

we have inherited, perhaps out of a sense of joy at the thinking they offer us. Each seeks a way through the chaos without constructing prisons (whether the same old ones or new ones). Each seeks an ethical analysis that speaks to the territories—the time-spaces—of human (and perhaps nonhuman) lives. Each seeks to open up new possibilities and perspectives on our own lives by trying to draw new lines between an unfinished present and an already begun future. Each seeks to find ways to let us see what has not been seen, to say what has not been said, and in the space between, in the space of such an analysis, to find new possibilities for hope, and new hope for possibilities.

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Everyday Matrix: Becoming Adolescence

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It is a very, very close and difficult thing to know why some paint comes across directly onto the nervous system and other paint tells you the story in a long diatribe through the brain.

—Francis Bacon (Sylvester, 1987:18)

Oh, what a god we have made of the mind, the understanding, which is so necessary to life, but which hangs like a cloud in the sky above the physical world which is the totality of every human creature! The mind: a trifle! Feeling is more than what happens in the mind; feeling possesses the whole living being.

—Robertson Davies (1991:224)

What makes the movie *The Matrix* (Silver, 1999) such a popular, powerful, striking movie? My contention is that, apart from “representing” anything that merits analysis, its special appeal is that it “paints” what Deleuze (1981) calls, in his work on the paintings of Francis Bacon, a “logic of sensation.” Rather than (just) representing reality or predicting a future, the analysis of which Bacon (the painter) would call a “diatribe through the brain,” *The Matrix* comes across directly onto the nervous system. It does not (just) tell us what reality is really like or predict what it will be like at some time in the future. Instead, it paints the sense of a world and the sense(s) we need to move around in that world. It organizes affect. It articulates knowledge, feelings, beliefs, practices, gestures, desires, longings, colors, noises, odors, and textures. Watching *The Matrix* is to become a particular body in those sensations (what that body is I will explain later), and through those sensations a very particular space is organized within which that body moves.

It is, as Deleuze puts it, "the same body that both gives and receives the sensation, that is both subject and object" (27); the body is both what makes sense of the space of *The Matrix* and what is given sense.

The difference between representing reality and organizing affect is captured in a moment in *The Matrix* when the Oracle "predicts" Neo's future. Neo, recently rescued from the Matrix by the resistance, is taken to the Oracle to find out if he is "the one," that is, the one who because of his extraordinary ability to "change whatever [he wants], to change the Matrix as he [sees] fit," will lead the resistance against the Matrix. The Oracle tells him he is not "the one." But as Morpheus explains later, the Oracle only told him "exactly what [he] needed to hear" (Silver, 1999:np). The prophecy does not convey the future; neither does it re-present the present. Rather it connects and contributes to what he needed and was ready to hear. Similarly, for us, *The Matrix* neither conveys a future nor re-presents the present. Rather it connects and contributes to what we need and are ready to hear. Its power lies not (or less) in its ability to prophecy a future or critique a present. It is not *about* anything in that sense. Rather, it is a logic of sensation: paintings of what we need, want, or are ready to hear, think, feel, smell, taste, see, *and* know. It paints—interactively—a logic of sense we are capable of occupying.

And who is this "we" that inhabits this space? Who (or what) constitutes the body that both gives and receives the sensation? What body is becoming in *The Matrix*? Deleuze and Guattari's concept "haecceity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:256–265) would suggest that this is not a question of, on the one hand, a subject produced, and on the other hand, a logic of sensation that produces the subject. Haecceity is "a mode of individuation," which is not a person, place, or thing, but a body defined by capacities in relationships: the capacity to affect and be affected, the capacity for movement (or rest) with particular speed (or slowness), the capacity for particular intensities and sensations. With the concept of haecceity, we can reframe the question, Who is this we? to What can this body do? And what can be done to this body? We can know about this body by learning

what its effects are, how [it] can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body. (257)

The relevant body in *The Matrix*, the body to which it returns as a kind of refrain, is the adolescent body or, perhaps more helpfully adolescence, which is not to say the adolescent. This is not a biological or generational subject, but "the sum total of material effects belonging to" (260) adolescence. Certainly one of the effects is the adolescent, by which I mean that slippery category made up of teenagers that spills to the sides to include younger kids and adults. But far more significant, and the challenge of this essay, is to come to know how adolescence is a kind of movement in relation with other bodies and that it has particular capacities to affect and be affected. These movements and capacities do not constitute a neatly trimmed coherent package, but consist of multiple rubrics or aspects that coexist, converge, and fold onto one another, sometimes in surprising contradiction, sometimes with frightening implications.¹ Understanding adolescence in terms of haecceity, as consisting of these multiple rubrics, is what makes the logic of sensation available to us. I traversed this space as I watched *The Matrix*; I moved among these rubrics, though I am certainly not generationally a teenager. To watch *The Matrix* is, as it turns out, to feel becoming adolescence.

Why Care?

I am not a film critic by trade, so why join in the myriad voices of critics talking about *The Matrix*? Again, the question is multiple: Why care about *The Matrix*? Why write about *The Matrix*? And why do so when so many others have? First, the popularity of *The Matrix* criticism suggests that the power of the film to compel sensation is considerable. So by considering the film in terms of that power is to add to, as well as comment on, those voices. But why care? Because *The Matrix* simultaneously produces questions and answers about some very important matters of affect. The nature of these questions and answers matters enormously and deserves yet another digression.

As a teacher, I have been very frustrated by the fact that so many of my students seem unengaged in their education, so uncommitted to learning. To put this in faculty-lounge talk: they sometimes seem to sit there passively waiting for me to entertain them and somehow impart knowledge painlessly. They show little enthusiasm and even less curiosity. An unwillingness to work hard and an unwillingness to accept failure as a necessary part of the process of learning pervade the classroom. So many students seem

totally unappreciative of the opportunities available to them. I think: What a waste of their time, money, and talents. We commonly call this "apathy," and as cultural critics we know that apathy "has to be constantly produced" (Grossberg, 1992:258). So how, *The Matrix* asks and answers, is apathy produced? But more important, it paints the fact of it happening, of apathy's production.

As a stepparent of a teenager, and therefore in contact with adolescence outside the school environment, I have been similarly frustrated by the "boredom" with which adolescence engages everyday life. Teenagers so often complain of being bored, even when they are doing those few things that they seem to enjoy: hanging out with friends, talking about (or having) sex, listening to music, and often doing drugs and alcohol. Again I think: What a waste of time and energy, and sometimes even their lives (through suicide). And once again, I know that this, too, is "produced." Again, *The Matrix* asks and answers: How is this boredom produced? Again, more importantly, it paints the fact of it happening.

As a teacher, a parent, and an inhabitant of the 21st century, I am greatly concerned by school shootings. This is an understatement. They terrify me. I stand in front of students like those killers almost every day. One of my students some years back did take up a gun, rob a local bank, and hold a bank employee hostage. He was shot and killed by the police before he killed anyone else. He might just as easily have killed other students or one of his teachers, maybe me. I routinely get plenty of students angry with me because I often judge them to be less than A+ students, and I often wonder if I would know which of any of them might be dangerous to me or to others. A recent school shooter, at Santana High School in California, was merely 15. So what makes a 15-year-old shoot to kill students and teachers they may not even know? Again, *The Matrix* asks and answers how this can happen and paints the fact of such killing.

Passive nonlearning, boredom, lack of enthusiasm, suicide, and the killing of school students and teachers: these things do not seem necessarily or obviously connected. But *The Matrix* made me ask, are they? And it answers the question: they are. *The Matrix* offers the logic of sensation in which they are connected. It does so by painting the affective logic that makes it all make (frightening but very common) sense. If we can come to sense this logic, we might begin to see what is happening. And we might be able to see where lines of flight from this logic become productive in a

positive sense and where they become, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, "the longing to kill and to die, the Passion for abolition" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:227). To do so we have to bypass—at least to some degree—the diatribe through the brain and its attendant rationale to sense a very strange logic.

The Matrix Works

The Matrix "works" in two ways. On the one hand, it is productive; it does connective, affective work. On the other hand, it does so powerfully, in that it very effectively takes up the sensibilities of adolescence and organizes them in an affective spatial logic conducive to being occupied. As I stated above, it does this work along multiple rubrics; that is, it traverses the space in multiple ways. In this essay I consider four of these rubrics, chosen from among others for their affective work in relation to the matters of concern laid out above. I call these four rubrics: (1) lost and found, flat and deep, (2) learning with eyes closed, (3) what the body feels, and (4) the color of love.

These rubrics do not all tell the same story; they aren't even necessarily consistent. They share no essence, as if we could say that they all make the same point from a different perspective. Nor are they an unfolding of a plot. Rather, they each take up, distribute, and reorganize elements, functions, and forces of an affective logic or landscape. Each relates to the others nomadically as they fold redistributed elements back onto another, adding dimension to their logic. They are linked or connected within the organization of logic, but different from one space to the next. Together, loosely organized as a film with a beginning and end, these rubrics enact a nomadic distribution of elements that, taken together, offer us a mode of existence that "makes sense." It is a mode of existence that "holds together," however tenuously.

To traverse *The Matrix* in terms of its rubrics is not to deconstruct it, to take it apart to hold its pristine component parts up to an illuminating intellectual or rational light. Rather, it is to layer one rubric on top of another, complexifying one with the other, rendering it virtually impossible to isolate and engage independent component parts. Each new rubric folds in complexity as it articulates to the work of those previously considered. By folding one onto the other we engage a process of what Charles Stivale has characterized as "action and opening outward, of involuntary revelations and adventures, of sliding toward possibly barbaric formulations,

unheard-of juxtapositions of concepts, monstrous couplings" (Stivale, 1998:24). After considering all four rubrics, the *The Matrix*'s logic of sensation should—if I am successful—feel commonsensical, even if monstrous.

Lost and Found, Flat and Deep

Mr. Thomas A. Anderson and Neo are multiple. One lost, the other found, but one and not one. From early in the film we are led to ask: Which is which? Who is lost? Who is found? Mr. Anderson works by day as a program writer for a software company. Plain gray suit. Late often. Humiliated by his boss. At night Neo hacks at the highest levels, perhaps deals drugs. Crashes in his paraphernalia-strewn room, making Mr. Anderson late again. Neo is found by members of the resistance who want to rescue him from the Matrix, a space that is unmistakably everyday life. Neo is recruited so that he can rescue others from the Matrix. When the Agents of the Matrix discover the plan, they come for Mr. Anderson, confront his multiple identity, and demand that he work for them to save himself. What was briefly a question ("Which is which?") is no longer: Neo prevails and is rescued by members of the resistance who insist that as Anderson he was lost and that the only way to be found is to accept the red pill, a machinic drug that extricates him bodily—painfully—from the Matrix and slams him into the other world of the resistance. Neo is found. Suffering, no longer multiple, and found.

Lost is flat and found is deep. The lost Mr. Anderson is "flat," a character with no "spine," no freedom, and no obvious inner life. He wears a plain gray suit, sits in a barren cubicle at work, and submits to the alarm clock and the boss. He lives like (almost) everyone else in the Matrix, a computer-programmed prison made to look like life. The colors that predominate in the Matrix are black, gray, and white. Both its inner and outer life are dull, drab, colorless, tasteless, but (oddly) with taste and smell intact, heightening what is disgusting. ("I can taste your stink," says Smith.) Even Agent Smith—otherwise evil incarnate—wants out of this disgusting place: "I hate this place, this zoo, this prison" (Silver, 1999:np). This is a life to be rescued from *even if* you are one of the really bad guys. How can one not have a desire to find and rescue those other multiples helplessly and unknowingly trapped in the Matrix? That is the goal of the resistance: to rescue those trapped in the Matrix who can still be rescued.

Unlike many films, where extra (flat) characters are used to fill in and offer verisimilitude to the main plot, the flat characters in this film are the point. That they are flat, that they have no inner lives, that they are not free: that is the point. They are monsters, walking dead, more like the living dead in *The Night of the Living Dead* than the extras in *The Truman Show*. Of these masses of people, indifference is an appropriate feeling, for these people do not experience life, think, feel, or act in any way other than how they are programmed to act, think, and feel. Indifference, rather than pity, is called for. How can you feel sorry for a cipher, a programmed bit of computer logic?

Although life in the Matrix is lifeless, uniform, and regimented, it offers occasional sensual respite for the greedy appetite: red raw steak to taste and savor, a girl in a red dress to lust after.² This is a sense of flat that that pretends to be otherwise, a deceptively alluring flat, a decoy set for fools. This sensual allure facilitates a slide from indifference into something more potent. For, as victims of the allure of sensation, these very ciphers are programmed to imprison others in the Matrix. They work as components of a structure, a Matrix that imprisons both themselves and others. Everyone in the Matrix is thus both prisoner and jailor. Mr. Anderson's boss restricts Neo's freedom to do what makes him free: to learn the truth (about the Matrix). The one smiling, attractive, colorful red-dressed woman among the crowd of gray suits turns out to be an Agent in disguise bent on killing Neo. A bum in the subway turns into an Agent who nearly kills Trinity. Morpheus, in a long speech to Neo, makes it clear that nobody is innocent, that everyone in the everyday Matrix is potentially a killer:

The Matrix is a system, Neo. That system is our enemy. But when you're inside, you look around, what do you see? Businessmen, teachers, lawyers, carpenters. The very minds of the people we are trying to save. But until we do these people are still a part of that system. And that makes them the enemy. You have to understand, most of these people are not ready to be unplugged. And many of them are so inured, so hopelessly dependent on the system that they will fight to protect it. (Silver, 1999:np)

All these people in the everyday Matrix are to be treated indifferently only if you are foolish, with fear and suspicion if you are smart, and as the enemy if your eyes are open. In treating those who live in the Matrix with the requisite combination of missionary

zeal, indifference, and suspicion, members of the resistance do not express hate, even though the boss, the Agents, and the traitor (most appropriately named Cypher) behave in ruthless and sinister ways. Those who inhabit everyday life may be full of hate themselves, but they are met instead with indifference and suspicion. In this sense, one can kill an enemy without hate, but with something more like indifference in the service of missionary intent. This corresponds to the Vietnam War tactic of killing the villagers to save the village. It can be done without rancor.

The Matrix has its deep characters as well, and they are all members of the resistance who become Neo's allies (and in one case, romantic interest). These characters have inner lives, goofy looks, personalities, piercings, and distinctive clothes (leather trench coats as well as rags). They experience pain, bleed red blood, love, and fight in the face of outrageous odds. They are loyal and self-sacrificing. And they are—significantly—very few. When Neo joins the group on the resistance ship, the hovercraft *Nebuchadnezzar*, they constitute a group of nine. By the end of the film they are four. They refer to the city of Zion, the “last human city” somewhere “underground near the earth's core, where it is still warm” (Silver, 1999:np). Presumably these Zionists, too, are people of depth, but in this film they exist as a remote, almost theoretical possibility. The sense of depth is confined to the very small group of allies of varying loyalties, not unlike a middle school or high school clique. The clique is unique. To everyone else, indifference and suspicion is appropriate.

But one must even be suspicious of one's small group of friends and be prepared to detach from them as becomes necessary. Even within the clique, one cannot trust blindly, for if you do you will surely be blindsided. This experience is played out in the actions of Cypher, who harbors hatred for his shipmates. He sells out his allies in trade for the best of the sensory experiences the everyday life of the Matrix has to offer: taste—the savory taste of red, rare (bioengineered) steak, the promise of being an actor, and the obliteration of knowledge—a memory makeover so he doesn't have to remember that the life he lives in the Matrix is, well, flat. Once you have become a deep character, you are stuck with irreversible and painful knowledge that sets you apart. You can't really go back unless you are reprogrammed to deny the truth, your depth, your freedom, your responsibility, your very humanness. Once you “know,” it is an “act” to participate in everyday life, a deadly act, for it has deadly

consequences for the few. To go back from your isolation is to become the most heinous of ciphers: a traitor, a jailor, and a potential killer.

If you are a person of depth, you live in an oddly formulated space where you must try to save the very people to which you are indifferent and of which you are suspicious. You must try to save your enemies. I think it is incorrect to reduce this to a kind of martyr complex; rather, it is an acknowledged trade-off. The saved do not enjoy their suffering; but their very survival—and their humanity—depends on their willingness to suffer. The goal of the clique onboard the ship is to scour the Matrix to find and save those (presumably) few people who, like them, have potential for depth and a willingness to suffer for it.

But there is an additional glitch. Even though there are others worth saving, it is almost impossible to determine who is deep and who is flat, who is worth saving and who is not, who has the capacity to suffer and who does not, who would be loyal and who would be a traitor or even an Agent. One's judgment is suspect. A little old lady in her kitchen baking cookies might be the Oracle, but it is just as likely—and more dangerous—that a member of your elite clique might abandon you for the sensory stimulation that covers over and for the obliteration of one's capacity to feel and suffer.

So don't write everyone off in theory, but in practice, it is probably safer to assume that anyone in the Matrix, anyone who moves around in your everyday life, is a cipher, an insignificant nothing, and at the same time a Cypher, a dangerous traitor. As part of the collective structure of the Matrix, each is your jailor or perhaps even your killer. Be prepared for even the closest of allies to abandon you. You must resign yourself to a state of constant suffering.

Adolescence is clearly privileged in this space; those who share the same adolescent sensibilities are more likely to be among your allies. Age articulates to adolescence, but age is not an entirely reliable indicator of adolescence. Morpheus explains the importance of age: “We have a rule. We never free a mind once it's reached a certain age. It's dangerous. The mind has trouble letting go.” Because Neo is past that certain age (though we do not know exactly the age, I would guess it is the late teens), he has “trouble letting go.” Of what? Of the programming that constitutes everyday life. Morpheus, our guide through this world tells Neo, “You are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else, you were born into bondage, born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch, a prison for your mind” (Silver, 1999:np).³ Old age (anything beyond adolescence)

is clearly and persistently an indicator of resistance to change and freedom. Children are salvageable, because it is easier to deprogram them, to set them free. But in this film it is adolescence—in the form of Neo—that is the most highly valued. The younger children in the film, the children at the home of the Oracle, while talented and “pure,” are in a sense too naive to take up a place alongside Neo. Neo learns from a child (how to bend a spoon by not bending it, but by bending himself), but the child is a buddha-like innocent at play, not a fighter like Neo.

In this rubric we come to see that in adolescence—in its isolation, indifference, suspicion, suffering, and willingness to kill—lies the salvation of the world.

Learning With Eyes Closed

Resisting the prison of the everyday Matrix requires knowledge, information, and training. Education is generally acknowledged here to be crucial. One has to know how to fight, how to fly a helicopter, how to leap from one tall building to the next in a single bound, and so on. Members of the resistance acquire this knowledge plugged into a computer downloading programs. In his initial training session Neo is hooked up to learn in this fashion. In this fantastically speeded up and transformed version of neurolinguistic programming, a mind not only learns, but a body becomes something knowledgeable. In this way, Neo learns Kung Fu in a matter of mere moments. Then strapped into their chairs, he and Morpheus fight in virtual space. In this fight, we witness the transformation of Neo from a skinny, night-owlish computer hacker to a trim, muscular, and extraordinarily skilled Kung Fu artist. One does not need to learn the old way, where learning Kung Fu involved a lifetime of discipline and effort, of training and apprenticeship, of success and failure. One learns by sitting back and letting the machine do the work.

As illustrated by how Neo learns, the logic of learning in *The Matrix* makes considerable sense for the 21st century. First, learning in *The Matrix* is astonishingly like the ultimate dream of distance education, where students learn in virtual space without classrooms or teachers, with the utmost convenience and with minimal effort. The programs that Neo downloads are the equivalent of the “great lectures” or “classes” marketed by virtual universities and publishing companies. These very real programs dismiss as inadequate classroom interaction with a live teacher who is anything less than

the very cream of the intellectual crop. It is far superior to experience a lecture or distance relationship with “the best.” Can it be surprising that just as the educational system looks increasingly to these kinds of virtual programs as offering the best and most efficient kind of education, that students, too, would not begin to believe it? It makes sense to be bored with anything less. But who would the best teacher be? If old people are flat and not to be trusted, even those “great lecturers” become suspect. The clique, given shape by its adolescent sense, is clearly the most likely source from which to learn. In pedagogical circles this is dignified with the title “peer learning,” which does seem to engage student interest more successfully than (old) teachers do, however limited peer knowledge might be.

Second, learning in *The Matrix* looks oddly like a particular kind of learning widely critiqued by critical pedagogues: the structure and belief that the teacher has knowledge that gets inserted into the mind of the student. In its place, modern pedagogical practice argues for more “active involvement” on the part of the student, where classrooms are shaped more by where the student wants to take it than by information that the teacher wants to convey. *The Matrix* reconfigures these elements in a rather unique way. The students here don't need teachers at all. But they do need that information inserted into their minds; as I've indicated, that work is done here by a machine in a form of distance education. But again adolescent sense plays an important role in this education, in that members of the elite clique determine *what* needs to be learned and *when*. Learning comes fast, on demand, when it is needed to fulfill a particular goal. In a sense, then, all learning in *The Matrix* is “service learning,” another darling of the pedagogical industry, where one learns only what one needs to accomplish a particular task. Trinity needs to learn to fly a helicopter—fast—in order to help Neo rescue Morpheus. So she quickly downloads a program to teach her how to fly. There is no need to learn anything in this world unless and until it has an adolescent-sanctioned application. Why read literature or philosophy if you are going to be a fighter? Why learn math until you need to use it? Why learn anything at all unless its application is imminent and it has been judged—by you—to be worthwhile?

Any teacher watching this film would tell you that Morpheus and the Oracle are teachers. But within the space of the film, they are not “teachers.” Teachers only exist in the Matrix. The Oracle is a “prophet” for the resistance and a “mother” of sorts. Morpheus is

"our leader" and "our father." It is interesting that Morpheus does a lot of what looks like teaching: his talks with Neo have all the marks of lectures. Yet they are not coded as teaching; they are delivered like service learning on a need-to-know basis, they are one-on-one as though father to son, and they come from a fighter.

Third, learning in *The Matrix happens to you*, almost without exertion. You sit passively in a chair and the learning comes to you. What remains of exertion is slight. Downloading is exhausting, both on the mind and the body. Tank takes Neo through ten hours of "training" at his first session and is impressed by Neo's endurance, declaring with delight, "he's a machine." But what we see is Neo sitting in a chair, eyes closed, getting "jolted" with knowledge. He has sort of a momentary hangover afterwards that doesn't appear to be particularly taxing or to have any long-term effects. Passively tolerating jolts of knowledge inserted into your programming and feeling momentarily worn out afterwards are what constitute learning.

Fourth, failure is only illusory. When Neo first tries to leap from tall building to tall building in a single bound, he fails, but suffers only a little mentally produced blood on his lip. Well, he was always safe, because it was just a program anyway. And as Cypher points out, "Everybody falls the first time" (Silver, 1999:np). Learning takes place on a virtual plane, not on a plane of irreversible effects with attendant risks and responsibilities. One doesn't learn from failure in *The Matrix*; one learns that there is no failure. Learning is about adopting a certain unlimited sense of self. As Morpheus tells Neo, "You have to learn to let it all go, Neo. Fear, doubt, and disbelief. Free your mind" (Silver, 1999:np). Those who remain in the Matrix of everyday life, those who remain flat characters can never be free because, as Morpheus tells us in another scene, "Their strength and their speed are still based in a world built on rules." The goal of learning is to free the mind, which as Neo puts it in his final message to the inhabitants of the Matrix, means to live in "a world without rules or controls." In the Kung Fu match, Morpheus challenges Neo to set aside rules: "Some of them can be bent, others broken" (Silver, 1999:np). Adaption and improvisation are a mark of those freed from the rules. To label any particular "try" a failure would only be to assert wrongfully that everyday life and its rules must be heeded—knowledge that would only continue to imprison you. Learning only occurs in resisting everyday life: in the knowledge that one has no limits, that there is no failure, that

knowledge can be easily acquired as deemed by you and your peers as necessary, and that rules are meant to be bent and broken. It makes sense within this logic for students to take any teacher's judgment of their work as anything less than A+ as an affront to their sense of self, as an attempt to restrict their freedom.

My very real students watch this film, many of whom are angered by homework, slow to participate, and who do not take failure seriously—apart from the effect it has on their GPA, which I take to mean its effect on keeping unlimited doors open to them. The Matrix articulates their anger and lack of enthusiasm to resistance. To have to work or to be enthusiastic about everyday life, of which school is certainly part, is to be a willing and duped prisoner of the Matrix. To refuse to participate is to assert one's uniqueness, one's claim to be "the one" at the center of a quest for freedom from the dullness, from the rules and controls of everyday life. In a very real sense, to be dull is to resist this dullness, to not learn is to learn. What matters is what one has in mind; that is, the sense one makes of it. Even strapped in your chair, essentially doing nothing, really significant things are going on, and they make real physical, affective sense.

In this rubric we come to see adolescence as the elite, isolated few compelled to resist the prison of everyday life by articulating learning in a certain way: to engage by disengaging, to bend and break rules, to learn by not learning, to expect the right knowledge to be imparted at the right moment, by computer preferably, and to learn without teachers, who are, like everyone else in everyday life, potential enemies. Ultimately, we are compelled to resist rules or controls of any sort, for they lie to us in telling us that we are something less than limitless, unbounded, and free. They lie when they tell us we are anything short of "the one." They—the rules, controls, and teachers—are among the many faces of the enemy.

What the Body Feels

Let your nervous system feel the sensations of adolescence in *The Matrix*. This, I know, is painful. It all happens to Neo's adolescent body. He is squeezed, pinched, scratched, turned inside out, grazed by bullets, drenched with sweat, poked with needles, jarred from sleep, wrenched with fear, jolted with knowledge, seduced by color, burned by desire, frustrated by self-judgment, and filled with power and self-assurance. His is a world filled with sensations: hard, soft, hot, cold,

pulsing, rhythmic, agonizing, pleasurable, disgusting, and delightful. He is possessed by feeling because he is a deep character in contrast with the flat characters whose feelings are merely superficial, mental "acts" that mimic feeling, like Cypher's desire to be an alien to eat bioengineered steak, to be made to forget.

The mark of one's special status as a member of the clique, as "the one," is to feel deeply, to be possessed by feeling. But this takes an odd turn, for if one engages the everyday Matrix by feeling in that life, it is an indication of just how much one is imprisoned and duped by its rules and controls. So feeling must be confined clearly to the realm of resistance and withdrawn from the realm of everyday Matrix. This requisite discrimination of affect can be managed reasonably in the film where the world of the resistance is marked by a spartan life with a few individuals on an isolated ship, where food is tasteless, killing is cool and without hate, and femininity is androgyny. But even this marking is not entirely reliable: remember the threat of Cypher. But how does one manage this requisite discrimination in everyday life outside the film? Where in everyday life is the site of resistance? Where in everyday life is the Matrix? *The Matrix* paints these places directly onto the nervous system; it does some preaching and teaching; but more effectively, it throws distinctions in your face with brush strokes of color, the passion of Neo, the visual acrobatics of the computer, the high of drugs, and the torn flesh of violence.

There are several obvious sites of resistance: music and dress, most notably. But I am not going to discuss them given what I take to be their obviousness and the fact that so many cultural theorists have recognized these as crucial sites of adolescent resistance. Besides, these have become relatively "harmless" sites of resistance, despite the continual protests against trench coats, piercings, and rock music. I am much more interested in some rather more potent sites of resistance: notably those of computers, drugs, criminality, and violence. I will treat them here from what I take to be the least to the most potent, again each site complexified by the folding onto it of those that follow.

First, computers are a sign of generational difference, with the group that is now adolescent being strikingly computer savvy. It's a convenient mark of difference between the everyday Matrix and the resistance. Though we may all be run by computers, only the resistance can hack through to find the truth required to resist. It is the resistance that uses computers to find recruits; this, for ex-

ample, is how they find Neo. Being passionate about computers indicates a commitment to freedom. This is very clear at the beginning of the film as we come to understand that Neo, not Mr. Anderson, is the deep, found character. Neo's passion to learn the truth is virtually indistinguishable from his passion to hack.

Second, drugs are a marker that distinguishes the Matrix from the resistance. To make the move from the Matrix to the resistance, Neo has to choose between the red pill (for the resistance) and the blue pill (for a return to the Matrix). So while everyone takes drugs, the resistance discriminates and has certain drugs of choice. The red pill delivers a psychedelic sensation, replete with color, sound, pain, and pleasure, but it delivers truth. To choose the red pill requires a passion for truth, for, as Morpheus explains, "there is no turning back." Truth and the drug experience are elided in the image of "Alice tumbling down the rabbit hole." Morpheus offers truth as a by-product of the psychedelic experience: "Take the red pill, you stay in wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. Remember, all I offer is the truth, nothing more" (Silver, 1999:np).

Third, criminality marks the resistance. *The Matrix* is rich with criminal behavior. First with regard to drugs, there is a rather amazing scene near the beginning of the film where we witness the folding of the computer, drugs, criminal behavior, truth, and freedom. In this scene Neo sells something that looks like a computer disc to Choi and Dujour. It isn't clear what it is, but an intellectual resolution of that question is beside the point. The work of the moment folds computers (a disc) onto drugs (Choi makes a reference to mescaline and clearly acts "high"), onto criminal behavior (Neo warns Choi not to let on where he got this disc if he gets caught with it), onto truth and freedom (after all, Neo is "the one" in search of truth and freedom; but further, Dujour has a tattoo of a white rabbit, which leads Neo to the resistance).

Using the computer for hacking is folded onto using the computer in search of truth and freedom—almost as though hacking is the same as the search for truth. Neo admires Trinity for her reputation as a well-known world-class hacker. And Neo himself, according to Agent Smith is "guilty of virtually every computer crime we have a law for" (Silver, 1999:np). But Trinity and Neo are, at the same time, the sort of "first couple" of the resistance who fight for truth and freedom. They may have grown out of hacking for its own sake, but it is exactly their skill at hacking that brought them

to the attention of the resistance to begin with, and these same computer skills enable the resistance to resist. Consequently, it is difficult to separate the two kinds of criminal behavior: hacking and belonging to the resistance. Both paint a willingness to resist rules and controls and are, therefore, practices of freedom.

In addition to drugs and computer crime, virtually every move made by the resistance is illegal. Their existence is illegal; Zion is illegal. And needless to say their weapons are illegal. Which brings us to the marker of violence and the full force of the annihilating power of this particular fold. There is a lot of violence in *The Matrix*; many people would say gratuitous violence. Further, people are disturbed by what seems to be the absence of affect when Neo and Trinity go on their killing spree. But these acts and their particular affect make common sense within this logic of sensation. Their killing is not gratuitous; neither is it without affect. Neo and Trinity are in search of truth and freedom and a key to that freedom is Morpheus, who is about to be broken down with (bad) drugs to reveal the location of Zion. Their whole living being is possessed by this desire for truth and freedom; they have no choice but to meet the Agents of the Matrix on their own (violent) terms. They do not do so with gusto, but with cool machinic reserve. Remember, they do not hate the people who walk the streets of everyday life; they do not even hate its Agents. The preference would be to rescue them. But because most of the members of the Matrix (and especially the Agents) cannot be rescued, they are appropriately treated with indifference and suspicion. And the bottom line is that you have to be willing to turn on them as necessary to assert the truth of their (and your) imprisonment and to gain your freedom. The more innocent they appear, the more dangerous they are likely to be. In this world, killing peers makes sense; they are the innocents whose very everydayness lures and snares you in the rules and controls of the Matrix. Killing teachers makes sense; they are like everybody else in the Matrix—people to mistrust. But even more pointedly, for the adolescent body, they are the embodiment of rules and controls that are *in your face* controlling you daily. They, like the Agents who are about to crack Morpheus, threaten daily to “crack” even the most powerful members of the resistance.

Parents may not be the logical targets that teachers and peers are because of a persistent adolescent awe, respect, and perhaps even fear toward parents—whether deserved or not. The parent figures in *The Matrix*, Morpheus and the Oracle, are both aligned

with the resistance. They are both awesome and frightening at points, loving and supportive in others. Morpheus, as impressive as he is, and as commanding when we first meet him, is always only second in command. By his own proud admission, he has spent his “entire life” looking for (raising?) “the one.” Neo is his find (his child?). And we are made to understand that Neo will replace Morpheus as the leader, as a son would replace a father. Morpheus, a tough but loving father, is ultimately rescued by “the one.” The father is not someone you kill in this logic of sensation.

The Oracle condenses almost everything “other” in cyberpunk: aging female, mother, baker of cookies, homespun caretaker of an “old world.” She is ambiguously safe, powerful, and fearsome. She offers Neo a cookie, but at the same time she challenges him with the most powerful—if indirect—guidance that she could possibly give, even at the expense of Neo’s “liking” her. Mother still has power both in the kitchen and in shaping “the one’s” sense of self. Mother, too, is not someone you kill in this logic of sensation.

In this rubric, we come to see that computer use, drug use, criminal behavior, and particular kinds of violence mark “the one”—that is, the adolescent body that seeks truth and freedom—as a way to extricate oneself from the spirit-killing realities of everyday life. These are not acts where passion finds expression; again, this is not a diatribe through the brain. Rather, these acts possess the whole living being; they are the passion. Flat affect is anything but flat. It is a passion with a logic that restores control. Neo tells us early on that what he wants is “control over his life.” He ultimately achieves this control when he is able to kill without rules or controls, and with indifference. When passion is effusive, when it bursts past the actions that possess whole living beings, as it does with Cypher, it is nothing more than the “acted” passion that typifies everyday life. Those acts of passion—eating juicy steak with gusto, killing with hatred—typify everyday life at its core: flat and controlled (as opposed to in control), and worthy therefore of nothing but indifference, suspicion, and obliteration.

The Color of Love

Ah, love. At last we have love: the one true bond that dispels the loneliness of “the one” who resists. Love is offered here as respite from loneliness and fear, a line of flight perhaps that escapes the logic of isolation, suspicion, and annihilation. When Neo lies dead, Trinity tells him “I’m not afraid anymore,” as though her

love for Neo allows her to overcome her fear. Of what? Of love? Of death? She says explicitly, "You can't be dead—because I love you" (Silver, 1999:np). She kisses him and he returns to life. So love has the ultimate power to overcome not just isolation and fear, but death. It is honorable and honest; it is made of passions quieter—but more powerful—than those that characterize the allure and threat of everyday Matrix.

Love thus moves along a line of flight that opens up productive flows of life giving interconnection. Love of another (Neo and Trinity), and to a lesser degree, love of parents and teachers (Morpheus), offer a path to resist the deadly and smothering logic of sensation that adolescence seems to offer. It is no wonder that so much hope is laid at the alter of adolescent romantic love; there seems no other way out. But love in *The Matrix* is not an uncomplicated line of flight; it is also reterritorialized in several significant ways within the logic of isolation, indifference, and even hatred: first, in the way that it delineates the difference between love and lust; second, in the way it folds onto the isolation of adolescence; and third, in the way it articulates to the idea of romance.

The distinction between love and lust elevates love over lust, but carries with it a misogynist affect. The life-giving love between Neo and Trinity contrasts with the death-dealing lust for the woman in the red dress. Earlier I explained that the woman in the red dress was nothing more than a (male) Agent in disguise who might have killed Neo. The last thing we see Mouse doing before he is trapped and killed in the Matrix is looking at, and lusting after, the poster he has made of the woman in red. Red, that daring, vibrant color of passion, brings only death. Lust is a temptress that kills; and the woman who flirts is a killer. Sensuous women are to be avoided, mistrusted, feared, and perhaps even obliterated, just as we should fear the overt expression of passion and sensuality in everyday life. Women generally can easily be seen as enemies here.

Love between Neo and Trinity thus ends up oddly colorless, an almost cerebral bonding rather than a passionate bonding, almost a bonding of siblings (like that suggested in *Star Wars*). Further, it is a bonding of outcasts that brings the two together in isolation from everyone else: from the rest of the crew as well as from those who live in everyday Matrix. Neo is "the one," and Trinity is the one destined to love "the one." Their uniqueness to each other and apart from all others folds onto the isolation of adolescence, giving

it just the tiniest outlet: with the most impossible of (romantic) expectations.

Ultimately, the love of Neo and Trinity is captured and reterritorialized as romance in the very moment that it suggests the potential to be productive. Romantic love promises as possible what is impossible; in so doing it diminishes what is possible (or in Deleuze-Guattarian terms, *virtual*). Love does not bring the dead back to life. Love between two people who are the ones—the one (male) one and his one (female) helpmeet—cannot by itself sustain an escape from loneliness, fear, and death. It's an old story—this promise of living happily ever after—and it promises to fail those who would resist in isolation, relying on the one true love as the solution to far more complex problems. Love is not the solution; it may be a path, even a line of flight, but it is not in itself the answer. As I see it, the promise of romantic love in *The Matrix* leaves the adolescent body invariably abandoned by the one last hope for survival. When *that* truth is taken away by the failure of real love to deliver romantic love, what life is there left to fight for?

Refrain

Clearly not every teenager suffers in isolation, lives out indifference, suspicion, and a willingness to kill. But clearly many do to varying degrees, and the organization of adolescence compels such intensities that are painted in *The Matrix*. Adolescence may work like what Deleuze and Guattari call a "refrain," "*an aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:323). In "drawing" a territory and mapping a landscape, adolescence may work to "fix a fragile point as a center" amid chaos (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:312) and gather unsuspecting lines and modes of existence into its particular logic of sensation. The logic of adolescence is sufficiently mobile that it affects my (much older) nervous system. My belief that this logic provides a "resting place" for many others, particularly teenagers, is strengthened for me each time I hear the details of a new school shooting, listen to the struggles of other teachers, or carry on a conversation with a young drug user. And I sense that we are all drawn in, territorialized, and held very close to this monstrous logic from which lines of flight are promised at every turn and which are reterritorialized as quickly as they are promised. A fellow teacher of mine, Patty Sotirin, is

convinced that many of our students choose Cypher's path, that they knowingly forget what there is to know, and want consciously to be bought off by the sensuous pleasures of everyday life. I find myself wanting to believe that most of them want to be part of the resistance, but at the same time to possess an adequate and productive means to traverse the passage from flat to deep. Without that means, I wonder why I would wish the deadly logic of resistance on anybody. This is a suffocating dilemma, the dilemma of the adolescent body at the beginning of the 21st century: everyday life that is death, or the death of everyday life. But these rubrics, in their multiple and complex folds, should suggest the possibility of escape. What might it take, I wonder, to find depth in the everyday Matrix?

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Notes

1. Just as the organizational strategies of works by Deleuze and Guattari eschew internal divisions as "chapters," in favor of, for example, "plateaus" in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), Deleuze uses the term "rubric" in his work on Francis Bacon (1981) to indicate the nonhierarchical, autonomous, but interconnected aspects of Francis Bacon's work. In the case of Deleuze on Bacon, "rubric" may also draw on the etymology of the term (Latin: *rubrica*, rubric, red chalk) and its other sense (red or reddish) to insert implicitly a distinctive coloration within the text's framework. By focusing on the multiple rubrics of adolescence, I want to draw attention to similar, autonomous ways of "coloring" adolescence and the fact that, when folded onto one another, they constitute a complex logic of sensation.
2. Even though the "girl in the red dress" is a computer construct generated as part of a training program by the resistance, she is made to "represent" what Neo might find in the Matrix. So her character is rendered no less potent by her status as a construct. Similarly, the Matrix is clearly not identical to everyday life as we know it. But the affective work of the film renders them

indistinguishable. The affective logic organized in the film does not rely on subtle distinctions between the questions of reality versus programming, levels of programming, or who or what is a construct of who or what.

3. Morpheus's words here are interesting, because the Matrix really does involve taste (the taste of food), smell (it "stinks"), feel (Neo senses the Matrix), and color (black, gray, white, and the alluring red). The discrepancy is not surprising: The story about the nature of the Matrix constructs it as both flat *and* alluring, sense-dulled *and* sensual. The sensual allure of the Matrix is, however, superficial, distracting, seductive, and deadly. This requires that the (deep) sensuality of the resistance be marked as different: hence its *apparent* flatness: the nearly tasteless food on the ship, the cool killing without hate, Trinity's almost androgynous demeanor compared to the woman in red, and so on.

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