

Area of Study – Response Sheet

Title: The Matrix
Form: Film
Composer: Andy and Larry Wachowski
Date: 1999

Context & Values:

The film was made in 1999, just a year before the turn of the millennium and in the middle of a large amount of hype surrounding the Y2K bug which was supposedly going to disrupt the entire world's computer systems.

The Wachowski brothers actually used this 'fear' of a digital threat and the growing interest in artificial intelligence as inspiration for the film.

It was a time of intense debate surrounding the use of artificial intelligence and the Wachowski brothers called upon everyone's worst nightmare in regard to artificial intelligence and made a film that was a 'worst case scenario.'

Concepts or Ideas Conveyed about Journeys:

There are two main themes evident in *The Matrix*. The first of these is the phrase is the idea that we can't see past the choices we don't understand. This implies that as we travel along the journey of life we are faced with many choices. However we cannot see what lies on the other side of a choice if we do not fully understand that choice and hence our journey will be halted.

The other theme invokes a fear factor and was the tagline for the movie at the box office, be afraid of the future. This not only plays on people's fears of robots controlling the world but also the fear of the unknown. The film is set somewhere between 100-200 years into the future and leaves the viewer open to wondering what will happen between now and then. The tagline reinforces this message.

Journey – Describe the nature of the journey; imaginative, physical or inner:

There are two themes concerning the nature of the journey conveyed in the film. The first of these is the imaginative journey theme. In a way, *The Matrix* is an imaginative journey inside another imaginative journey. The film itself is based in the future where artificial intelligence is prominent, a very fantastic society and purely imaginative. However, inside this imaginative world is another imaginative world, the matrix itself. The matrix is a fake world 'pulled over your eyes' by the 'machines' to 'cover up the truth.' To the majority of people living in this future, the matrix is real, but for those rebel humans fighting for the world it is just another imaginative world in their journey.

The other theme is that of inner journeys. Throughout the film, Neo tries to find out who he is and tries to come to grips with the fact that he's 'The One.' It is the combination of both the imaginative and inner aspects of the journey that give *The Matrix* its alluring appeal.

Language/filmic/visual/aural features:

Discuss how the composer conveyed the inner or physical or imaginative journey. Identify the feature, exemplify and explain how it conveys or creates the journey and extrapolate by discussing its impact on the responder. Draw comparisons/contrasts between this text and other texts you are discussing in your response. Include quotes from the text.

There are many features which help to convey the idea of both imaginative and inner journeys.

The first of these features is the use of metaphorical speech and the use of cryptic riddles. This is evident when Morpheus offers Neo the choice of a red or blue pill, "you take the red pill you stay in wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes?" This use of metaphorical speech and cryptic clues keeps the viewer guessing and adds to the unrealistic nature of an imaginative world.

The use of sensational special effects is very powerful filmic feature in suspending the audience's disbelief. It allows them to become fully engaged in the film and incorporates a philosophical questioning of our existence. The responder is also challenged by these special effects, questioning pre-conceived notions of "reality".

This is done by the use of visual images of what we would regard as 'normal' items or people doing things that they are not normally associated with.

The music track also helps to add to the surrealism surrounding the film. Whenever a choice or unclear notion is occurring in the film, the non-diegetic music supports this situation with equally eerie, surreal music which once again adds to the imaginative nature of the journey.

The use of mise-en-scene is evident in the slow-motion footage which is used to add to the imaginative side of the journey. Throughout the film, slow-motion footage is used to show extremely fast 'real' action at a frame-by-frame rate. This is evident when Neo dodges an agent's bullets or runs along walls. This helps to show just how unrealistic a person dodging bullets or wall-running is. By playing it in slow-motion, the unrealistic nature of the action and journey becomes much more apparent.

However, there are also features that support the inner journey theme. The use of symbolism helps to convey this idea. In the film, when Neo is 'unplugged' he is symbolised as being re-born rather than merely transferring from the matrix to the real world. This idea of re-birth helps Neo to begin a new understanding of the world and his place in it.

From the outset, it is apparent that Neo is destined to "The One" as prophesized by the oracle. However, the use of rhetorical questions temporarily leave the audience, and for some time Neo, unsure as to whether he is "The One" or not. This is evident in the film when Morpheus questions Neo's understanding of his world by asking 'do you think that's air you're breathing now?'

Neo's uncertainty is not helped by more metaphorical phrases that question Neo. This is evident when Morpheus states to Neo that fulfilling his destiny cannot be done by anyone but himself. Morpheus insists that he "can only show you the door, you must walk through it."

The other main feature that represents an inner journey is actually the fundamental rule by which the matrix operates, "your mind makes it real." Despite many features questioning a viewer's opinion of Neo's place, the final straw is when Neo overcomes this fundamental rule and convinces his mind that he is "The One", therefore convincing his mind that the matrix is not real and therefore can avoid his

mind "making it real." Overall, all these features make *The Matrix* both an inner and an imaginative journey.

Describe the journey and the consequences of the journey:

As Neo journeys to find in himself whether or not he is "The One", his journey does have both positive and negative consequences.

On the negative side, in accepting his place as "The One" he is then subjected to the pressure of expectation that he will end the war and free the human race.

However, on the positive side, Neo has found a way to beat the fundamental rule by which the matrix operates. He has found a way to convince his mind that the matrix is not real. He is then able to dodge bullets, stop bullets and come back from the dead.

The journey however, continues on beyond what is in the film, as Neo must try to stop the destruction of the human race. If he was to fail, the consequences in the 'real' world would involve death for himself and the 'entire human race.'

Linking & Synthesising: Discuss what you have discovered or learned about physical, inner or imaginative journeys from the texts. Compare and contrast the texts.

The Wachowski brother's film, *The Matrix*, has demonstrated that an imaginative journey can occur inside another imaginative journey. It has also shown the link between making choices and the ultimate destination of the journey of life.

This is similar to Robert Frost's poem, *The Road Not Taken*, which also conveys the idea of choices guiding our future and that we cannot move on with life unless those choices have been understood and made.

There are also similarities between *The Matrix* and Margaret Atwood's poem, *Journey to the Interior*, which both deal with delving deep inside oneself and examining our human psyche. In *The Matrix* the dark part of the human psyche is represented by a corrupt program known as Agent Smith, who searches inside himself, quite ironically, for purpose.

This text, *The Matrix*, has used many language and filmic features to develop the concept of journeys.