

The Matrix (The Wachowski Brothers, 1999; 136 minutes)

Producer: Joel Silver

Cinematography: Bill Pope

Editor: Zach Staenberg

Production Design: Owen Patterson

Set Designer: Lisa Brennan

Costumes: Kym Barrett

Music: Paul Barker, Don Davis, et. al.

Screenplay: Andy & Larry Wachowski

Sound Designer: Dane A. Davis

Abstract:

Computer hacker Neo/Thomas Anderson (Reeves) has lived a relatively ordinary life—in what he thinks is the year 1999—until he is contacted by the enigmatic Morpheus (Fishburne). In reality, it is 200 years later, and the world has been laid waste and taken over by advanced artificial intelligence machines. The computers have created a false version of 20th-century life—called “the Matrix”—to keep the human slaves satisfied while the AI machines draw power from them. Morpheus hails Neo as “The [Chosen] One” who will lead the humans to overthrow the machines and reclaim the Earth. Pursued constantly by “Agents” (computers who take on human form and infiltrate the Matrix), Neo joins Rebel warriors led by Morpheus and Trinity (Moss) in their struggle to destroy the Matrix.

Cast:

Neo/Thomas Anderson (Keanu Reeves)

Morpheus (Lawrence Fishburne)

Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss)

Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving)

The Oracle (Gloria Foster)

Cypher/Mr. Reagan (Joe Pantoliano)

Tank (Marcus Chong)

Apoc (Julian Arahanga)

Mouse (Matt Doran)

Ray Anthony Parker (Dozer)

Questions for Discussion:

1. As you watch the film, note the motifs, parallelisms, and contrasts created among settings, characters, and sounds.
2. What do you interpret as the film's explicit, and implicit meanings?
3. Break down the symptomatic meanings you find in *The Matrix* to really tease out ideologies by the categories of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Find examples of each from the film, and be prepared to discuss them in class.
4. Keeping the various categories of ideology you find from #3 in mind, why do you think the narrative must follow the path it does in order to maintain mainstream ideology?
5. Are there ways to read *The Matrix* “against the grain,” to suggest alternative readings to the film’s images and messages regarding sexuality, gender, and race? Find several examples in the film and explain why/how you think they can be recuperated.

Ideology and Cultural Criticism Terminology

Symptomatic Meaning

American Ideologies

Gender/Race/Class/Sexuality/Post-coloniality, et alia . . .

Patriarchy, Laura Mulvey

"Against the Grain"