a just social order. The messianic idea animated Jewish resistance to Roman occupation and sustained the Jews for centuries in the diaspora.

In appropriating the Jewish messianic vision Christianity sought to replace the Jews as the heirs of the covenant with God within which this vision was defined. In order to achieve this expropriation it was necessary to portray the Jews as perverse non-believers who had forfeited their right to the covenant through their refusal to accept the Messiah. Jews were offered the choice of giving up their Jewish identity and joining the church in order to enter the New Covenant, or existing as a despised religious minority excluded from the social mainstream. It is important to recognize that orthodox Christian doctrine accorded the Jews a recognized role as an outcast community, in contrast to heretics, who were not tolerated at all. The marginality of Jews in the traditional Christian world was intended to emphasize the stigma that attached to their rejection of the new messianic order. The price for acceptance was, then, a total renunciation of Jewish life. The intensity of Christian anti-Semitism was due in part to the persistence of self-affirming Jewish communities in the midst of Christian societies, for these communities testified to the failure of the Christian messianic enterprise to displace its predecessor and so complete its universal project.

Islam also began its history with a failed overture to the Jews. Initially it received a positive response from Jewish tribesmen and rabbinic authorities in Arabia, who recognized the close affinity between the Prophet Muhammad's robustly monotheistic teachings and traditional Jewish belief. However, conflict soon developed when the Jews refused to give up their Judaism to embrace the new religion. The Jews, together with

the Christians, were assigned the status of *el dhimmi*, a protected religious minority living on the fringes of Islamic society. Islam understands itself as incorporating the religious insights of both Judaism and Christianity while superseding them. Unlike Christian Europe, the Muslims did not regard the Jews as a threat to their hegemony, nor did they subject them to systematic, large-scale violence. However, the price that the Jews paid for refusing to accept Islam's messianic project was, again, existence in a marginalized community. Although their situation was far better than the one that they endured in the Christian world, there are obvious parallels between the positions that each society assigned them.

While traditional Islam does not recognize the legitimacy of any non-Islamic political power, the ongoing competition between Islamic and Christian empires that played out from the Middle Ages into the modern era forced pragmatic acceptance of non-Muslim rule in formerly Islamic territories such as Spain, Greece, and the Balkans. By contrast, the Jews never had collective political power at any point in this period, and so the question of accommodation with a Jewish political entity was not an issue. Similarly, Christian Europe had no need to deal with Jewish military or political power, and therefore the idea of a Jewish polity simply did not arise. In both Christian and Muslim domains the Jews were understood entirely as a dependent minority defined by its refusal to disband and join the new majority order.

#### SECULAR MESSIANISM AND THE EUROPEAN LEFT

With the emergence of secular

civil societies in Western Europe following the French Revolution, Jews were offered the possibility of social and political emancipation without explicitly renouncing their Judaism. However the conditions of this offer required that Jews enter the new social order on a strictly individual basis and abandon their view of themselves as constituting a people. The ideal recommended to them was full assimilation. Reconstitution as a religious denomination on the model of Christian churches would be tolerated. But to the extent that Jews insisted on retaining a connection to a collectivity, they would be stigmatized as an obstinately atavistic group clinging to an unwelcome foreign identity. Count Stanislas-Marie-Adélaïde de Clermont-Tonnerre provided a particularly clear formulation of this view of the Jew in a civic society in his "Speech on Religious Minorities and Questionable Professions" delivered to the French National Assembly on December 23, 1789.

We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals. We must withdraw recognition from their judges; they should only have our judges. We must refuse legal protection to the maintenance of the so-called laws of their Judaic organization; they should not be allowed to form in the state either a political body or an order. They must be citizens individually. But, some will say to me, they do not want to be citizens. Well then! If they do not want to be citizens, they should say so, and then, we should banish them. It is repugnant to have in the state an association of non-citizens, and a nation within the nation.

Where European liberalism insisted that Jews give up their involvement with a religiously defined collectivity as a condition for acceptance in the new civic democracy, the mainstream of the revolutionary European left refused to accept a culturally autonomous secular Jewish proletariat committed to class struggle alongside the working-class movements of other nations. The Jewish Labor Bund was persecuted by the Bolsheviks and then by Stalin. Trotsky and his followers also rejected it.

In contrast to the Zionists, the Bund did not seek the creation of a Jewish state, nor did it endorse a territorial solution to Jewish oppression in Eastern Europe. It envisioned the emergence of autonomous Jewish communal and cultural institutions within a socialist society. The Bund enjoyed widespread support in Poland and the Russian pale of settlement, where three to four million Jews constituted approximately 13 percent of the population. It argued that the Jewish population in Eastern Europe was an oppressed national minority that should be permitted to take its place among other peoples in the struggle for a just society.

The left's problem with the Bund was not one of accepting a religious community in a secular society. The Bund's heresy was neither territorialism nor unacceptable ideas on the nature of socialism, but its demand that Jews be recognized as a people and permitted to sustain their language and their cultural institutions. The revolutionary left claimed to respect the rights of all peoples to self-determination and defended the rights of national minorities in other cases.

Its refusal to apply these principles to Jews who sought to participate in the revolutionary movement as Jews exposes its thoroughgoing inability to cope with any form of Jewish collective life.

In effect both classical European liberalism and the revolutionary European left offered the Jews a secular version of the traditional Christian choice: either discard involvement with the Jewish people and achieve individual acceptance in a new liberated era or suffer stigmatization and marginalization as perverse holdouts against the mainstream. The choice expressly excluded the possibility of existing as a free nation among other nations.

Given that the view of the Jewish people as an illicit nation is so deeply ingrained in both religious and secular European culture, it is not surprising that assimilation failed to eliminate European anti-Semitism. Most Jews who adopted variants of this strategy soon found that their attempts to sever connections with collective Jewish life generated the suspicion that they had not fully renounced their forbidden loyalties. They were all the more threatening for having receded into the limbo of non-existence imposed upon them by classical liberals and revolutionary socialists. The issue was not simply Jewish collectivity but Jewish visibility. Leon Pinkser's critique of assimilation (*Auto-Emancipation*, 1882) as a means of escaping oppression proved to be entirely correct.

A large part of the contemporary European left has inherited the liberal and revolutionary antipathy toward a Jewish collectivity, with Israel becoming the focus of this

attitude. While acculturated Jewish intellectuals and progressive Jewish activists are held in high esteem, a Jewish country is treated as an illegitimate entity not worthy of a people whose history should have taught them the folly of nationalism. The current intifada is regarded as decisively exposing the bankruptcy not so much of a policy of occupation and settlement, but of the very idea of a Jewish polity, which could not but do otherwise than commit such misdeeds. These underlying attitudes are clearly expressed in Perry Anderson's extended editorial article "Scurrying towards Bethlehem" (New Left Review, July-August, 2001). Anderson is at pains to show Zionism as a nationalist movement begotten in the sin of collaboration with European colonialism and sustained by continuing involvement with American imperialism. He envisages the de-Zionization of Israel as a necessary condition for a reasonable solution to the conflict. Interestingly, the fact that Arab nationalism and the various states that emerged from it were also deeply involved with European colonialist ventures plays no part in his story. Moreover, he does not regard Palestinian nationalism in particular and Arab nationalism in general as problematic phenomena. The former is understood solely as the engine of a progressive movement for national liberation. It seems, then, that the reasonable demands for graduation to a post-nationalist politics and for a critique of historical myths apply exclusively to Israeli Jews. Palestinians and other Arab nationalists are exempt from these requirements as their national movements are inherently progressive, even if occasionally misguided in their formulations.

In the course of his article Anderson makes the important observation that Israel is unique as a settler state because its immigrants had no mother country in whose colonial interests they were dispatched. This insight should have alerted him to the important difference between the historical reasons that brought Israel into being and those that produced other immigrant-based settler countries, and hence to the inapplicability of a simple-minded analogy between Israel and these products of colonialism. Instead, he suggests that the power of Jewish economic and political influence in America has transformed the United States into an effective mother country for Israel. "Entrenched in business, government and media, American Zionism has since the sixties acquired a firm grip on the levers of public opinion and official policy toward Israel, that has weakened only on the rarest of occasions. Taxonomically, the colonists have in this sense at length acquired something like the metropolitan state-or state within a state- they initially lacked."

The specter of a Jewish-Zionist lobby/conspiracy that controls state power and the media, particularly in America, has become a significant theme in the writings of left-wing political journalists in Europe. So, for example, Robert Fisk ("I am Being Vilified for Telling the Truth About Palestinians," Independent, December 13, 2000) and John Pilger ("Why My Film is under Fire," Guardian, September 23, 2002) insist that a powerful Zionist lobby operating in Britain but directed from America is working with con-

siderable success to suppress all objective reporting and critical discussion of Israel. The January 14, 2002, issue of the New Statesman ran two articles on the Zionist lobby. The cover of the issue featured a large golden Star of David piercing the center of a British flag over the caption "A kosher conspiracy?" The first piece, by Dennis Sewell, concluded that the lobby, to the extent that it exists, is largely ineffective in stemming the tide of hostile reporting and comment on Israel. But the second article, by Pilger, repeated his claim of Zionist power in the British government and the press. It also included the comment that "Blair's meeting with Arafat served to disguise his support for Sharon and the Zionist project." For Pilger, then, Sharon's appalling policies are only derivative problems. The real target is the country as such, reduced to an ideological slogan as "the Zionist project." Peter Wilby, editor of the New Statesman, apologized for the offensive cover in an editorial that appeared in the February 11, 2002, issue. He explained that it had been innocently intended to attract attention on the newsstand. He did not address the obvious question of why a venerable publication of the Labour left should choose to use an image clearly reminiscent of Nazi iconography to promote its sales. It is too facile to dismiss this incident as a passing mistake of judgment. Sneering chatter of a powerful international Jewish lobby, once the stock and trade of fascist propaganda, has now become a staple of left-wing comment on Israel in the British and European press. By contrast, the activities of Arab, Muslim, and pro-Palestinian advocacy groups in the media and public discussion of the Middle East have gone largely unremarked. It is

generally assumed, quite reasonably, that such groups have a natural role to play in debates on conflicts that concern them directly. Oddly, these assumptions do not extend to Jewish and Israeli advocacy groups.

The contrast between Europe and North America in this matter is clear. While by no means free of anti-Jewish prejudice, North America defines itself as an immigrant society in which ownership of the country is not the preserve of a single native group. Jews function like other immigrant communities, most of which have succeeded in developing hyphenated personae, easily combining their ethnic identities with their active presence in the mainstream of American life. It is not surprising,

then, that public Jewish visibility and the notion of a Jewish polity seem to pose less difficulty in America than in Europe and the Middle East.

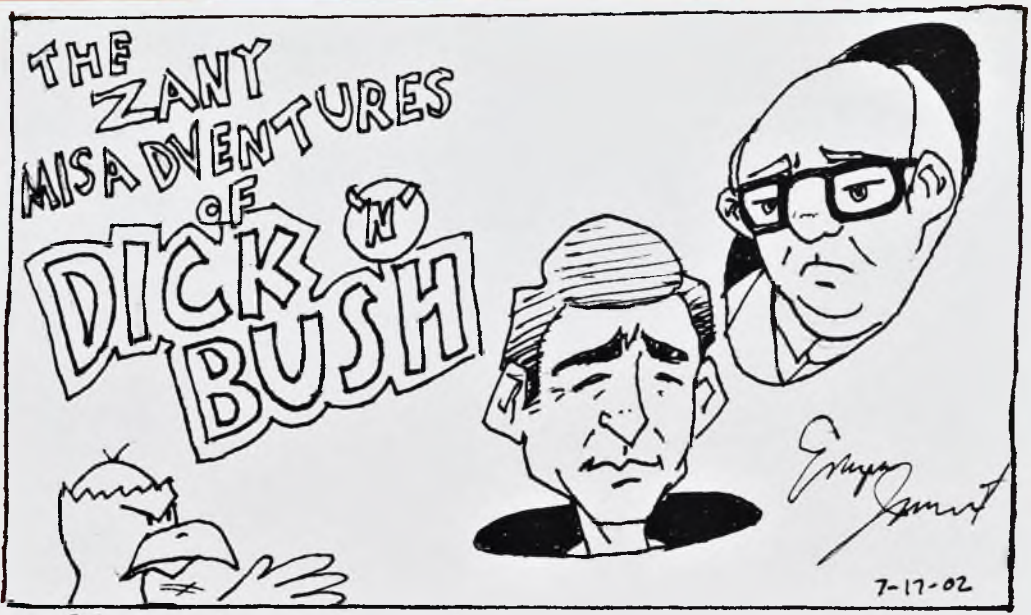
Although much of the criticism directed against Israel in the past two years of the intifada is legitimate if not always accurate, the growing hostility to the country stems, at least in part, from acute resistance to a Jewish polity and general difficulties with Jewish collective life. These attitudes are deeply rooted in the histories of both Europe and the Islamic world. The problem of distinguishing bigotry from reasonable opposition is difficult, given that in Israel the Jews are no longer dispossessed, but citizens of a powerful country with a large army that is now being used to sustain the occupation of

another people. When considering the critical response to Israel it is reasonable to insist that it be accorded the same legitimacy and judged by the same principles as other countries. To require less of Israel is to allow it to claim rights that are denied to others. To demand more is to invoke a unique set of standards motivated by traditional prejudices. Both positions are unreasonable and must be resisted.

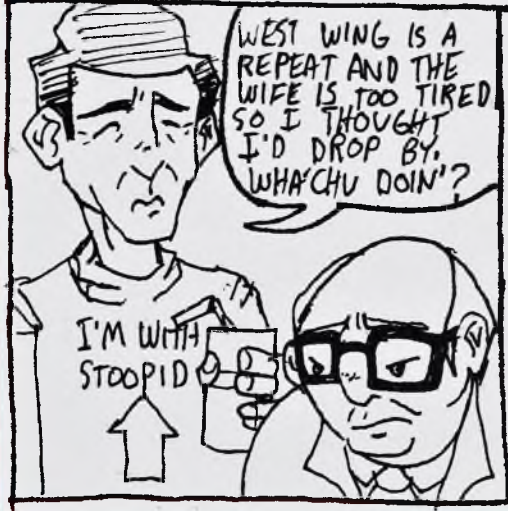
*Shalom Lappin is a professor in the Department of Computer Science at King's College London and is an active supporter of Peace Now in Israel. He has been involved in social democratic and labor organizations in Israel, Canada, and Britain.*

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TODAY'S EPISODE: FOREIGN DIPLOMACY



HEY, THAT'S KEWL, MAN. MAKE SURE YOU USE MY HANDWRITING WHEN DOING IT. PEOPLE MAY GET SUSPICIOUS WHEN THEY SEE ALL MY WORK IN YOUR HANDWRITING.



DON'T WORRY, BUSH. I MADE ENOUGH GRAMMAR ERRORS SO NOBODY GETS WISE.



AA, DICK, YER ALWAYS ONE STEP AHEAD. BY THE WAY, WHAT'S THIS BUTTON DO?

OH GOD NO!



DON'T TOUCH IT!



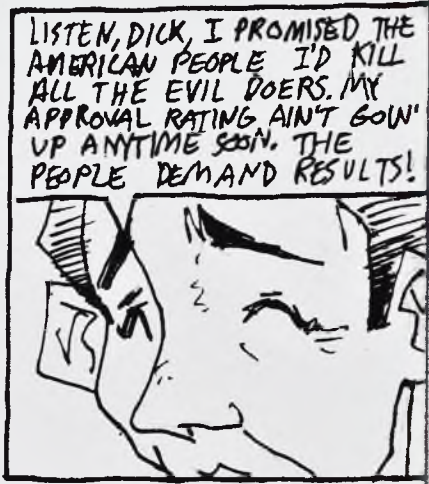
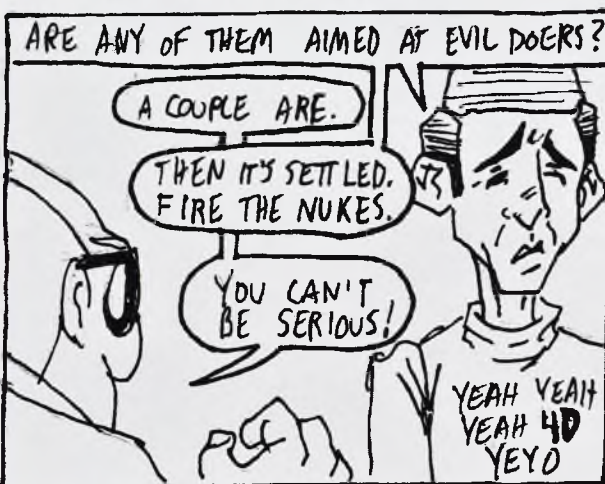
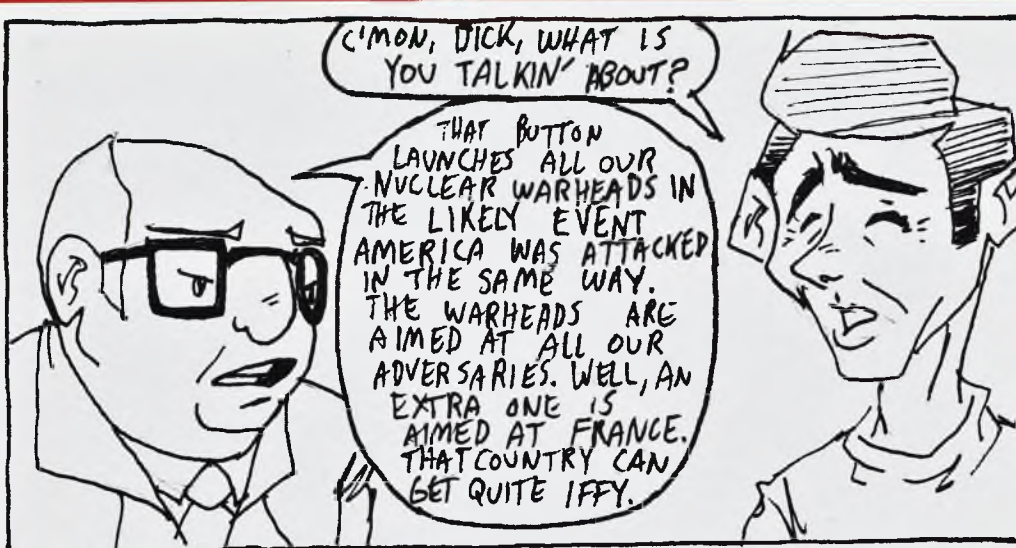
D'OH!

CHRIST, DICK! YER ONE JUMPY SONUVABITCH!



ME JUMPY? YOU ALMOST STARTED WORLD WAR 3!





HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU! THE MISSILE DEFENSE SHIELD DOESN'T REALLY WORK. IT'S JUST A SCAM TO GIVE BILLIONS OF DOLLARS TO MILITARY CONTRACTORS.



WHAT'S THE POINT IN HAVING NUKES IF WE AIN'T GONNA USE 'EM.



IT TAKES MORE THAN THAT TO ESTABLISH WORLD PEACE. YOU'RE BETTER OFF JUST HAVING A PISSING CONTEST WHILE YOU'RE AT IT.



THAT'S IT! WE'LL HAVE A PISSING CONTEST. YOU CAN'T IMAGINE HOW MANY CONFLICTS WERE SETTLED BACK IN MY YEAR AT YALE WITH A GOOD OL' FASHION, PASSIONATE PISS OFF. IT'S HOW WARS ARE WON.

OKAY, I WANT YOU TO GATHER ALL THE WORLD LEADERS SO WE CAN FINALLY END ALL THIS MAYHEM. WE'LL BRING PEACE THROUGH THE DRAINING OF LIZARDS.

I KNOW I CAN WIN OVER THE ORIENTALS, BUT I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THEM AFRICANIANS. I'VE HEARD STORIES, MAN. OH, AND I'LL BE SURE TO MAKE A LOT OF DRAMATIC PAUSES WHEN READING MY NEW FOREIGN POLICY TO MORROW. POLLS SHOW THE AMERICAN PEOPLE LOVE THAT.



THANK GOD HE'S ONLY A FIGURE HEAD. OTHERWISE THIS COUNTRY WOULD BE FUCKED.







Third Rail is looking for some good poetry. That's right - we are not looking for bad poetry. We are looking for good poetry! So get your pens out and start getting creative! When you finish your masterpiece, just email it to [editors@ThirdRailMag.com](mailto:editors@ThirdRailMag.com). That's all folks!

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**Start salivating now .....**



