



Camden Council Library Services – Movie Club

The Matrix (1999)

Discussion Questions

1. The Matrix is praised for its distinct visual style, featuring cyberpunk aesthetics, “bullet time”, green and blue lens filters, “digital rain”, just to name a few. Is there a link between the film's ideas and its visual style? (N.B. Cyberpunk is summed by the phrase “low life, high tech”, combining advanced technology with run down, crime and poverty stricken settings ([What is Cyberpunk?](#), 2009). Other films in this style include: *Bladerunner*, *Ghost in the Shell*, *12 Monkeys*, *The Lawnmower Man*, *Hackers*, *Hardware*, and *Strange Days*, as well as a long list of literature, most notably William Gibson's *Necromancer*. How much does the Matrix borrow from this tradition and to what extent is it “arguably the ultimate cyberpunk artefact” (Gibson, [The Matrix: Fair Cop](#), 2003)?
2. What stylistic differences are there between the “the desert of the real” (2199) and the Matrix (1999)? Can you discern a visual language in the film, e.g. compare scenes in the 1990s Matrix with scenes in the 2199 “real” world? How do these different visual elements relate to help and help tell the story?
3. If viewed as an allegory, the Matrix represents the rules and systems people interact with in their everyday lives (social norms, obligations, political and legal systems, etc.) Can you see parallels between specific aspects of the Matrix and our world?
4. The Matrix raises intriguing aspects about the role of perception in defining and determining reality. This has led many to link it with different philosophical notions that equally interrogate this concept. The two most notable influences are Descartes' theses of intellectual autonomy ([The philosophy of The Matrix](#), 2007) and the related philosophical fable of ‘a brain in a vat’ ([The Matrix as Metaphysics](#)). In contrast to this the film has numerous religious allusions, such as the character called Trinity, Nebuchadnezzar, the prophecy of a saviour (Neo) who will change world, Judas, just to mention a few ([Christian Allegory](#); [The Matrix as Messiah Movie](#); [Looking for God in the Matrix](#); [The Matrix and Christianity](#)). How does the film balance and combine on the one hand a questioning of perception and reality while at the same time creating a familiar story of hope and redemption, of good and evil?
5. Is there a religious or cultural parallel with the Agents? Are they “evil”? Is the system for which they work (i.e. The Matrix) evil, or is this just our perception? Why is the Matrix evil?

Is it because it involves the consumption of humans by machines, or because it is an illusion, a deception? Is Cypher evil for betraying Morpheus?

6. To what extent is reality “merely electrical signals interpreted by the brain”? If not, how else can we define or determine reality. Morpheus claims to offer Neo the truth. He later warns him that “the body cannot live without the mind”, that if he dies in the Matrix his real body will die. In what sense, if at all, is the Matrix real? If it is only signals that we perceive, and thus not necessarily real, how can the mind be killed by it, by something that is not “real”? If our minds “make it real”, then how does the world of 2199 provide any greater reality or truth than the Matrix of 1999?
7. Neo expresses that he dislikes fate, and the Oracle tells him he is not the one. However, it turns out that Neo is The One and the Oracle told him “exactly what (he) needed to hear”. If Neo’s ‘fate’ as The One means that he will have the ability to change the Matrix, how can his fate be fixed, how can prophecy exist in such a ‘reality’ where the prophecy itself expects changes to the system? What is the role of prophecy, the Oracle, and fate in the film? How firm is fate and prophecy when there is a scope of interpretation as presented in the film (e.g. would Neo still have broken the vase if the Oracle did not mention it)?