RESPONSE TO DOBSON & IFTODY
Invited Contribution

A Slacker Darkly? No Interpretation Without Intertextualization

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In 'Consciousness and Complexity in "Waking Life",' Teresa Dobson and Tammy Iftody argue persuasively for interpreting Richard Linklater's film, which deploys innovative animation techniques to portray discussions of theories of consciousness, from a complexivist perspective. They demonstrate how complexity theorizing might inform interpretive practices and recommend the film as a focus for discussion in humanities education. This response concurs with much of their analysis, but suggests that there are limitations to interpretive practices that focus on a single text, and argues for an alternative approach that deliberately foregrounds intertextuality – that is, interpreting any given text in terms of other texts. Examples of intertextual readings that produce multiple and unpredictable interpretations are provided, including interpretations of Waking Life's intertextual relations with other films by Linklater, and with other visual and literary texts.

I thank Teresa Dobson and Tammy Iftody (2009) for their thoughtful (and generous) appraisal of Richard Linklater's (2001) film, *Waking Life*, and for their thought-provoking elucidation of some of the ways in which complexity theorizing might be generative in realizing its curricular and pedagogic potentials. I am very sympathetic to the theoretical positions they adopt and have no quarrel with their reading of the film from a complexivist perspective. However, I cannot wholeheartedly endorse their assertion that, as a visual media text, *Waking Life* is "an excellent choice for humanities educators wishing to take up complex interpretive work with their students" (p. 74). I agree that it could be a *defensible* choice for such purposes, but so could many others. My response to

their essay is, therefore, more concerned with its gaps, silences, and contradictions, and with roads not taken – that is, with what appears to me (on the evidence of what the authors say) to have been left unsaid. In terms of one of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987) well-known conceptual creations, my essay can be understood as an attempt to generate alternative pedagogic possibilities by following some of the "lines of flight" (pp. 9-10) that flow through the complex social field in which *Waking Life* is constituted.

Towards the end of their essay, Dobson and Iftody summarize their understandings of appropriate pedagogies for "complex interpretive work" as follows:

> *Waking Life*, with its narrative and media complexities, invites us to initiate a sophisticated interpretive process by refusing to privilege one theory—or even one medium, genre, or artistic style—over another. This paper constitutes an initial response to that invitation, and serves, we hope, as an example of how complexity theory might figure in such interpretation. In terms of the educational import of this exercise, we cannot emphasize enough how necessary it is to move beyond approaches to humanities education that envision instances of art, be they literary, visual, or any combination thereof, as autotelic artifacts awaiting excavation and explication (p. 73).

Dobson and Iftody add further emphasis to their latter point by reiterating Dennis Sumara's (2002) assertion that "one must abandon theories of learning that insist on excavating Truth" (p. 160).

I agree with the broad directions that Dobson and Iftody advocate in the passage quoted above—with two reservations. First, I would have thought that refusing to privilege one theory, one medium, one genre, or one artistic style, could and should be extended to many other categories. Surely we should also refuse to privilege one text or one artist (author, director, screenwriter, etc.) over others? This relates to my second reservation. By choosing to privilege *Waking Life*—one work by one writer/director—Dobson and Iftody risk encouraging (albeit inadvertently) the very practice that they claim they want to resist, namely, envisioning an instance of art as an artifact awaiting excavation and explication. Indeed, in an earlier passage, Dobson and Iftody's metaphorical language invites us to understand *Waking Life* as a resource to be "mined" for its riches: "this film offers *rich* material for discussion … is *rich* in content and offers much for analysis" (p. 68, my itals.). This sense of "excavating"—of digging down to retrieve the film's buried treasures—is exacerbated by their decision to limit much of their discussion to "a key film segment dealing with theories of free will and determinism" (p. 68). Again, the "key" metaphor reinforces the interpretation-as-excavation trope they urge us to resist: what is this segment a "key" to? Does it open a door to reveal more riches in the film's subtexts?

Dobson and Iftody also quote Sumara (2002) in support of their approach to interpretation, with particular reference to "creating conditions for people to learn to be surprised by what might happen if they dedicated themselves to literary practices that require a sustained engagement with someone else's structure of thinking" (p. 160). Dobson and Iftody see Sumara as "encouraging a form of deep interpretive practice entailing multiple, careful engagements with a particular text" (p. 73). However, I

suggest that engagement with any *one* text is not necessarily sufficient to sustain "engagement with someone else's structure of thinking". My preference is to read, interpret, and criticize texts of all kinds *intertextually*, that is, in Julia Kristeva's (1980) terms, to understand how, in the production of meaning, "every text is related to every other text" (p. 36). Producing intertextual readings of textual assemblages counteracts the temptation to "excavate" meaning from a single text and creates conditions for surprise – conditions that encourage the emergence of unpredictable interpretations.

In order to demonstrate the generativity of intertextual reading strategies for producing multiple interpretations, I will recount a specific example from my own teaching experience. I will then return to Dobson and Iftody's essay to explore some alternatives to the curricular and pedagogical approaches they produce from their reading of *Waking Life.*

Enacting Intertextuality: *Thelma & Louise* Meet Cyborg Cinema in Baudrillard's *America*

For more than a decade, during a previous phase of my academic career, I used various concepts, representations, and manifestations of cyborgs as an heuristic in curriculum inquiry—as departure points for exploring the threads of meaning that intersect in specific popular and theoretical conceptions of cyborgs.[1] Many of these inquiries were initiated within the graduate courses in curriculum study I was then teaching in Australia and in Canada. I would usually begin by inviting students to consider the name "cyborg" as a code that gives pattern and substance to particular ways of constituting, reconstituting, materializing and deploying subject positions in social worlds saturated by informatic and biogenetic technologies. That is, cyborgs are produced at particular intersections between technologies and the stories that constitute our subjectivities. Thus, cyborgs (or their traces) can be imagined, recognized or named in a wide variety of culturally interconnected sites and discourses – a reconnaissance of which also serves to make visible the operations, relations, and conditions through which they are so identified. To initiate this reconnaissance, I drew attention to three broad and overlapping categories of cyborgs:

- Theoretical constructions of cyborgs are foci for speculation and debate in contemporary philosophy, one of the most prominent examples being Donna Haraway's (1985) "cyborg manifesto." Haraway's cyborgs serve the rhetorical purposes of a materialist feminist politics, and they combine qualities of machines and organisms, or of animals and humans. Other theorists of cyborg identity include Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who created such concepts as "the machinic phylum" and "the Body without Organs," and Jean Baudrillard (1987), who advanced his philosophy as "an exercise in simulation" (p. 36).

[1] For a more detailed account of my methods see Gough (2004); for a critical commentary on their manifestations in some of my earlier writing see Weaver (1999).

- Another significant category of cyborgs is the wide range of creatures populating SF (an acronym that refers to much more than "science fiction"[2]). These are creatures that combine and/or blur distinctions between organisms and machines. Cinema and television provide some of the most familiar examples, including Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* films, the replicants of Ridley Scott's (1982) *Blade Runner*, and the Borg from the *Star Trek* series. Many fascinating variations on cyborg themes have arisen in comics and graphic novels that have radically revised the "superhero" genre, such as *Watchmen* (Moore & Gibbons, 1987), *Animal Man* (Morrison et al., 1991), and *Black Orchid* (Gaiman & McKean, 1991); the eponymous "hero" of the latter reverses a number of stereotypical binaries of this genre by being represented as a "plant woman" – an organism that combines qualities of plants and female humans.

- A third and ever-expanding category comprises people who are already cyborgs in some material or subjective way, including people with electronic pacemakers, artificial joints, drug implant systems, implanted corneal lenses, and artificial skin. Metaphoric cyborgs include keyboarders and gamers joined in cybernetic circuits with their screens, and neurosurgeons guided by fiber-optic microscopy when performing operations.

During this initial reconnaissance I would encourage students to proliferate images and examples of cyborgs—and interrelationships across the above categories—rather than reify existing preconceptions, such as the tendency for some stereotypical representations of cyborgs (especially those that resemble ultraviolent men) to be appropriated as ideological legitimators by both conservative humanists and naïve technophiles. The pedagogical strategy I used in response to this difficulty was to emphasize the *narrative* construction of cyborgs. That is, in dealing with representations of cyborgs it is all too easy to be distracted by their "hardware," and we need to remind ourselves constantly that they are constituted not only by technologies but also by the "machineries" of texts.

For example, many students initially resisted any kind of engagement with cyborg SF films by dismissing them as excessively violent, or too bleakly dystopian, or unhealthily masculinist. But fortuitously, in one class, I found that many students who expressed such views had also enjoyed (in some cases immensely) Ridley Scott's (1991) movie *Thelma & Louise*. I used this as an opportunity to invite these students to "read" *Thelma & Louise* in the light of Scott's earlier films, *Alien* (1979) and *Blade Runner* (1982), Haraway's cyborg manifesto, and the narrative strategies of Baudrillard's (1988) *America*. These intertextual readings generated a number of alternative interpretations of all three films. For example, the obvious foregrounding of gender politics in *Thelma & Louise*

[2] As Haraway (1989) explains, since the late 1960s the signifier SF has designated "a complex emerging narrative field in which the boundaries between science fiction (conventionally, sf) and fantasy became highly permeable in confusing ways, commercially and linguistically"; SF now refers to "an increasingly heterodox array of writing, reading, and marketing practices indicated by a proliferation of 'sf' phrases: speculative fiction, science fiction, science fantasy, speculative futures, speculative fabulation" (p. 5).

alerted students to an intriguing subtext of *Alien*, namely, a very unusual (for SF cinema) *lack* of sexual differentiation. As Constance Penley (1991) points out, "[screenwriter] Dan O'Bannon's treatment… was unique in writing each role to be played by either a man or a woman. Ridley Scott's direction followed through on this idea, producing a film that is (for the most part) stunningly egalitarian" (p. 73).

Connecting Baudrillard's textual strategies to *Thelma & Louise* generated a somewhat surprising interpretation of the film as a simulation of feminist political action. In particular, the film's enigmatic ending (in which Thelma and Louise drive over the edge of Grand Canyon and their car, rather than immediately falling, appears to fly straight out from the canyon's edge and disappear) can be read as a cinematic equivalent of Baudrillard's (1987) strategy of evocative, "hyperspatial" simulation:

> I am no longer in a state to "reflect" on something, I can only push hypotheses to their limits, snatch them from their critical zones of reference, take them beyond a point of no return. I also take theory into the hyper-space of simulation—in which it loses all objective validity, but perhaps it gains in coherence, that is, in a real affinity with the system that surrounds us (pp. 36-7).

In other words, through the characters of Thelma and Louise, Scott takes elements of liberal and cultural feminist theory into a "hyper-space of simulation" in which they "push hypotheses to their limits," and "take them beyond a point of no return." As the film approaches its conclusion, the dominant visual images—a speeding car, the desert—increasingly converge with Baudrillard's (1988) evocations of *"astral* America,"[3] which in turn resonate with the often joyful audience response as Thelma and Louise reach their "vanishing point":

> Disaffection finds its pure form in the barrenness of speed… Here in the transversality of the desert and the irony of geology, the transpolitical finds its generic, mental space. The inhumanity of our ulterior, asocial, superficial world immediately finds its aesthetic form here, its ecstatic form. For the desert is simply that; an ecstatic critique of culture, an ecstatic form of disappearance (p. 5).

The emergence—and subsequent discussion and critique—of this interpretation of *Thelma & Louise* did not make any of my students more tolerant of gratuitously violent cinematic cyborgs, but these activities did appear to dispose many of them to be less hasty in prejudging movies by reference to broad generic categories (such as assuming that any movie labeled "sci-fi" will almost inevitably involve gender stereotyping, sexism, misogyny, violence, or "boys playing with hi-tech toys").

I recommended interpreting *Thelma & Louise* as an intertext of Baudrillard's *America* after reading Maureen Barr's (1991) interpretation of the film's ending:

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[3] Baudrillard (1988) writes: "I went in search of *astral* America [*'l'Amérique sidérale*'], not social and cultural America, but the America of the empty, absolute freedom of the freeways, not the deep America of mores and mentalities, but the America of desert speed, of motels and mineral surfaces. I looked for it in the speed of the screenplay… in the film of days and nights projected across an empty space, in the marvelously affectless succession of signs, images, faces, and ritual acts on the road…" (p. 5; itals. in original).

> Thelma and Louise plunge into a magical place of nonhuman signification; they enter an alternative text. By doing so, they themselves become fantastic, magical, surrealist. Their car does not adhere to the laws of gravity… Thelma and Louise are no longer brought down by patriarchal law. Instead of allowing an army of men and machines to capture them, while ensconced within a vehicle which transcends the laws of nature, they enter a magical space… These women who have been dehumanized transcend humanity and mortality (pp. 85-6).

This plausible reading differs from the interpretation generated by the students in my class by situating Thelma and Louise's entry into "an alternative text" as an event *within* the film itself, rather than viewing the whole film as a simulation situated in an alternative "space."

I hope that this brief account is sufficient to demonstrate the practicality of a deconstructive pedagogy that actively promotes reading intertextually and thereby fosters emergent interpretations. As Kenneth Knoespel (1991) puts it: "Deconstruction, rather than reading a single text a single time, promotes the reading of many texts many times for an ongoing confessional comprehension of how meaning is generated" (p. 116).

Choosing Texts for Interpretive Work

Although I have already quoted part of Dobson and Iftody's (2009) conclusion to their essay, I will now quote their final paragraph in full, as a prelude to further exploration of the issues it raises:

> As we value interpretive inquiry in education, we must embrace disturbance, disorientation, incoherence, and ambiguity, accepting that all of these are necessary features of complex learning. The open-ended and multilayered nature of *Waking Life* epitomizes this perspective, and makes it an excellent choice for humanities educators wishing to take up complex interpretive work with their students (p. 74).

How should educators go about making particular choices among the potentially infinite array of alternative texts available for interpretation? Clearly, Dobson and Iftody have recommended *Waking Life* to other humanities educators because they believe it exemplifies the complexivist perspectives on learning and inquiry that they value. Their reasoning also seems to include an implicit hope that various unspecified cohorts of hypothetical students might generate similar interpretations of *Waking Life* to those they rehearse in their essay. However, I am persuaded by Joseph Schwab's (1969) argument that defensible curriculum decisions require "the anticipatory generation of alternatives," that is: "Effective decision… requires that there be available to practical deliberation the greatest possible number and fresh diversity of alternative solutions to problems" (pp. 17-18).

Thus, my immediate response to Dobson and Iftody's conclusion was, yes, I follow your reasoning, but why would I (or any other reader) choose *Waking Life* from among the innumerable films that display similar qualities? One obvious alternative is Linklater's (2006) *A Scanner Darkly*, a similarly "open-ended and multilayered" film that also deploys the rotoscoping animation technique to stunning visual effect. I also judge

it to be a superior example of cinema art, for reasons that include my personal preferences for particular narrative modes and genres. I did not find the near-plotless philosophical meanderings of *Waking Life* anywhere near as engaging as the blackly humorous yet compassionate narrative convolutions of *A Scanner Darkly.* An additional attraction for me is that the screenplay is a respectful and intelligent adaptation of the novel of the same name by Philip K. Dick (1977), an author I hold in very high regard and whose works have inspired a number of other thought-provoking films.

Putting personal preferences aside, another likely influence on an educator's choice of a text for interpretation is their anticipation of how the text might be received by particular learners in particular milieux. Dobson and Iftody do not disclose if they based their identification of *Waking Life* as "an excellent choice for humanities educators" on any evidence of (or assumptions about) its likely reception by particular cohorts of learners:

> From our perspective as humanities educators with an interest in teaching and engagement with literary art forms across a variety of media, this film offers rich material for discussion both within and beyond formal educational settings (p. 68).

A number of Linklater's (and many other directors') films could serve similar purposes, and educators are likely to make different choices in different circumstances. However, I would argue that learners should also have the opportunity to make some of the choices involved in identifying texts for interpretation, which is a further reason for my preference for locating interpretive work within an intertextual field that includes many texts rather than just one. For practical purposes, we might need to begin with a limited field. For example, by privileging *Waking Life* as an object of interpretive work, Dobson and Iftody have clearly decided that, in Sumara's terms, Linklater's "structure of thinking" is worthy of "sustained engagement". But I suggest that the "structure of thinking" that Linklater represents and enacts in *Waking Life* is likely to provide more opportunities for sustained engagement, and opportunities for the emergence of unpredictable interpretations, if it is experienced intertextually. This could initially include other films that Linklater has directed or other texts that educators or learners perceive as having an intertextual relationship with *Waking Life.* So, in the spirit of Schwab's "anticipatory generation of alternatives," let me briefly rehearse an alternative way of exploring the "complexivist questions" that Dobson and Iftody identify.

Intertextual Emergence: A Slacker Darkly?

Apart from its innovative animation techniques, *Waking Life* has many similarities to several of Linklater's previous films. A sustained engagement with the structure of thinking Linklater enacts and represents in *Waking Life* would be enhanced by seeing how this is done in one of its more conventional, live-action predecessors, such as Linklater's debut feature film, *Slacker* (1991). Indeed, *Slacker* begins with a young traveler, played by Linklater himself, waking on a bus (rather than a train) and describing his dream to a taxi driver who picks him up at the station—a parallel of sorts to an early scene in *Waking Life* in which the unnamed protagonist accepts a ride in a

boat-car (in which a second passenger is played by Linklater). Like *Waking Life*, *Slacker* seems near-plotless but, rather than following the meanderings of one character, documents a single day in the lives of a number of young people who mostly just hang around aimlessly and talk. *Slacker* follows various characters and scenes, never staying with one character or conversation for more than a few minutes before picking up someone else in the scene and following them. As in *Waking Life*, the characters we encounter in *Slacker* are eccentrics or misfits, including a UFO buff who insists that the U.S. has been on the moon since the 1950s, and a woman trying to sell a Madonna pap smear. Depending upon how much time is available, it would be useful for learners to view one of the other films Linklater wrote and directed that employ similar sprawling structures to *Slacker* and *Waking Life*, such as *Dazed and Confused* (1993) or *Before Sunrise* (1995). Aside from its loose narrative structure, *Waking Life* contains several references to, and elements in common with, Linklater's earlier films. For example, characters and actors reprise roles, including Linklater as himself, and Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy playing the same characters as in *Before Sunrise*.

Although I agree with Dobson and Iftody that the artful animation of *Waking Life* is "an ideal mode of expression" and "a perfect marriage of form and content" for "a film exploring the sometimes-tenuous relationship between consciousness and reality, freedom and determinism," I am not convinced that *Waking Life* succeeds in exploring that relationship in a way that might encourage viewers who are unfamiliar with its philosophical themes to ask "complexivist questions". Concepts of identity, dreams, consciousness, and free will, and the complex relationships among them, are treated superficially, as is the laundry list of philosophers name-dropped throughout the film—Sartre, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Débord—and a grab-bag of philosophical positions, including Buddhism, Taoism, existentialism, and situationism. I suspect that Dobson and Iftody see *Waking Life* as encouraging them to ask "complexivist questions" *because they read the film as an intertext of the complexity theorizing that they cite in their essay*.

Linklater's (2006) *A Scanner Darkly* also succeeds in marrying the rotoscoped animation form with narrative content that probes similar themes to *Waking Life*—but it goes beyond mere talk about the nature of consciousness and identity to dramatically explore their material effects. Set in Anaheim, California, "seven years into the future," the country is in the midst of an epidemic of addiction to a new drug, Substance D. Fred, a police officer assigned to deal with Substance D suppliers, has to wear a Scramble Suit that constantly blurs his appearance so that nobody on the force knows his true identity. He is assigned to observe the hidden scanners placed in the house of Bob Arctor who, along with his girlfriend Donna and friends James and Ernie, is suspected of being a major Substance D dealer. But through his surveillance, Fred becomes aware that he himself is Bob Arctor. At the same time, Fred is taken in for medical studies by the police department to see if repeated use of Substance D in his undercover work is causing difficulty in being able to distinguish reality, including the possibility of splitting his identity. The "marriage of form and content" is particularly evident in the ways in which the "real world" has come to resemble the dark world of comic books.

Near the end of *Waking Life*, Linklater tells the unnamed protagonist about a dream he once had, but before doing so he recalls an essay by Philip K. Dick—who, as mentioned previously, wrote the novel *A Scanner Darkly.* I believe that such interreferencing in Linklater's films helps the viewer to perceive the emergence of a particular "structure of thinking" in them. For example, although Linklater's first feature film popularized the use of "slacker" to describe "a person regarded as one of a large group or generation of young people (especially in the early to mid 1990s) characterized by apathy, aimlessness, and lack of ambition" (*OED*), he did not intend the word to have negative connotations. Rather, he thinks of a slacker as an intelligent, independent person, unconcerned with commercial interests or "selling out."[4] In Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly* we can glimpse a paradoxical worldview emerging in which binary opposites – such as positive/negative, bad/good, real/unreal—cannot be untangled and in which "slacking" might be a defensible form of political activism.

Dick's fiction from the mid-1960s onwards anticipates many of the ideas about the rise of subtle mechanisms of social control in Western nations voiced in the early to mid-70s by theorists such as Michel Foucault (1977/1975), and others. Of particular relevance to *A Scanner Darkly* (both novel and film) is Deleuze and Guattari's (1977/1970) argument that Westerners were becoming "oedipalized" —desiring their own repression – and their valorization of the psychotic (becoming "schizophrenized") as a way of resisting normalization. Dick's protagonists tended to be semi-employed, drug-using, near-schizophrenic anti-heroes who succeeded in their struggles against neototalitarian surveillance and manipulation through sheer stubbornness and perversity. In a 1970 letter to *SF Commentary*[5] Dick wrote: "I only know one thing about my novels. In them, again and again, this minor man [sic] asserts himself in all his hasty, sweaty strength." More tellingly, in a 1972 speech,[6] Dick sees positives in the unreliability and unpredictability of young people:

> Either through laziness, short attention span, perversity, criminal tendencies – whatever label you wish to pin on the kid to explain this unreliability is fine. Each merely means: we can tell him and tell him what to do, but when the time comes for him to perform, all the subliminal instruction, all the ideological briefing, all the tranquilizing drugs, all the psychotherapy, are a waste. He just plain will not jump when the whip is cracked. And so he is of no use to us, the calcified, entrenched powers. He will not see to it that he acts as an instrument by which we both keep and augment those powers and the rewards – for ourselves – that go with them.

A Scanner Darkly invites us to ask very similar "complexivist questions" to those advanced by Dobson and Iftody, such as: "If culture is becoming increasingly complex and ambiguous… how might that change the way we experience our minds-in-culture, our evolving identities, and our possible futures?" (p. 73). *A Scanner Darkly* asks

[4] Linklater (2004) makes this point in one of the commentary tracks on the Criterion Collection DVD release of *Slacker*.

[5] See Dick (1996). A long quotation from this letter was retrieved 3 July 2009 from http://everything2.com/title/Philip%2520K.%2520Dick

[6] See Dick (1995/1972). The complete speech was retrieved 3 July 2009 from http://www.philipkdickfans.com/pkdweb/The%20Android%20and%20the%20Human.htm

precisely those same questions in an even more complex and more ambiguous way than *Waking Life*. Interpreting *Slacker, Waking Life*, and *A Scanner Darkly* as intertexts of one another and of Dick's novel adds further complexity, and further ambiguities, but also provides opportunities to understand Linklater's films as material artifacts of an emergent "structure of thinking" about young people's minds-in-culture, evolving identities, and possible futures. It is to this emergent structure of thinking—which cannot be "excavated" from any one text but only generated in intertextual relations—that my title, "A Slacker Darkly," alludes.

Postscript

As Dobson and Iftody (2009) point out, *Waking Life* has developed a cult following online, and I agree that the range of commentary on the film itself, and on various uploaded video response materials, reveals "serious and ongoing inquiry into both the subject matter and the technique of the film" (p. 68). I also recommend that readers who are interested in *Waking Life*'s reception by young(er) people, should browse sites such as James Skemp's (2006) weblog, which includes his version of the film's script. In the discussion space that follows the script, there are a number of references to the ways in which teachers and students are interpreting *Waking Life*. For example, "RM," who is taking "a senior high school honors english class with the course theme of 'The Aesthetics of Living'" writes:

> To James Skemp
>
> I'm doing a paper in school due in two days and we had to watch this movie and pick three of the vignettes and explain them corresponding to the following questions:
>
> How and why does one search for meaning?
>
> What is the function of art in life?
>
> What is the relationship between goodness and evil?
>
> I'm not sure what vignettes to choose, if you happen to come on here in the next day I would be very appreciative for your input. Thanks
>
> RM (USA, posted 1/20/2007)

The ensuing discussion (in which "RM" receives a great deal of input from Skemp—which I trust s/he acknowledged in her/his class paper!) reveals that many teachers persist in using the "excavation and explication" approach that Dobson and Iftody eschew. Other posts reveal some of the intertexts of *Waking Life* that bloggers identify:

> wow! I really enjoyed the movie. since the Matrix I hadn't seen such great movie dealing with philosophy and religion (ethics).
>
> Bahram (Iran, posted 11/3/2007)

Interpreting any given text intertextually can begin with other texts that educators or learners perceive as having an intertextual relationship with it—or even texts chosen at random. In *The Medium is the Massage*, Marshall McLuhan (1967) wrote: "When

information is brushed against information… the results are startling and effective" (pp. 76-8). The challenge for educators is to be alert to the possibilities for emergence that arise when learners make unsolicited connections, such as Bahram's identification of the Wachowski brothers' (1999) *The Matrix* and *Waking Life* as "great movie[s] dealing with philosophy and religion."

To conclude this essay on a personal note, I was very pleased to see Bahram's reference to *The Matrix*, because it seems to me to wear its debt to European philosophy more lightly than many other films, including *Waking Life.* For example, in a sequence titled "Society is a Fraud" in the *Waking Life* DVD track list, four young men drift down a street exchanging situationist jargon—one speaks of "ruptur[ing] the spell of the ideology of the commodified consumer society so that our repressed desires of a more authentic nature can come forward"—finally encountering "Mr. Debord," who has the scene's last lines of situationist dialogue. *The Matrix* also alludes to Guy Débord's (1970/1967) *The Society of the Spectacle* in Morpheus's depiction of the Matrix as a subliminally sensed "world that has been pulled over your eyes." In a more obvious display of its philosophical credentials (some might say pretensions), *The Matrix's* central character, Neo, hides his illegal computer discs in a hollowed-out copy of Baudrillard's (1981) *Simulacra and Simulations,* and Morpheus greets Neo in the world outside the Matrix with: "Welcome to the desert of the real," a reference to Baudrillard's "precession of simulacra."[7] However, unlike *Waking Life*, *The Matrix* does not confine its sampling of philosophies to talk about them: as one of the young men in the "Society is a Fraud" scene says, "We're all theory and no action" —and he could be speaking for almost every character in *Waking Life*. There is no shortage of action in *The Matrix,* where French postmodernism meets a multitude of other cultural influences in a high-speed head rush that includes elements of Hong Kong-style action cinema (kung fu, John Woo), Japanese animé, comics and graphic novels, cyberpunk SF, drug cultures, computer games, S&M, and *Alice in Wonderland*. But I will leave it to someone else to write "Consciousness and Complexity in *The Matrix*."

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[7] See Baudrillard (1981): "It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the Empire, but our own. The desert of the real itself" (p. 166).

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