

Between Drudgery and “Promesse du bonheur”: Games and Gamification

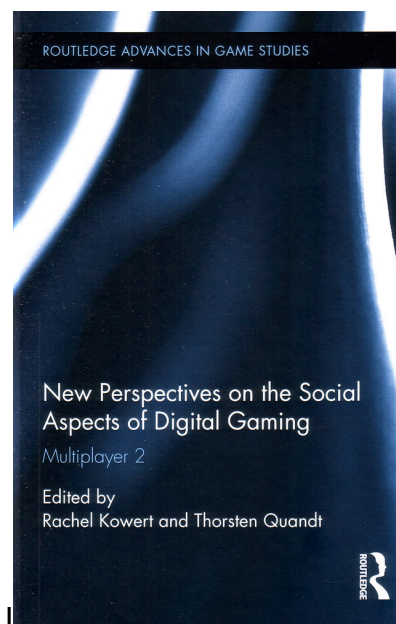
Mathias Fuchs

Leuphana University

Institute for the Culture and Aesthetics of Digital Media, Gamification Lab
Scharnhorststraße 1, Room C 5.318, 21335 Lüneburg, Germany
mathias.fuchs@creativegames.org.uk

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Abstract: Gamification receives the most enthusiastic praises and is at the same time dismissed as “bullshit” by others (Bogost 2011). It seems that the appreciation of the process of turning extra-ludic activities into play is valued controversially and that the range of hopes and fears connected to the phenomenon range from extremely negative to utmost beneficial. This difference in opinion can be traced back to the classical positions in regard to games and play. Games can be valued in two different ways: Following Bataille (1975), we would hope that play could be a flight line from the servitude of the capital-labour relationship. Following Adorno (1970) and Benjamin (1939), however, we might discover that the escape from the drudgery of the worker leads to an equally alienating drudgery of the player. This article analyses the controversial dialectics of self-contained play for play’s sake and the ubiquitous notion of gamification as a purpose-driven activity, that might actually trigger and shape social change.



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Gamification receives the most enthusiastic praises of leading to a “pleasure revolution” (Schell, 2011) and is at the same time dismissed as “bullshit” by others (Bogost, 2011). It seems that the appreciation of the process of turning extraludic activities into play is valued controversially and that the range of hopes and fears connected to the phenomenon range from extremely negative to utmost beneficial. This difference in opinion can be traced back to the classical positions in regard to games and play. Games can be valued in two different ways: Following Bataille (1975), we would hope that play could be a flight line from the servitude of the capital-labour relationship. Following Adorno (1970) and Benjamin (1939), however, we might discover that the escape from the drudgery of the worker leads to an equally alienating drudgery of the player. I argue that gamification might be seen as a form of ideology, but that games and gamification also hold the potential for change. Ever since the notion of gamification was introduced widely (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011; Reilhac, 2010; Schell, 2011), scholars have suggested that it is the mechanism of choice to turn playful activities into activities with an impact. This article analyses the controversial dialectics of self-contained play for play’s sake and the ubiquitous notion of gamification as a purpose-driven activity that might actually trigger and shape social change.

Good Gamification

Similar to the cure-alls of medieval charlatans, the panacea of gamification was said to have an unlimited range of possible application areas and unrestricted trust and loyalty by the consumers: Gamification can “combine big data with the latest understanding of human motivation” (Paharia, 2013); “make living eco-friendly a lot more interesting” (Sexton, 2013); “can help children learn in the classroom, help build and maintain muscle memory, fight against some of the effects of aging, and distract from pain and depression” (Ramos, 2013); “When we’re playing games, we’re not suffering” (McGonigal, 2012b). These promises contain a *promesse du bonheur*, a prospect for better living, and the suggestion that gaming can

definitely change individual lives and most probably change social life. But as long as there is no evidence for such change to have happened as a result of gaming, the promises might only conceal that games can neither change the individual nor society as a whole. It is difficult to falsify any of the announced effects of gamification because the inherent logic of the *apparatus* of gamification is consistent. Gamification has turned into one of the systems that Foucault described as:

a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, [...] administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid (1977, p. 194).

Gamification as a *dispositif* or *apparatus* supports the current power-structure: Gamification is used as an administrative measure, it is talked about on blogs and in books like this one, it is used and misused by journalists, and it is applied to work as the rationale for propositions that contain a *promesse du bonheur* (wealth, health, end of suffering, reduction of the effects of aging) like religious salvation once did.

The notion of gamification was introduced widely in the 2010s (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled & Nacke, 2011; McGonigal, 2011; Schell, 2011; Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011) to suggest that marketing, design, health, and work might be seen as some kind of free play or leisure activity. A process that has been named by Joost Raessens the “ludification of culture” (2006) prepared us to consider activities as play that our parents and grandparents would never have thought of as play. Traditionally, three pillars of gamification would clearly have to be considered ‘serious’: health, work and economic exchange. During the timespan of one generation, this seems to have changed. Thirty years ago, nobody would have suspected that these fields could be mistaken for fun. Conversational language, proverbs, status of characters in novels and film, and pathos formulas within cultural artefacts would solidify what predecessor generations felt to be common sense and nondisputable. At least three assumptions were felt to be rock-solid and unquestionable.

Health, to start with, was a serious matter. People have been taking about a ‘serious’ condition. The patients asked the doctor: “Is it serious?” It took a quite a few years of ludification to arrive at a situation where popular new media could publish headlines such as “Fun ways to Cure Cancer” (Scott, 2013). Our parents would have been shocked and most probably argued that you do not make fun with such things as health. (Knock on Wood!)

Second, work was an aspect of life that could not be mingled with fun. “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,” is constructed upon the firm opposition of work and play. The saying has been documented in print as early as 1659 in James Howell’s *Paroimiographia* (Howell, 1659,

p. 12). Obviously considered to be of a commutative nature, the Irish novelist Maria Edgeworth added a line to the proverb:

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.
All play and no work makes Jack a mere toy.

Only children were allowed to confuse work and play or tools and toys and only they can say: "I am working very hard now", when they move their *Bob the Builder* dolls or their *Playmobil* characters on their play-room floors. Nowadays, proper grownups pretend that they play, when they work (Figure 12.1). Google employees have slides connecting their offices to prove that working for Google is mere play.

A poster in the streets of Berlin announcing shared office spaces for rent carries the slogan: "In ev'ry work that must be done, there is an element of fun". Obviously inspired by Mary Poppins the landlords of the rental space rely on some kind of magic that will turn work into play. The magic trick that makes the potential customers believe in this is called gamification. Zygmunt Bauman argues that playfulness in our ludic culture is no longer confined to childhood, but has become a lifelong attitude: "The mark of postmodern adulthood is the willingness to embrace the game whole-heartedly, as children do" (Bauman, 1995, p. 99). This very willingness to subscribe to playfulness as a guiding principle for most different activities has been diagnosed by Johan Huizinga as a character flaw that treats serious things as games and games as serious things. Huizinga blames what he calls "puerilism" for this "contamination" of play (Huizinga, 1936). In *The Shadow of Tomorrow*, Huizinga describes puerilism as

[...] the evil of our time. For nowadays play in many cases never ends and hence it is not true play. A far-reaching contamination of play and serious activity has taken place. The two spheres are getting mixed. In the activities of an outwardly serious nature hides an element of play. Recognised play, on the other hand, is no longer able to maintain its true play-character as a result of being taken too seriously and being technically over-organized.

(Huizinga, 1936, p. 177)

It seems that "the evil" of Huizinga's time has returned. The spheres of play and serious activity are mixed, blended and jumbled up. We even have an apologetic term to describe the paradoxical confusion: gamification. The second decade of the 21st century praises gamification and serious games as the key to wealth, health, and pleasure. Jess Schell goes as far as putting it into an anthropologic framework that has survival, followed by efficiency, and then followed again by fun: "We are moving from a time when life was all about survival to a time when it was about

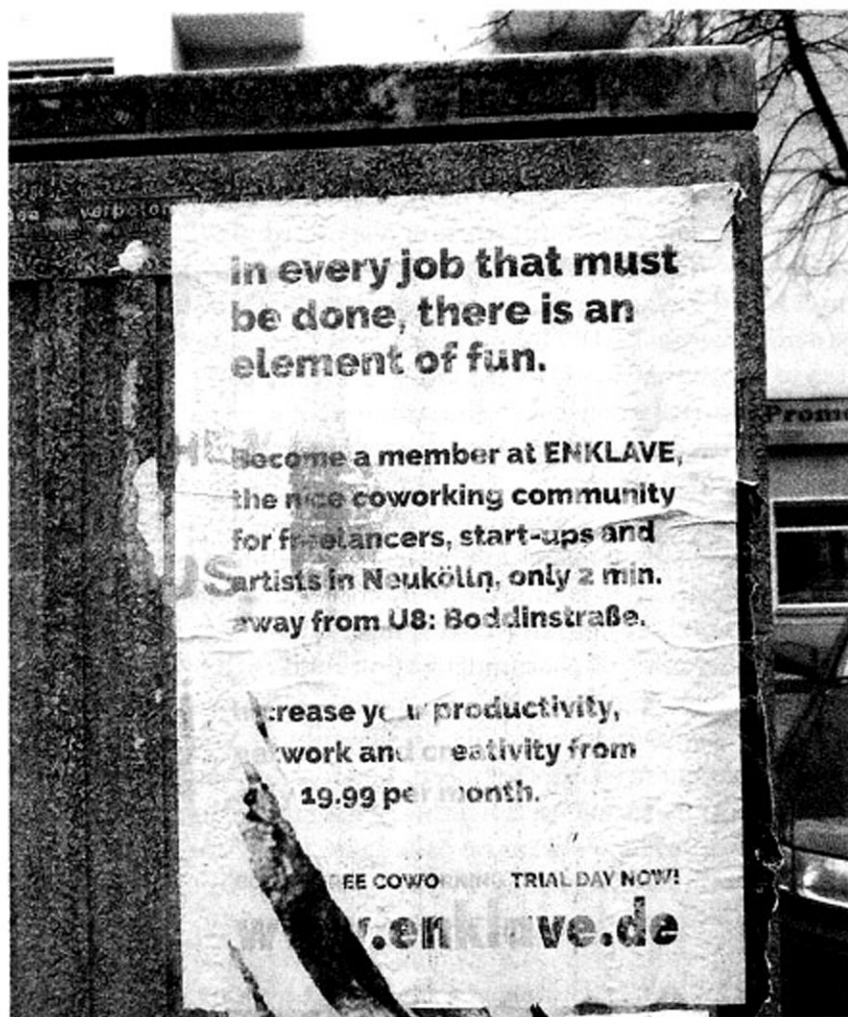


Figure 12.1 Poster announcing co-working spaces in the streets of Berlin.

efficiency into a new era where gamification design is largely about what is pleasurable” (Schell, 2011). Such high hopes are in stark contrast to Huizinga’s concerns about a dangerous and widespread phenomenon of puerilism. He warns of an

attitude of a community whose behaviour is more immature than the state of its intellectual and critical faculties would warrant, which instead of making the boy into the man adapts to that of the adolescent age.

(Huizinga, 1936, p. 170)

The Dutch philosopher and anthropologist may sound extremely pessimistic here, and the account he gives about U.S. politics and

professional sports (sic!) just underlines what he thinks is wrong with society, but he obviously did not want his writings to abandon all hope; on page nine of the *Shadow of Tomorrow*, he states: "It is possible that these pages will lead many to think of me as a pessimist. I have but this to answer: I am an optimist" (Huizinga, 1936, p. 9). Different from the blind optimism of contemporary gamification evangelists, Huizinga did not see any benefits in turning a society into a society of eternal adolescents. His hope was rather directed towards a recovery of the 'sacred' boundary separating work from play. There is no evidence for such a separation being desirable today. By the turn of the century Jeremy Rifkin argues: "Play is becoming as important in the cultural economy as work was in the industrial economy" (Rifkin, 2000, p. 263).

A third premise that was guarded by the believe system of our parents' generation, was a strict separation between monetary transactions and ludic activities. Today, play turns out to be the number one ray of hope for the possibility of economic growth. Postindustrial society believes in monetary transactions being playful and relies upon exploiting the potential of such new forms of playfulness. Extremely hazardous economic transactions of so called 'big players' such as Northern Rock, Bank of Scotland, Lloyds, and Lehmann Brothers made it evident that gambling with huge financial resources was part of the daily banking business, the notion of "casino capitalism" (Strange, 1986) demystified the alleged seriousness of Wall Street and the finance sector. Gambler-stockbrokers turned out to be the new superheroes with enormous income and massive bonuses and the new super villains, who ruined thousands of clients, companies, and complete national economies in a fraction of a second. Other than the obsessive players of Dostoyevsky's novels, these gamblers were real and did not jeopardise their own fortune and future, but those of others. The gamification of the finance sector served as legitimisation for irrational risk-taking in economic transactions. According to Kuhnen and Knutson:

The relationship between affect and risk taking that we propose here suggests a possible explanation for asset bubbles and crashes. Positive returns in financial markets may induce a positive affective state and make investors more willing to invest in stocks, and more confident that they have chosen the right portfolio, which will lead to increased buying pressure and future positive returns.

To spell out the concrete events Kuhnen and Knutson refer to, it is the "relationship between affect and risk taking" that can be made responsible for the real estate crash and the financial crisis of 2002. It is however, also possible that this very correlation can be used to stabilise micro-economies or private households. Apps that increase

the efficiency of savings work with gamification mechanics, and software like *SaveUp* or *Punch the Pig* encourage their users to account carefully for their finances, make regular savings and stop irrational spending.

If play is good for our health, our working conditions and for our financial well-being, why should it not be possible to play our complete selves? Self-tracking and self-observation became the fashionable way of improving oneself. Whereas “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 1988) were centred around the care of oneself and used meditation and “gymnasia” (sports) in antiquity, modern technologies of the self were optimisation technologies that could be called “work on the self”. Mark Butler argues that we have now reached a point that when playing with ourselves replaces the before mentioned care of the self and the work with the selves (Butler, 2014). Jennifer Whitson identifies the playfulness in monitoring our bodies and emotions for the purpose of self-improvement:

There is already a game being played within everyday metering. Every time we imagine an action with multiple future outcomes, this becomes a game (see Malaby, 2007). For example, every time we prepare to step on a weigh scale, we play a game with ourselves: Will I be heavier? Have I lost weight? Have I hit my goal of losing two pounds? We frame our experiences in narratives of success and failure, and develop strategies for attaining victory (or evoke rituals such as the shucking out of clothes that may taint our results and praying for divine intervention).

(Whitson, 2013, p. 169)

Once these games become formalised and implemented on digital devices, play turns into an activity that gamifies aspects of our daily life. The reason for playing this kind of mini-games is a mix of curiosity, boredom, and a promise of trophies and prizes one is expected to be given. The gifts can rarely be monetised directly. They are either add-ons to the games played or they are access rights to services that one never did want to gain in the first place. My personal collection of gifts include a night in a five-star hotel in Dubai (if I get there at my own expenses), an upgrade from class C rental car to a class B rental car in Funchal (Madeira), a pair of men’s slippers, and a free ticket for a friend to go to a *Star Wars* movie (if I was so desperate as to go there myself and pay for it). The give-aways of gamification are like the presents you get from distant relatives at Christmas times. Worse than the teapots from old aunts, gamification prizes always serve the benefits of someone else (airlines that offer flights to Dubai or Madeira, an apartment store, a cinema that shows *Star Wars* movies). The presents are commodities in disguise. They are given away to get something back.

Free Gifts for All

A gift in a gamification context is never "le don" as Marcel Mauss conceived it emphatically (1923/24). The gamified *homo ludens* is just an advancement of the *homo economicus*. Marcel Mauss' gift and even more so George Bataille's excessive gift held a promise for the possibility to escape the cage of traditional economic reasoning. Mauss expresses his hope in the conclusions section of *Le Don*:

Fortunately, everything is still not wholly categorised in terms of buying and selling. Things still have sentimental as well as venal value, assuming values merely of this kind exist. We possess more than a tradesman morality.

(Mauss, 1990, p. 83)

But he is also sceptical about the possibility to escape the reciprocity of the gift and quotes an old Maori proverb, which is indicative of most of his ethnographic observations:

Ko Maru kai atu
Ko maru kai mai
ka ngohe ngohe.

'Give as much as you take, all shall be very well.'

(Mauss, 1990, p. 91)

Mauss was tempted, yet still hesitant to identify or predict a social configuration that would allow for an anti-utilitarian mechanism of gift-making beyond the limits of reciprocity. Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida, Alain Caillé, and the *Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales* (M.A.U.S.S.) went a step further in this regard (Strehle, 2009, p. 129). It is not hard to see whose groundwork it was that prepared the theories of M.A.U.S.S. Influenced by the very same author, Bataille developed his utopian model of an economy beyond reciprocal exchange. Bataille was hoping for a Copernican revolution that turns an economy of scarcity into one of excess: "Changing from the perspectives of *restrictive* economy to those of *general* economy actually accomplishes a Copernican transformation: a reversal of thinking—and of ethics" (1991, p. 25). Bataille identifies the gift, excessive play, and sexuality as areas where this 'general economy' can already be observed nowadays. The French philosopher thinks of playing games in the wider sense as a nucleus of emancipation.

One hundred and forty years earlier, Karl Marx already played with the possibility that labour could escape the state of alienation and drudgery that it needs to have under capitalist relations of production. In *Excerpts from James Mill's Book "Éléments d'économie politique"*,

Marx sketches an utopian mode of economic relations that is not based on reciprocity of equivalent value exchange. "Let's assume we would have produced as humans. My work would be free expression of life and life's craving. It would therefore also be the enjoyment of living" (Marx, 1981, p. 462).

In such a situation, giving would be part of the craving and every gift would be a deliberate present. The reason to give would then not be to exchange and get back, but to just give. Samuel Strehle analyses this proposal from the viewpoint of human history:

I give for the reason of giving, not of receiving. The communist liberation of man from his 'prehistory', the leap of mankind from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom is essentially the liberation from reciprocity.¹

(Strehle, 2009, p. 144)

Theoreticians like Marx, Bataille, and, to some degree, Mauss were desperate to identify an element in society that would have the potential to disrupt or to even break open this cage of necessities effected by the system. Marcel Mauss (1923/24) believed that a fundamental quality of human interaction should exist outside the rationality of exchange and of monetary interest. Giving away without any expectation for payback allows us to act in a way that is non-alienated and differs considerably from the exchange of commodities with the aim of profit making. George Bataille's (1975) perspective on economic structure used the concept of the gift developed by Mauss to support his affirmation of the possibility of human sovereignty within economic systems. For Georges Bataille, play was one of the conceivable frameworks that foster a type of sacrifice that resembles a gift. The game in a Huizingian (1938) sense of a free activity was therefore interpreted as opposed to alienated work. *Gaming* and *labour* would be diametrically opposed, and the 'sacred' within play was a source of hope to escape the master-slave dialectic of capital-labour relationships. Bataille did not phrase it in this way, but his theory suggests that gaming could change society in a positive way.

Bad Gamification

The question at stake here is, whether games actually change our society in such a way that work turns into play or whether it is just an ideological misconception that makes us think the former could be the case. There are good reasons to think of gamification as ideology. Gamification is intended to raise the profits of companies, and is said to do so at a staggering rate. Gabe Zichermann, one of leading industry consultants estimates that "Gamification techniques can increase

productivity of employees by 40%" (Zichermann, 2013). As this rise in productivity is achieved under prevailing economic settings, there is obviously nothing to gain for labour. The profits remain on the side of capital. The necessities of the system guarantee what Louis Althusser describes as the reproduction of production relations ensured by the wage system (Althusser, 1971). It is due to "ideological apparatuses" like the one we call gamification that relations of production are not questioned, but are reproduced to increase the profit rate.

It is not always apparent on the level of individual gamification projects to see how the seemingly well-intended efforts to save water, cure diseases or increase health are linked and embedded into the whole of the "ideological state apparatuses" (Althusser, 1971). The extension of play into all kinds of nongaming contexts leads to an overaccumulation of play. This is to say that play loses its liberating dynamics and turns into a phase that is characterised by quantitative increase of games and gaming up to the level of play congestion. A situation could arise where the system's capacity to cope with further increase of playfulness is exhausted. This might lead to a qualitative leap that turns diversity into totality and free play into total play. As a perversion of the original play drive that is sensuous, liberating and free, a mode of total gamification could be prefigured where games are the new normal and where games are the only normal. It can be observed already in our decade that games are given a general license to be the solution to any conceivable problem. In his famous statement "Games are the New Normal" (Gore, 2011), the former vice president Al Gore paved the way for a general pardon for the impact of games and for a license for games (and the games industry) to proceed and expand without limits. Exclusive normality leads to totality. "Total gamification" (Fuchs, 2015) would describe a situation where all human and technical resources have to be gamified. In regard to human resources, we are already facing a situation where the old and the young, men and women, various ethnic groups and a huge reserve army of minorities and niche population are drawn into the gaming arenas. The main games industries work with their brothers in arms of the indie games industry to incessantly recruit new audiences: the homeless, black teenage mums, those with depression or Alzheimer's. But also on a technical level, total gamification takes its toll. In his essay, *Gamification as the Post-Modern Phalanstère*, Flavio Escribano describes a sector of gamification that he calls "technological gamification" (Escribano, 2012, p. 206–207). This is a type of gamification that is triggered and driven by technological innovation. Escribano's concept is reminiscent of Huizinga's complaint about play "being technically over-organized" (Huizinga, 1936, p. 177).

Escribano describes how large-scale simulations, medical research, sports training, or military operations are run on games technology to

benefit from its ease of use, low cost, efficiency, legal status, and design appeal. One of the examples of “technical gamification” Escribano unmasks as serious and evil business done with allegedly harmless play-tools is the case of former Iraq authorities having bought 4,000 PlayStation 2 consoles to evade the computer embargo imposed upon Iraq in 2000. “Intelligence agencies suspected the hardware of these consoles was to be used to create a computer capable of controlling the trajectory of missiles equipped with chemical warheads” (Escribano, 2012, p. 206).

Good-looking Bad Gamification

Are there conceivable situations, when gamification seems to be all right and still it is not right at all? When Jane McGonigal (2012a) promises the audience of the popular TED talks to increase the live expectancy of every single person in the room by 10 years, if they invested in playing more often, she is of course telling a lie. But her statement, which is firmly and intentionally integrated within the ideology of gamification, carries a philanthropic utopian promise that connotes with moral statements, quasiempirical data, and light philosophical speculation. Nobody cares whether one year, 10 years, 11 years, or no time at all of added lifetime results from her gamified self-control therapy. And nobody will ever know. This is the nature of ideological statements: Whether they are true or false does not really matter. What matters here is an ensemble of references (“I am a game designer”), of status symbols (TED talks), of power (research and development director of the Institute for the Future), commitment to rationality (“I have maths to prove this”), and an endearing naïveté that announces big changes to come with only minimal efforts to be undertaken.

It is for these mentioned reasons why we suggest to conceive of gamification as the latest form of ideology. When the evangelists of gamification tell us that work must be play, that our personalities will be playful, that the whole economy is a game, and that each and every activity from cradle to grave can be turned into a game, we encounter false consciousness that is socially necessary. Today, gamification is used to tell people that if reality is not satisfactory, then at least play might be so. McGonigal (2011) phrased this aptly in her popular proposal that “reality is broken”. Replacing reality-based praxis with storytelling, gaming, self-motivation, or ‘self-expansion escapism’ (Kollar, 2013) is what Marx and Engels would have labelled as ideology. McGonigal’s ‘When we’re playing games, we’re not suffering’ (McGonigal, 2012b) is the cynical statement of somebody who is definitely not suffering economically and has probably little reason and even less time to play games any longer.

There are two complementary reasons to rightly classify gamification as ideology:

- 1 Gamification is false consciousness: The proposition that game design elements can change the nature of labour and successfully cope with exploitation, "alienation" (Zichermann & Linder, 2013), or "suffering" (McGonigal, 2012b) is proven on the basis of subjective assessment or mere speculation and not based on empirical economic analysis.
- 2 Gamification is socially necessary: Concluding from market analysis and market predictions data that Saatchi & Saatchi, Gartner, and Ernst & Young offer, the industry needs to implement gamification in most of the sectors that drive our economy. It will, therefore, be mandatory for consumers and prosumers to embrace gamification as well. Gamification is not a choice; it is necessary for the political economy of this decade.

Ideology works best when it distorts reality in such a way that we do not notice the distortion because everything seems to be all right. Although in fact a mistaken identity and a unification of play and labour serve the needs of the economic system, the ideas of ideology make it appear natural. It makes the subordinate classes accept a state of alienation against which they would otherwise revolt. This state of alienation has also been referred to as 'false consciousness.' In the closing chapter of Alfred Sohn-Rethel's *Intellectual and Manual Labour* (1978), the author invokes the concept of "necessary false consciousness." This is a type of false consciousness that is not just faulty consciousness. Necessary false consciousness is rather a type of false consciousness that is logically correct. However cruel, meaningless, or destructive it might seem, it is necessary for the system in which we are working to keep working until we die, so that we will shop until we drop.

It might be useful at this point to ask why such a complex phenomenon like gamification has to be installed, made popular and disseminated widely to warrant for the stability of the relations of production. In traditional Marxist understanding an ideology generally refers to theory that is out of touch with material processes of history. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels observe that the ruling ideas of an epoch "are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas" (Marx & Engels, 2004, p. 64). They are the "Illusion of the Epoch". If we consider gamification as a ruling idea of our times and society, very much like "morality, religion, metaphysics" (Marx & Engels 2004, p. 64) have been ruling ideas for an earlier time and society, then gamification seems to the people to define and design material

reality. According to Marx and Engels, it is the other way round. People believe that gamification efforts would redesign the health system, would create new financial opportunities, and would reconfigure working conditions. But this is ideology: false consciousness. It is instead true – according to Marx – that the production relations and the ensemble of means of production create ideas – like gamification – that become dominant ideas. Louis Althusser's concept of the "ideological state apparatuses" advances from the classical concept of ideology as false consciousness. Althusser rejects the concept of ideology as a distorted representation of reality by which the dominant elite cynically exploits the working classes, as a simplification. For him ideology is much more than a set of instrumental lies. Althusser proposes that all consciousness is constituted by and necessarily inscribed within ideology. Neither the elite nor avant-garde under-class intelligentsia can develop "true consciousness". Ideology as "necessary false consciousness" is a superstructure with a high degree of autonomy. Gamification can be seen as a part of this immense superstructure. In this context gamification is a mechanism for producing certain social practices. Bonus systems in supermarkets, playful communication on *Facebook* and other social media platforms, hotel booking with multiple-star ranking (Schrape, 2014, p. 21–46) or academic research incentives in the form of board games (Fuchs, 2014) are such social practices. As a result of first suggesting and then producing ways of being they also circulate forms of understanding the 'real'. In this way, gamification has a productive role in ideology formation.

Conclusion

I hope to have demonstrated that the complexity of the gamification phenomenon asks for an assessment that is multilayered and goes beyond simplifying assumptions of gamification being either just good or exclusively bad. There are elements of necessity and falseness dialectically interwoven into gamification processes that make them less enjoyable than a "pleasure revolution" (Schell, 2011) and more complex than "bullshit" (Bogost, 2011). If we agree to analyse gamification as an ideological state apparatus we must understand that gamification has a productive role in the formation of our selves and of consciousness at large.

It would be too simple to stop at a point where Adorno criticised the "repetitiveness of gaming" as nothing but "an after-image of involuntary servitude" (1984, p. 401; Adorno, "Nachbild von unfreier Arbeit", 1970, p. 371). One would also have to advance from Walter Benjamin's observation that the gamer's actions resemble those of the proletarian worker as they perform what is derived of all meaning: "drudgery of the player" ("Fron des Spielers", 1939, p. 72–73). Gamification has meaning and produces meaning in its role as ideology. An important transformation

taking place in society and being reflected and promoted by gamification is the subsumption of play under the relations of production.

Aware of that Jürgen Habermas wrote his ultimate antigamification statement in the 1950s, when he told us in a somewhat melancholic mood: "And where it ever had existed, the unity of work and play dissolved" (1958/59, p. 220). Habermas is here the voice of the Frankfurt Critical School but also the voice of a materialist and Marxist view on the relation of labour and play. It is not by chance, therefore, that Habermas shares the belief promoted by Benjamin and Adorno that labour and play are two different things that certainly have an influence on each other, but that never can be harmonised as one.

Ultimately, the attempt to harmonise play and labour is ideology. Gamification that has at its core the suggestion that work can be fun is therefore caught in the trap of a self-contained ideological system that is in synch with the development of the relations of production of our society. 'Work is Play' might sound spectacular and enjoyable, but it is untrue because of its nature as necessary false consciousness.

Note

- 1 transl. MF, orig.: "Das Geben selbst wird zum Bedürfnis und jede Gabe in gewissem Sinne zur Simmel'schen 'ersten Gabe', ja zum Geschenk aus freien Stücken. Ich gebe, um zu geben, nicht um zu erhalten. Der kommunistische Ausgang des Menschen aus der bloßen 'Vorgeschichte', der 'Sprung der Menschheit aus dem Reich der Notwendigkeit in das Reich der Freiheit' ist in seiner Essenz der Ausbruch aus der Reziprozität."

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