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REVIEWED BY SAL J. BARRY

Rewind: The Matrix

“What is the Matrix?”

Ten years ago, filmgoers were asked that question when the martial-arts-charged cyberpunk action film *The Matrix* was released. For those who need a quick synopsis, the film stars Keanu Reeves as Neo, a computer hacker-turned-superhero who joins fellow protagonists Morpheus (Lawrence Fishburne) and Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) in a futuristic conflict between humanity and machines.

As the film celebrates its 10th anniversary this year, here are ten reasons why *The Matrix* was and remains a significant film, and is one that most any IAM student should see – or see again:

Cross-genre – *The Matrix* successfully blends the genres of action, martial arts and cyberpunk films. Gunplay? Check. Kung-fu? Check. Technology and an apocalyptic future? Check and check. While the film is not more “punk” than the cyberpunk classic *Blade Runner*, *The Matrix* more than makes up for it with giant robots and karate kicks.

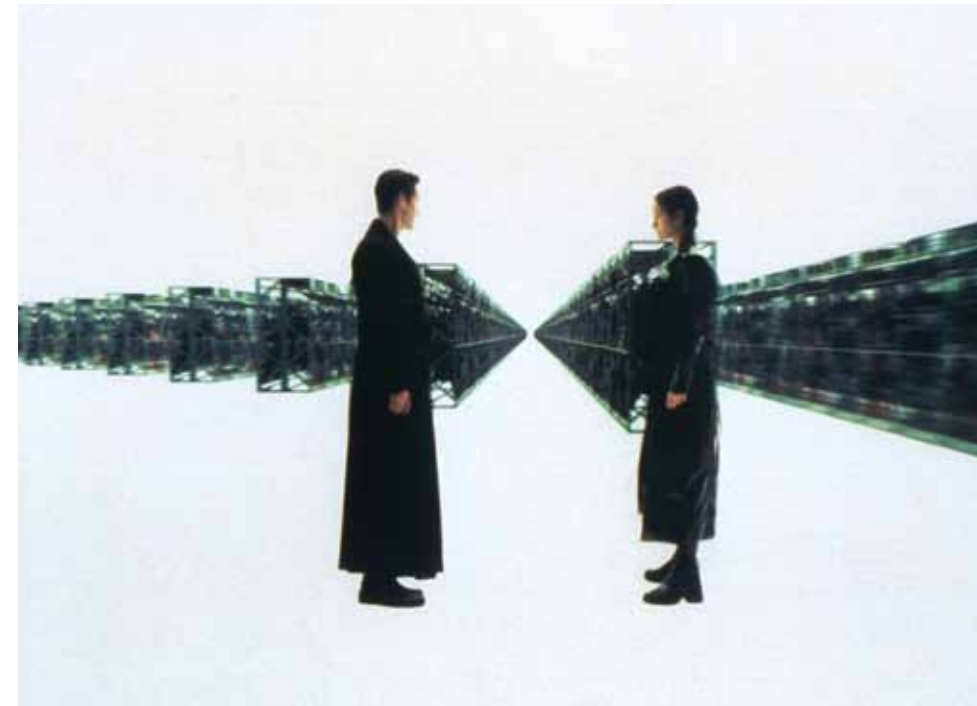
Bullet time – Referring to slowing down the action so that we could “see” really fast stuff like bullets, *The Matrix* popularized this multi-camera, digitally-enhanced filming technique. Bullet time would find its way into other mediums, such as televised sporting events like the Super Bowl and video games such as *Max Payne*.

Dig the DVD – The Matrix embraced DVD technology before it was mainstream. In September 1999, it was released on DVD but did not see release on VHS until mid-December. An unusual move, as DVD technology was only around two years old when *The Matrix* was released and VHS cassette tapes were the standard. Besides, how many people had a DVD player in '99? This prompted the film to become the fastest-selling DVD of that time and was the first DVD to sell three million copies.

Programmers are cool – How many films feature a computer programmer as the hero? Not too many. And if the hero is a computer wiz, the character is usually depicted as some nerd who saves the day by hacking into a database. Neo was not your typical muscle-bound, sword-wielding good guy—he’s a hacker and an action hero as well.

Critics loved it – Usually, when an action-oriented film like *The Matrix* comes out, fan boys love it and critics hate it. That was not the case for this one. In 2000, *The Matrix* won four Academy Awards. In 2001, AFI named *The Matrix* to its list of 100 Years 100 Thrills, placing *The Matrix* at 66—a higher rating than both *Blade Runner* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.

It’s Chicago – While *The Matrix* was filmed in Australia, the generic-looking city that we see in the movie is meant to be Chicago: Adams Street Bridge; State and Balbo, and Wabash and



Lake are all locations most Columbia College students are familiar with. Sharp-eyed watchers can even spot Chicago city street maps on computer screens in the film.

Password please – Like other films at the end of the 1990s, *The Matrix* had its own promotional website. One feature was online comic stories which expanded the world of *The Matrix*. But, those nerdy enough (like me) to watch all of the credits at the end of the film were rewarded with a password – steak – which when entered into the website would unlock extra content. Most similar sites at the time dared to go any further than just being “online brochures”.

Mainstream martial arts – Thanks to meticulously choreographed kung-fu fighting (known as “wire fu” because of wires used to assist actors with superhuman martial arts feats), *The Matrix* helped push martial arts films into mainstream U.S. theaters. Movies like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Iron Monkey* and *Kung-Fu Hustle* would not have been shown outside of “artsy” theaters if not for the mass appeal of *The Matrix*.

Avatars – One concept explored in the film was that of residual self-image. As explained to Neo, it is “the mental projection of your digital self.” While operating within the Matrix program, all the characters “play” idealized versions of their “real-life” counterparts. While

The Matrix did not create this concept, an avatar or idealized digital version of oneself is now a commonplace thing in popular games like *The Sims* and *Second Life*.

Words of wisdom – Good-guy leader Morpheus is the source of some of the film’s best advice – advice that would be meaningful to any student: “There’s a difference between knowing the path and walking the path.” Powerful words that still resonate with me today as they did ten years ago.