



Glissement – From Gaming to Playing

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1.1 Abstract

Meanings, events and organizations 'slide' or move about. Structurally pre-defined, seemingly rigid action, does not necessarily lead to stasis. How do we understand this combination of the *game's* closed structure and its ability to change itself? *Glissement* is a way to describe interaction between the logic-of-the-game and the events of change and activity. *Glissement* can be understood as an issue of identity (Robbe-Grillet), as a characteristic of gaming, as a subversive logic (Deleuze) and as an aspect of the ebbs and flows of signification/identity (Lacan). These definitions are explored before the film 'the matrix' is examined in terms of *glissement*. Because the film can be understood: as a description of organization, as an animated computer game and as a study of the hyper-real culture of simulacra, it provided the sort of material for conceptual exploration that we sought. In the end we oppose the matrix's gaming with our own play; two senses of *glissement* that are fairly irreconcilable.

1.2 Four definitions of glissement

1.1.1

1.1.2 (i) Glissement is defined in games as:

Déplacement d'une pièce d'un endroit à un autre qui se fait sans soulever ni retourner celle-ci. La pièce peut ainsi être déplacée de la case où elle se trouve à une case voisine libre, orthogonalement ou obliquement. Si la case n'est pas libre, généralement la pièce qui occupe cette position est retirée. Dans la plupart des jeux et des récréations, les pièces se déplacent par glissement ou par saut.
(*Dictionnaire de mathématiques récréatives* www.recreomath.qc.ca)

Thus, *glissement* has to do with the repositioning of a piece (or token) in a game without lifting it from the surface of the game. It is movement enclosed in context; a shift of position governed by strict rules and by small steps, but capable of making a difference. *Glissement* rotates around the 'differences that make and mark a difference'. (Bateson, 1972) *Glissement* describes the movement that is permitted within the rules of a game and within the boundaries of a 'system' --- it defines some sort of change, while opening up options for the next moves. Some change is so disruptive, that it destroys the system (game). Some change is so minor, that it is imperceptible to the system (game). *Glissement* is change the system can accept --- every gaming system has to be robust enough to sustain choices. The epistemic problem is how can one know what change the system can or cannot accept? Or with respect to organizations: 'Who is in the position to decide (and or block) relevant moves? And what if the system becomes seriously playful? After all, *glissement* has to do with self-generating and self-defining systems: the game only continues as long as it produces further moves out of the state into which it has put itself. The movement along the game board is at least two-folded: the 'game' plays the participants at least as much as the participants play the game. "A game is a machine that can get into action only if the players consent to become puppets for a time" (McLuhan, 1965: 237-238) --- but if the players become machines are unable to make a difference, the game gets caught in an endless loop and is virtually dead. If the participants remain outside the game --- that is remain 'observers'; then they do not play. From within the game, one accepts the

rules-of-the-game and one plays. From the inside, the rules are self-constituting. Only by stopping or significantly irritating the game, can the 'rules' be (re)negotiated. But if one stops the *glissement* of the game --- that is, the action or movement inherent to the 'game' --- one cannot be sure if the 'game' will be restarted or restart-able. Ending the game, can always turn out to be the endgame. *Glissement* is only half observable --- one can see the moves but not at the same time 'observe' the environment through which the moves move. Either one submits and responds to the game, or one remains an observing consciousness outside of the game. Players re-enter the game through their moves; via their ability to make a difference on the game board. Games open to the players' moves by operationally closing themselves. This 'operational closure', is a pre-condition to the game's autonomy and self-referentiality. A game can only be observed from inside its set of meanings. As long as a game is on-going, it (re-)creates its own patterns and logics of 'sense'. To participate in a game, one has to 'play'. Every move in the 'game' makes sense in its logic of play --- but to experience that logic, one has to be within it. Inside play, one makes 'moves', and these are received, accepted and 'understood'. And they evoke new (counter) moves. A game is a pattern of action-comprehension-response-comprehension-action etc., etc. The pattern only exists if enacted --- one either plays the game, or one doesn't. One can only observe the dialogic process of the 'game' from the inside. One can observe a game as an outsider, but then one is not a part of the interaction that is the game. One sees the players and their behavior, but one does not see the 'game'. *Glissement* is the movement with and within the game.

1.1.3

1.1.4 (ii) Glissements Progressifs du Plaisir

Accelerative slippages of pleasure (1974) is a film of Alain Robbe-Grillet. It is film as 'game'. It mixes 'realism' and psychological fantasy. Grotesque situations are followed by visualizations of fetishism and obsession. The sound track is a collage unto itself. It is film as an invitation to play with film. The pretense --- Alice killed her friend Nora and cut out her heart with a pair of scissors --- is deconstructed by playing with the 'filmatic' and experimenting with psychological fascination(s). The 'true' history of the 'self' is unavailable. Who or what could define such a 'truth'? The living person knows a range of 'selves' bounded by situations, circumstances and constructs. In experience, the singularity of reference shifts and turns. In the film, the signature of the 'self' is throughout the 'text' --- in the experienced, the events, the stream of activity. Attributing a fixed point of reference to someone or even to oneself, is to deny the constant interaction of self and other, communication and system,

organization and circumstance. (Havercroft, 1994) Identity flows and shifts – it is in everything, but cannot be identified with anyone or anything. Identity is floating and characterized by its fissures. It is the *glissement* of experience.

...I realize fully that the *parole*, the speech, the "word" of a writer such as myself, has something strange and even contradictory about it, even within its own creator. At the moment when I write, let us say, *La Jalousie* or *Glissements progressifs du plaisir*, what I propose is improbable and consequently unacceptable; that is, my *parole* as a writer or as a cineaste in my novels or in my films is abrupt, inexplicable, nonrecuperable for any correctly organized discourse. Nevertheless, you have noticed that I speak with the same clarity as any professor, and this constitutes an extremely interesting contradiction because it goes to the very heart of the debate; order and disorder never cease to interact, to contaminate each other, to practice a sort of mutual recuperation. If, having written a novel of disorder, I don't find someone - for example, Bruce Morrissette, about *La Jalousie* - to prove that it has order, I'll do it myself. The principle of order is so crucial that I wish to prove that the disorder which I've created I can myself transform into order. But, as soon as I have shown that it has its order, from that moment on I've destroyed the interest of my work. I have brought about within an organized discourse, organized according to the normal logic of Cartesianism, the recuperation of something which was in fact a machine of war against order. I often run into people who say to me after a film, "Ah, it's a pity that you didn't come to explain all of that before the film. We didn't understand a thing, and it is such a fine thing that you have explained it." And I reply, "Yes, but don't trust that too much," because what I've said is not at all the film. It is even almost the opposite; it is the way in which I show myself that there is in what I created a part which is in spite of everything, explainable by established order, and a part increasingly large, because order progresses.

Excerpt from "Order and Disorder in Film and Fiction" by Alaine Robbe-Grillet, translated by Bruce Morrissette in *Critical Inquiry*, Volume 4, Number 1 (Autumn 1977).

The paradox here of identity is that it exists in so far as it does not exist – that is, it is in everything. It is distributed throughout the 'text', it slides from pulsion to pulsion. It does not exist where it seems to

exist, as 'I', 'self' or 'identity'. Reduced to a rationalization, object or 'thing', it does not exist. 'Self' is a game of *glissement*, or it is nothing.

1.1.5

1.1.6 (iii) Being *glissement*

In Lacan's psychology, *glissement* refers to the endless chain of signifiers. Every significance refers to others significances. Any word, idea or identity exists in relationship to other words, ideas and identities. Meaning slides from one signifier to another. Meaning, thought and identity are language 'games' wherein the signifiers always remain in motion. Communication is an on-going form of semiotic play. We deal constantly with constructions of sense and meaning that we exchange, develop and convert. Meaning is fragmented and always remains in a curious (un-)balanced relationship with (non-)sense --- a play of possibilities, an exchange between a foreground (the 'said') and the background (the 'silenced' or left 'unsaid'). If the flow of meanings is disrupted, then the tissue of shared existence is threatened. A constant flow of associations, pushes against the danger of senselessness and despair. As long as significations remain visible (on the game board), the desire to continue prevails. As long as communication continues, the social subject is constituted. Stopping the flow, amounts to stepping into nothingness. An observer that is not playing with distinctions, is in unmarked space; lost without relations. As long as the signifiers flow, there is a sense of identity and purpose. Language protects the 'self' from the abyss of selflessness. Meanings have to glide into one another for there to be communication --- the ongoing quality of inter-subjective existence depends on it. If the *glissement* stops, shared reality disintegrates. The terror of choice is to loose oneself in the *glissement*. *Glissement* provides the self's opportunity for continuity; but only by stepping out of the *glissement*, do we explore 'self'. Self-knowledge amounts to the 'end-of-identity'. We are subjects of on-going discourse(s), which respond to our surroundings, cultures and circumstances. Our ability for social existence, depends on our lack of fixed identity. If we can be *glissement*, we can socially continue to exist. Insistence on 'identity' --- on a 'self' outside of the flow of the Other --- destroys the social process. Our social existence occurs inside the system of the *glissement* of signifiers. Humans exist in shared meanings events, constructs and organizations. As long as one stays inside the referential system and 'self' is constituted within the limits of the *glissement* on-offer; identity and social existence remain possible. But is *glissement* then an opportunity for social existence, or a mutually enforced prison, or perhaps both? Is *glissement* a play of shared identity, wherein interaction is possible, or the drama of (nearly) powerless subjects

repressing one another? Is the game autonomous? How can texts be shared, if *glissement* is only half-observable? Are the shared signifiers in a logic of domination or of mutuality? If we admit that there is no pure 'self' --- that consciousness is shared and based upon communication; do we somehow give up the essence of (individual) freedom? And does a shared constitutive text, always lead to the repression or destruction of desire?

1.1.7

1.1.8 (iv) Glissement, virtuality and another desire

Glissement in Deleuze's *Logique du Sense* identifies floating elements, which are in between sense and non-sense, are neither one nor other, and are partially realized and somewhat virtual. (Deleuze, 1992) The 'virtual' in a pre-digital Lacanian world is the possible and contingent --- it could be possible and often is desired. It is to be found in the gaze of the other. Virtuality, in Deleuze, is the hallmark of desire. Gliding and crossing from the real to the virtual, Deleuze investigates different *glissements* and thinks through responses to dissimilar desire(s). The moves he explores are not controlled by the Other. Desire for him emphasizes the virtuality of the event and the importance of uncontrolled randomness. It disregards the presence of the other. Contrastingly, Lacanian *glissement* is mediated through the embodied Other. It operates as a pre-ontological structure. Lacanian embodiment cultivates the desire of the other. Its embodiment takes on the other as a compulsory *à priori* that controls the *glissement* from the one to the other. Deleuze replaces the other; he decontaminates the (other-determined) force field so that emerging desires can appear in all their force. Desire is a screen for the projection of virtuality; it welcomes the phantasm. Deleuze acknowledges the importance (and the terror) of other-determinedness. The other can enable gradual *glissement* into the virtual. Interaction between the One and the Other can pre-structure one's desire for meaning: "*What is the meaning of my day? What is the meaning of my world? I will call them beautiful, if it stands in your eyes*" (Rosset, 1994: 72) For Deleuze, duality is to be found somewhere in between the structural 'other' and the effects of its absence. (Deleuze, 1992: 372) But what differentiates the 'non-other' from the 'other'? What happens when structure disappears? How is desire constituted if there is no Other at hand, or if submerged in an untrustworthy virtual world? When the presence of the embodied other recedes, one gets system failure. Suffering and hallucinations are produced by self-absence. Compensatory obsessions and a longing for order, result. Phantasms and doubles emerge, and create a force field. Images of desire are generated. *Glissement* commences between other and another, between significant and signifié, between

solitaire and solidaire. *Glissement* is movement through another. *Glissement* has to be thought of as so many images and not of as becoming. It is the realm of *another other, than the other*. (Deleuze, 1992)

1.1.9

1.1.10 From glissement to gaming, to organization

In the film 'the matrix' popular culture provides, in one of its more successful efforts, a simulacra of movement, action and occurrence. The people are portrayed as compute-game figures, consciousness is virtual reality, society is hyper-real. In this high-tech simulation, everything slides from identity to identity and position to position, and follows the logic(s) of *glissement*. Not linear cause and effect, or a change driven dialectic, but a convoluted self-referential logic of game-like moves, is characteristic of 'the matrix'. The matrix appears to portray a simple either/or, good/bad, universe, but the opposites touch and everything collapses into ambiguity. Identity is not what it appears to be; resolution (closure) is more open than closed, purpose gets no-where. Appearances are more important than principles and plot is a flimsy excuse for endless (violent) 'action-scenes'.

Nussbaum has called on the professional fields to look to literature to enrich their awareness and empathy of practice. (Nussbaum, 1990) Willmott and Knights (re-)discovered status, identity and rationality by following just such a procedure. (Willmott & Knights, 1999) The gaze caught by 'the matrix' reveals in our analysis gaming, desire and the *glissement* of signification. How do these highly contemporary simulacra inform (organizational) practice?

***Glissement* and gaming**

The film 'the matrix' has, as its explicit point of departure, the choice between 'self' and 'illusion', the real of the desert and appearances of virtuality. One can play along, or re-write the game. The assumption upon which the film is based is that mankind has been reduced to biological batteries who are only fed 'virtual reality' with no 'real' communication or experience left. Most people are content to live what the VR has to offer, namely no crises and a 'comfortable' existence in a fairly rich society (the USA of 1999). A few want to know 'what really is', even if that is far less comforting or safe. The explicit choice posed in the film is between safety in ignorance (taking the blue pill), which is identified with corporate existence; or danger in knowledge (taking the red pill), which is identified with counter-cultural individualism. But analysis of the film shows that this seemingly simple dualism is not that simple at all. In fact, there are lots of crossovers from the one logic to the other. The

texture of the movie is full of *glissements* from position to position, identity to identity, significance to significance.

Not the choices that people make --- the red pill versus the blue pill, reality versus illusion, individuality versus conformity --- but how all the choices imply one another and slip the one into another, are what count. *Glissement* deconstructs choice and the 'self' that supposedly chooses. It is a destabilizing force that topples identity based on 'things are what they are, and that is our safety'. *Glissement* is the social process of uncertain boundaries, indefinite desires and a logic that turns and twists back on itself. In the matrix *glissement* is a product of 'gaming', of living life in a virtual computer game environment. First 'the world of gaming' needs clarification and then its significance can be explored.

Games can be thought of as mirrors of day-to-day experience in the corporate world and hyper-real society. Games are a popular form of entertainment whose operations follow strict conventions. Watching *the matrix*, is like playing a computer game. The movie displays cinematographic dream images, the products of digital techniques. These images seem to be beyond every day comprehension and to be powerful enough to hypnotize the player. The digital filming, cutting and rendering technology, used in the matrix, evokes being inside a computer game. The matrix seems to operate on computer code. The gaming environment and the digitally created environment, change from moment to moment. The point of entry for the characters is in the film 'boot camp' where they are trained in simulation. The 'real' action comes thereafter --- a skyscraper has to be conquered, numerous jump and run scenes demand all sorts of dexterity and computer generated weaponry is employed in combat. The matrix is the game terminal, and the players are its extensions.

1.1.11

1.1.12 Appearances

Aesthetics is crucial to computer games. Being 'good' and being 'attractive' are the same thing¹. Good is 'attractive' – bad is 'ugly'. Even the one traitor in the film is obviously less attractive than his loyal colleagues – he has a weak chin, a stubble beard and very little bodily hair. The male lead, Neo, is a prototype male model and thus 'very good'. The female lead, Trinity, is a 'female goddess'. Goodness and appearance are tightly linked. Everyone in the game who is on the right side, has a

¹ Tomb Raider and popular Soccer Stars such as David Beckham are popular examples.

sympathetic outward appearance. In the matrix, you can judge by first appearances, without risk of disappointment. Morpheus and the Oracle, two key supporting characters, pay obvious tribute to attractiveness in terms of political correctness; they represent the older generation and excluded sub-groups. The young (Neo & Trinity) are more attractive but governance is the privilege of the experienced leaders (Morpheus & the Oracle). 'Good' is defined in terms of resistance to tyranny technology and conformity. Morpheus is the director of the 'resistance' – he facilitates the new player's (Neo) experiences and represents wisdom and insight. The Oracle is a mentor in the mission of the good. She has been with the resistance right from the beginning and cares for the (human) players. She gives Neo cookies --- food for the soul or holy communion --- and displays an ironic sense of humor. The oracle permits identity to be established². The heroes --- Neo, Trinity, Morpheus and the Oracle --- are attractive game figures.

On the other side, the 'suits' are the representatives of the matrix. They are nasty and heartless, with a cynical sense of humor. They display the characteristics of the anonymous corporate man. Basically, they punish anyone below them, and execute the instructions of their superiors. They duck or run, when things get difficult. The cold authoritarian corporate type, is other-directed, bad and literally inhuman. The agents act anonymously and all look the same. They are clean-cut types, with rectangular sunglasses; they are unified and uniformed. The emphasis on appearances is crucial. The premise of the matrix is that what consciousness consumes, and to a large degree wants to consume, is the illusion of attractiveness. But who in the film is really attractive? Is it really the so-called good figures?

Though the agents are 'bad' --- they're smart, responsive and have a sharp street-wise sense of humor³. They are treated as respected business partners, by the matrix⁴. The resistance is made up

² Trinity: That the Matrix cannot tell you who you are. Neo: And the Oracle can? Trinity: That's different.

³ (Office)

Agent Smith: Never send a human to do a machine's job.

(Office)

Agent Smith: Have you ever stood and stared at it, marvelled at it's beauty, it's genius? Billions of people just living out their lives, oblivious ... Evolution, Morpheus, evolution, like the dinosaur. Look out that window. You had your time. The future is our world, Morpheus. The future is our time.

⁴ (Restaurant)

Agent Smith: Do we have a deal, Mr. Reagan.

of a bunch kids, playing around in an over-structured adult world of rules and limitations. Outwardly the matrix celebrates childishness and rejects adult responsibility --- a standpoint common to much 'juvenile-ized' culture. The agents on the other hand, get the work done. In the matrix running, hiding and hitting, are the keys to success. If you are the right hand of the matrix, you adjust; after some time you even get to like it. You may be on a tight leash --- agents get precise instructions via little ear speakers, but you get things done. The agents are the performative team. Eventually, agents discover that from time to time that they can take the little speakers out. There are benefits of being an agent; agents have been promised that they can leave the matrix upon the completion of their mission⁵. They enjoy their vacations once every while. Comparing these prospects with the prospects of the resistance-crew --- that is the juvenile-ized attractive characters, leaves us with a paradox. The 'One', Neo, is supposedly exceptional; he gets his work done and is also juvenile. He, so-called, 'saves the world'. But ultimately he is left to wander around the matrix, proclaiming his 'truth' to a world that will not listen. While he can use the matrix as a tool --- his powerless within the matrix, is obvious. Neo manages to provoke a system failure --- the game has to go 'on pause'. But his imagination is severely limited. In his closing statement, he merely announces that the fight against the system will continue⁶. But fighting the matrix, is reproducing the matrix --- and the system

Cypher: You know, I know this steak doesn't exist. I know that when I put it in my mouth, the Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy and delicious. After nine years, you know what I realize? Ignorance is bliss.

Agent Smith: Then we have a deal?

Cypher: I don't want to remember nothing. Nothing. You understand? And I want to be rich. You know, someone important, like an actor.

Agent Smith: Whatever you want, Mr. Reagan.

5

(Office)

Agent Smith: Can you hear me, Morpheus? I'm going to be honest with you. I hate this place, this zoo, this prison, this reality, whatever you want to call it. I can't stand it any longer. It's the smell, if there is such a thing. I feel saturated by it. I can taste your stink. And every time I do I feel I have somehow been infected by it. It's repulsive, isn't it? I must get out of here. I must get free and in this mind is the key, my key. Once Zion is destroyed there is no need for me to be here, don't you understand?

6

(Phone)

The One: I know you're out there. I can feel you now. I know that you're afraid. You're afraid of us. You're afraid of change. I don't know the future. I didn't come here to tell you how this is going to end. I came here to tell you how it's going to begin. I'm going to hang up this phone and then I'm

knows it. Where can Neo go after he has 'saved' the world?⁷ What is 'success', under matrix conditions? How could one notice that the *'playing in the matrix, is actually over'?*

1.1.13

1.1.14 Booting, running and shooting

The characters in the movie always know what to do --- they never have to think about it. They are either programmed or remote controlled --- i.e. agents through their earplugs; or they just do automatically do what is good for the game⁸. It is all the same basic logic. Throughout the movie the most frequently used phrase is 'you / someone / we 'have to''. There are twenty-one 'you 'have to's'' in the lines of the good characters. The matrix is an instructions-based world. Mind as analysis, as consciousness and as reflection, is worthless in the universe of the film. One just 'has to'. Likewise, competing truths or fundamental uncertainties are either absent or get resolved in an aggressive military style⁹. Learning¹⁰ is something one 'uploads' from a computer¹¹. There is no room for process issues --- blind action is rewarded. The attractiveness of the results is built-in.

The film is infantile in its approach to individual intellectual effort. In the matrix, one has to be physically super-human and to fight a lot. But there is no role for thought or mind. During the first sequences of the movie, Neo undergoes his socialization --- and the audience with him. Neo gains

going to show these people what you don't want them to see. I'm going to show them a world without you, a world without rules and controls, without borders or boundaries, a world where anything is possible. Where we go from there is a choice I leave to you.

⁷ The Matrix sequels 2 and 3 will cater with an answer.

⁸ FIFA in Zurich might permit us the reproduction of their identity statement.

⁹ Neo: I believe I can bring him back.... What are you doing?

Trinity: I going with you.

Neo: No you're not.

Trinity: No? Let me tell you what I believe. I believe Morpheus means more to me than he does to you. I believe if you were really serious about saving him you are going to need my help. And since I am the ranking officer on this ship, if you don't like, I believe you can go to hell. Because you aren't going anywhere else. Tank, load us up.

¹⁰

(Cellular)

Tank:

Operator.

Trinity: Tank, I need a pilot program for a V-212 helicopter. Hurry.... Let's go.

¹¹

(Cellular)

Tank:

Operator.

Trinity: Tank, I need a pilot program for a V-212 helicopter. Hurry.... Let's go.

his new game character identity; likewise, the audience, in the cinema, is initiated (introduced) to the film. Both characters and audience are prepared to play the matrix. As soon as Neo enters the 'real' world of the desert --- i.e. chooses for the red pill; he is transformed. Neo becomes a game figure. And instead of his prior normal reality, it is revealed that he has been a porous body riveted with holes all along. What was 'real' was mere VR. Existence is an embodied nightmare. Neo's body has been a physical mass of flesh that was plugged into the matrix. Being outside the matrix, means entering into a transition state. Morpheus and the other dissidents mentor Neo. He is prepared to be a game-player against the matrix. To win one has to be prepared.¹² Successful behavior has to be programmed into Neo, providing him with the advantages of pre-adaptive selection. In matrix-ation, competences are determined. That is how one gets things done in the game. Education and socialization take place in a pre-determined closed system. Evidently, every character in the game has had to run through the same training program.

The order of the matrix, is portrayed to be a universal fore-structure. One is either inside or outside the matrix. Existence is defined as being either on the 'blue pill' (autopilot) or on the 'red pill' (believing in the power of ones self) pill. Either way, life is played in complex game terms. One is a 'player' in a matrix. The results are not surprising. Humans can beat agents, if they shoot run and fight more intelligently than they do. Heroes win by stretching the rules of the game. Being is the becoming of the matrix; it is matrix-ing. Identity is produced, by becoming a better computer game application.

Individualization via introspection, self-observation and reflection, have little value in the film. One just has to play, imitate, emulate and destroy. Existence, or an answer to the 'what do you really do' question, is defined in terms of the 'chase'. If one is virtuous enough to make a difference, then the system chases and tries to destroy you. All one can do in response, is to destroy the system. Winning is the only thing that can be desired --- it is the pre-scribed and pre-determined phantasm. The matrix is a satanic universe, ruled by a paranoiac metaphysics wherein the forces of evil have most of the power. Spiritual existence is defined in terms of a universe in which almost everyone is

¹² Morpheus: ... As long as the Matrix exists the human race will never be free ... Get some rest, you're going to need it.

Neo: For what?

Morpheus: Your training.

Tank: Morning, did you sleep? You will tonight, I guarantee it. I'm Tank, I'll be your operator.

damned. There may be some remote possibility of salvation, but it is not evident. Evil dominates --- it wins and loses, triumphs and retreats. The logic of pursuit and violence, fight and flight, never ceases. Some people may escape the matrix --- but their existence is still defined in terms of their escape. There is no alternative to the first principle. One can be inside the matrix or one can be outside it, but both positions are defined in terms of it. The matrix has usurped the imagination --- it does not show us to the door.¹³ The claim in the movie to provide a way out of the matrix, is just another way into the matrix. The matrix is a closed system that suffers from a lack of difference --- there is no outside. The matrix is a virus --- it has unlimited powers of representational reproduction, and it can crowd out all other texts. There is always an(O)ther game to entertain and please one's hyper-real phantasms. The matrix is not an exit¹⁴. It is an endless feedback loop of illusion, escape and re-entry. Rebellion merely leads to playing the game more intensively and that re-integrates one into the game. There is nowhere else to go. The players are caught in the endless game loops of the matrix.

1.1.15 The consumer consumed

We are supposed to experience the movie as: 'good' (attractive) humanity versus 'bad' (repressive) machines. The freedom to initiate change is good, the lack of freedom is bad. But the matrix is the result of a man-made ecological disaster that destroyed the climate --- so the matrix's curse and self-legitimization ("humans are a sort of virus or cancer"¹⁵) carries a lot of weight. But in the movie,

¹³ Morpheus: I'm trying to free your mind, Neo, but I can only show you the door, you're the one that has to walk through it. Tank, load the jump program.... You have to let it all go, Neo, fear, doubt, and disbelief. Free your mind.

Morpheus (with a consultants voice): ... I told you I can only show you the door. You have to walk through it.

Morpheus: (a bit later in the plot) Neo, sooner or later you're going to realize, just as I did, there's a difference between knowing the path and walking the path.

¹⁴ Echoing of course Bret Easton Ellis famous last sentence in "American Psycho" – another version of the matrix filmed from within a virtual and operationally closed 80s, New York, Wall Street suit reality.

¹⁵ Agent Smith: I'd like to share a revelation during my time here. It came to me when I tried to classify your species. I realized that you're not actually mammals. Every mammal on this planet instinctively develops a natural equilibrium with the surrounding environment but you humans do not. You move to an area and you multiply and multiply until every natural resource is consumed. The

freedom and a conscious choice, is supposedly only possible in opposition to the matrix. The digital technology evokes nightmare images of alienation and repression. The dissidents proclaim an alternative. Morpheus and his gang call to: "Follow the white rabbit, take the red pill, master the game, become the One". But these calls are all hyper-real. They are a simulation that pretends to be more 'real' than the 'real'. In hyper-reality, objects may be free, but consciousness is not. (Baudrillard, 1981 & 1983) Baudrillard's point is that hyper-reality, or the images of the game at hand, prioritize the logic of the object --- indeterminacy moves over to the side of the object. Situations, structures and objects are liberated from human consciousness, which is pre-programmed. In the logic of the consumer society, objects have identity, substance and significance; consciousness is 'read by the objects'. Humans in hyper-reality, produce human look-alike artifacts -- - but 'human' and 'humanity' is a mere effect. Hyper-real worlds look like human creations, the system (dis)plays the simulacra. The system lives creates and multiplies; consciousness is merely a point in a lattice of (industrial, commercial, virtual) relationships.

Why the two pills? The polarity between 'red' and 'blue' --- the red pill signifying truth (and the revolution or leftism) and the blue pill signifying the opposite (blue is the color of the British conservative party). But why the choice, why pose an existential question in terms of swallowing a pill? One can define choice in terms of simple dualism and the pill does just that. But why the consumerist pill taking? For instance in Salem, when they had to decide if someone was a witch, they used tests. They'd drop someone into water and if they drowned they were human and not a witch. Why didn't Morpheus opt for such a pragmatic option, with fate (predestination) high lighted? The issue of choice versus predestination runs through the film. The matrix functions as a simulacra of choice – it creates the illusion that you are in control of your own life. If you acknowledge (discover) that the matrix and not yourself is in control, then you are in control. Thus the logic is that of Catch 22 --- *'If you think you 'know' your own freedom, you are not free'; and 'If you think 'know' your unfreedom, you are 'free'. But either way, you are 'not free'.*

For the audience, and the game figures, the film performs the same function. If you think you are free to see, re-construct and interpret the film --- you do not realize how much the film has locked you into its hyper-reality. And if you understand how powerless you are, in the face of the game, then

only way you can survive is to spread to another area. There is another organism on this planet that follows the same pattern. Do you know what it is? A virus. Human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet. You are a plague, and we are the cure.

you know that you are part and parcel of the hyper-reality. Either way, the hyper-real reigns.

Energy flows (electricity) are essential in the film. The reproduction of the matrix --- the keeping of the system alive, is its sole purpose. Humans are used as batteries --- that is as a primary energy source. Humanity is defined in terms of thermodynamics – it exists in a regime, struggling to overcome entropy. The climate change that has caused human beings to be transformed into biological batteries, is a result (the Agents tell us) of a fault in the evolutionary identity of humanity. The matrix is, in its own way, 'just' --- after all, humanity destroyed the earth¹⁶. Humanity is both 'good' as Neo, Trinity and Morpheus, and 'bad' as the cause of all the ecological problems. If human agency would be restored by Neo, then the curse that destroyed the planet is ready to be reenacted. The 'blue pill' versus 'red pill' dilemma can be constructed to be very confronting --- but it can also be seen as childishly silly. There are two choices and both of them are consumer-ist. The big issue is which pill are you going to consume --- but that you have to consume something, is unquestionable. Pre-fabricated objects and pre-determined sequences of behavior organize the matrix. That you have to play is an integral aspect to the logic. The obligation to make consumption-choices is the real violence of the matrix. Consumer choice, in a hyper-real consumer society, never touches on the logic of essential relations. Functioning within the system, might irritate or disrupt it; but it never fundamentally questions it. Neo may become a source of mis-functioning for the system. The VR

¹⁶ Morpheus: We have only bits and pieces of information but what we know for certain is that at some point in the early twenty-first century all of mankind was united in celebration. We marvelled at our own magnificence as we gave birth to AI.
Neo: AI? You mean artificial intelligence?
Morpheus: A singular consciousness that spawned an entire race of machines. We don't know who struck first, us or them. But we know that it was us that scorched the sky. At the time they were dependent on solar power and it was believed that they would be unable to survive without an energy source as abundant as the sun. Throughout human history, we have been dependent on machines to survive. Fate it seems is not without a sense of irony. The human body generates more bio-electricity than a 120-volt battery and over 25,000 BTU's of body heat. Combined with a form of fusion the machines have found all the energy they would ever need. There are fields, endless fields, where human beings are no longer born, we are grown. For the longest time I wouldn't believe it, and then I saw the fields with my own eyes. Watch them liquefy the dead so they could be fed intravenously to the living. And standing there, facing the pure horrifying precision, I came to realize the obviousness of the truth. What is the Matrix? Control. The Matrix is a computer generated dream world built to keep us under control in order to change a human being into this. [Morpheus holds a battery in his hands]

(virtual reality) may be forced to allow him to fiddle (a bit) with the simulacra. But the principle that society is a VR game, is unaltered. The matrix divides humanity into winners and the rest. Humanity is imprisoned in the matrix, doomed to create the electricity that is needed to play out immature superhero games. The basic definitions, social reality is a computer game and one exists in the myths of the 20th century, are not altered. Mind is blind to itself; it is defined as the ability to be totally lost in a world of consumerist hyper-reality. Human existence is a video game played endlessly over and over. Mind is limited to dealing with the parameters of action films.

The player cannot take distance --- escaping the stream of events is impossible. The digital effects are used to over-power reflection and mesmerize the mind. From a gaming point of view, the film is like VR without a reset button. It is a prototype next generation computer game. It is meant to be judged on its own terms by its appearances. It is politically and ethically correct and it even comes with a superficial happy-end. The movie produces pure illusion. Who sees the matrix and how it is seen, is irrelevant to it; it just 'is'. There is no separate 'act of seeing'. The game writes its message onto your face in the movie theatre. The matrix is a hypnotizing experience of visual simulation. The senses are over-loaded with stimulation and the (critical) eye is deadened.

In gaming, the movement from position to position, stance to stance merely sucks one deeper and deeper into the game. There is no outside to 'gaming'. Turning off the one game and turning on another, does not make all that much difference --- the games all resemble one another. The 'moves' that one can make while 'gaming' are repetitive, limited and in most ways pre-given. Gaming is designed activity wherein what counts does not change. There is lots of motion in gaming, but no real change. All the surfaces are full of movement, but nothing really happens. Contrastingly, one can assert that movement on the surface is exactly what happens and that it is the only form of change that our world really knows.

1.3 Shut-down

1.1.16

1.1.17 (i) Glissement --- in and out of the matrix

Glissement is movement in-between words and objects; it occupies the gap between virtuality and the real. Glissement produces continuing realignment of elements. Organizational, societal and epistemic relationships are characterized by such constant small shifts. Individual existence occurs inside such movements, in signification, economic order and social configuration. Epistemic, organizational and social epistemes mediate 'self', 'identity' and 'consciousness'. By not assuming

the primacy of the individual, the relational logic of *glissement* emerges. By not reifying structure, process, change and movement can remain over-end. For instance, the agents can be understood in terms of the debates in the 50's on the organizational man ('Death of the salesman' and the dangers of other-directedness). Or they can be seen as a critique of the greed society of the 80's (the film 'Wall Street', Neuromancer, Alain Minc's critique of rampant capitalism). But they can also be thought of in terms of current speculation about the virtual society (Woolger, S & Grint, K, 1997). *Glissement* between the various possible interpretations creates an intellectual game --- a hide-and-go-seek of identity.

The logic of communication can be made accessible as a language game. *Glissement* captures the appropriate logic of change. Here is the link to Wittgenstein and Lyotard's idea of the language game as the logic of communication. But do the games play the player? Is there release from domination by the 'machines' of *glissement*? What language games get played out in the simulacrum of organizations and society? How are they mirrored in pop culture?

... the agent is a temporary term or position in an ever-active
matrix of order-disorder. (Parker & Cooper, 1998: 213)

.... modern science [has substituted] for our world of quality and sense perception,
the world in which we live, and love, and die, another world --- the world of quantity,
of reified geometry, a world in which, though there is place for everything, there is no
place for man. Thus the world of science --- the real world --- became estranged and
utterly divorced from the world of life ...(Koyré, 1968: 23-24)

The matrix can be seen as an invitation to Deleuzian *destratification*, but also as a perspective-less rendering of Newtonian dead-ends. From the Deleuzian perspective, the matrix is an invitation to corrosive practices. A way for liberatory thought to invent techniques for the kind of self-destruction that allows rhizomatic reflection. Normal reflection supposedly categorizes, determines and fixes. It destroys the flow and motion in layer after layer of reification. Normal thought denies the polyphonic and objectifies reality in order and reason. The matrix displays the inconsistencies of a world defined as a closed system --- no such tight order is conceptually sustainable. One can observe social phenomena such as mass conditioning via virtual gaming and label it, for instance as 'the matrix'.

'The matrix' then becomes a totalisation. It is 'subjectified', as if 'the matrix' had 'agency' all of its own. A category such as 'mass conditioning via virtual gaming' is made into an actor with agency. 'The matrix' is then, no longer a convenient concept. It has become a social actor, capable of influencing human existence. Social scientists (literary critics, philosophers, politicians, etc.) then discuss 'the matrix' as if it possessed its own unique ontology. A concept that may have strong heuristic value in media studies, or in (critical) cultural analysis, becomes a 'thing' --- it is object-ified. A parallel universe develops for the (de-)construction of desires, self-descriptions and subversive reversals. The matrix can be used to mount just such a process of conceptual (de-)reification. All its inconsistencies make the flaws of 'object thinking' apparent. Its inconsistencies create (non-)sense -- - a *glissement* between free/unfree, human/nonhuman, corporate/individual that frees up communication. Deleuzian destratification, is such a process of reification running in reverse. (Buchanan, 2000) Through its 'inhabitation' the power of repressive thought is broken:

This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialisation, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment ... (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)

The matrix is a closed simulacra --- but instead of being just another machine for the repression of ideas, it is an opportunity to think differently. One can slide in the matrix from inconsistency to inconsistency, and glide from there into an alternative space (of social analysis). The matrix's reifications are effortlessly undermined – the internal limits of the system are easily reached and criticized. Its virtual system(s) produce variation. Its over-simplified structures --- machine versus human, top-down versus bottom-up, free versus un-free all collapse under their own weight. For instance, the machine/human dichotomy is displaced by cyborgization, VR and ICT (information & communication technology). Machines obviously are no longer simple extensions of human agents, they have too much cybernetic extension for that. Although human knowing is conveyed via (mass) media, and human working entails tools, and the consumer society revolves around objects; people are not simply extensions of things. Machine/human integration is ambivalent; there are lots of

equivalents and no hegemony. Humans are game-players; the games have identities. Gaming constructs and deconstructs, escapes and engages, adds nothing and defines a whole (sub-)culture. It is "immaterial whether one says that machines are organs, or organs are machines. The two definitions are exact equivalents." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983: 285)

But one can also assert, that in the matrix difference and change have been reduced to the identical and the permanent. Time has been eliminated. Events are reversible; VR can be adjusted warped and adapted so that 'the game' continues. There is no law of irreversibility --- the game continues irrespective of specific events. Society is frozen in a pre-given social order that is endlessly determined to repeat itself. The unicity of the present, the uniqueness of the situation, are not respected. The rules of the game brush the individual and particular aside. The matrix (re-)produces a logic wherein 'truth' (science) and phenomenal existence are in conflict with one another. Structure --- the order of reality --- is dominant; specific personal existence is a secondary epiphenomena to be dealt with via illusion and media. 'Reality' is independent of the observer. Society just 'is'; it is totally reified. Living human activity is purposeless. Humanity merely consumes hyper-real media --- human will has been pacified. What is this, but normal science (Newtonian physics), rendered in a consistent social vision in a timeless world of (ir-)rationality. Human relationships communication and activity are irreparably lost. Simulated hyper-real illusions, robbed of all purposiveness, have taken over. There is no 'now', other than the 'now' of the matrix. The present --- as a zone of shared and experienced possibility --- has been shut down. Time as a space for human lived circumstances is denied. If human meaning is 'constructivist' that is, sense-making is realized in circumstance and in contact with others, then the mental and social spaces it depends on to exist, are denied in gaming. Sense-making, made up of 'text' and containing layers of significance that are dependent on language, dialogue and interaction, has been evicted from the game. In the matrix, people are 'monads' --- suspended in parallelisms of non-communicating and non-interacting disembodiment. There are no windows in the matrix through which something can get in, or out. The matrix is a hyper-real *world*. In the matrix, the multiple temporal and complex, are denied. Because humanity is not entirely alienated from its immediate existential world, the matrix intuitively appears to be flawed.

As the film states: “there seems to be something wrong.”¹⁷ In the matrix, one cannot discover lived-time, shared reality or the *lebenswelt*. The matrix is on a performative level, a computer game, which is its brilliance and its particular ‘horror’. The game players are ‘hyonons’ --- mesmerized consumers of a hyper-real gaming environment. You cannot gain your way from the universe of computer games, back to lived complexity.

1.1.18

1.1.19 (ii) From gaming to playing

Glissement between being and becoming, laws and games, desire and perversion, time and structure is what creates potentiality. The connectionism *glissement* reveals, is an opening to indeterminacy and change. Awareness of possibility, experience that some of the pieces of life can (sometimes) be moved about, is a feeling “that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts ... in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hopes, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity – the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.” (Conrad quoted in Gunn, 2001: 32)

In the matrix gaming is not meant to lead anywhere. One is supposed to play the computer game until one drops from exhaustion. ‘Winning’ is arriving at a point, that already existed before you began. And you loose all the time that it took you to get there. Gaming is an escape from the present, into endlessly self-repeating patterns. In gaming, there is only seriality of action leading nowhere. -In so far as time is duration, or a space for action, gaming escapes time and the need to act. Gaming empties circumstances of movement. But as in the matrix, gaming fails. Interaction, communication and process, reassert themselves. From the Deleuzian perspective, desire undermines rules, structures and control. Organization triggers subterfuge. It creates conditions of *glissement* that lead to connectionism, interaction and process. This reading of the matrix sees the

¹⁷ Choi: Something wrong, man? You look a little whiter than usual.
Neo: My computer, it ... You ever have that feeling where you're not sure if you're awake or still dreaming?

Morpheus: I know exactly what you mean. Let me tell you why you're here. You're here because you know something. What you know you can't explain. But you feel it. You've felt it your entire life. That there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is but it's there, like a splinter in your mind driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me. Do you know what I'm talking about?

agents as the heroes, because in their humor and irony human qualities prevail.

Contrastingly, and less bleakly, the rhizomes of organizing can be positively interpreted. The solidarity involved in analyzing the film, can become serious play. The matrix is, then, an invitation to play with gaming, by deconstructing its obsessive fetishisms of appearance, winning and violence. In play, the players talk to one another --- they enter into on-going dialogue about what to do. In gaming, the game plays the player. By writing about the matrix, we try to earn our way out of the matrix, back into (intellectual) play. One has to play in order to talk about the games organizations impose; it is a (possible) way to earn one's way back into subjecthood.

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