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Introduction
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INTRODUCTION

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This book is about gamification, and much more. The publication intends to explore the concept of gamification, its history and applications, its implications for theory and practice. It also aims at doing more than simply mapping a trend, or providing guidelines for the design of gamification apps. In this book the concept of gamification will be rethought, through several distinct approaches and a multitude of questions.

But first, what is gamification? Gamification can be approached in at least two ways. First, as a general process in which games and playful experiences are understood as essential components of society and culture. From this perspective we could look at how practices and rituals, belonging to different historical and cultural contexts, might take the form of or resemble a game. Roger Caillois, while drawing on anthropology, biology and the study of myths, has shown how the playful might in fact belong to living beings of any kind, and not be limited to the human sphere. It might also be less of a process of rationalisation, and more of an instinctive reaction to the surrounding environment, a form of adaptation that connects life and death into one single thing (Caillois 1960, 1961 and 1964). Before him, Johan Huizinga had already argued that play is an essential component in

the formation of societies and civilisation (1949 / 1938). From this perspective, gamification may be viewed as a much broader phenomenon, and as a concept not nearly as novel as many would have us believe.

More recently, however, gamification has also been used to describe a much more limited practice. This second and more widely-known meaning has been brought forward by marketing gurus and designers over the last few years. It is this latter sense that has led to a great number of definitions on gamification. It is also this second meaning that drives us to discuss gamification in the context of this publication. Sebastian Deterding, Rilla Khaled, Lennart Nacke and Dan Dixon have proposed a tentative history of the term: "'gamification' as a term originated in the digital media industry. The first documented use dates back to 2008, but gamification only entered widespread adoption in the second half of 2010" (Deterding et al. 2011, 1).

In other publications we can read that extensive use of the term has been reported from 2010, but its origins are probably to be found in a British consultancy company, Conundra Ltd., founded in 2003 by Nick Pelling, a game designer, who claimed to be specialising in gamification (Werbach and Hunter 2012). The no longer active Conundra Ltd. focused on helping "manufacturers evolve their electronic devices into entertainment platforms" (Conundra Ltd. 2014). Its core business focused on advising companies interested in attracting new customers on the implementation of game features into the companies' products and services. This type of activity was called "gamification" on Conundra's website (ibid.). More recently the idea of "gamifying" a business seems to have re-emerged, not necessarily directly as a result of Pelling's first attempt but in a very similar vein.

Over the last few years the marketing and consultancy sectors have been promoting gamification as a potential source of revenue. This period has also witnessed the emergence of several events and publications that have contributed to defining gamification. Gabe Zichermann's and Cristopher Cunningham's book *Gamification by Design: Implementing Game Mechanics in Web and Mobile Apps* (2011) is one of the most popular in the business context, as is Zichermann's website *Gamification.co* and the associated annual conference Gamification Summit held annually in San Francisco since 2011. Jane McGonigal's work, expounded in her contribution at the TED Talk series in 2010, is also concerned with "selling" gamification to corporations. In her book *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How*

They Can Change the World (2011) she mostly looks at her own work as a consultant for McDonald's, the Olympic Games organising committees, and other companies for whom she organised marketing campaigns based on alternate reality games. In McGonigal's view, gamification is not only a new goldmine for designers and business people; it is also a tool that has the power to change the world.

In her understanding, gamification is a concept that describes a new age where gamers can collectively use their problem-solving skills not only to solve puzzles within a digital game but also to approach social and political issues in the real world. Gaming, according to McGonigal's vision, could and should play a redeeming role. Game designers could become the new social entrepreneurs, and citizens become gamers. From this perspective, gamification thus becomes a technique for enabling greatly ambitious change. Reporter Alex Konrad on the Fortune segment of *CNN Money* described gamification as a sort of new "Wild West" on the 17th of October 2011: "gamification is the *hot* new business concept, with many of the world's most admired companies signing on" (Konrad 2011).[1] On the 10th of October Rachel Emma Silverman of the *Wall Street Journal* also declared that companies all over the world were already jumping onto the gamification bandwagon (Silverman 2011).

It seems that gamification is now the keyword for a generation of social entrepreneurs and marketing experts, in perfect and timely combination with the re-evaluation of participatory practices (as also recorded in the art and cultural sector, see Bishop 2012) and the trends of quantification and self-governance (often categorised under the label of the Quantified Self movement). Thus, the question remains: Does gamification need to be rethought? Is there something wrong with it? Or to put it differently, why do we need this book in the first place?

Let us start by saying that, according to its many promoters and "evangelists", there is nothing wrong with gamification at all. Quite on the contrary, although the keyword might now be a bit more rusty than a few years ago, consultancies and workshops on this topic are still popular, as well as academic courses and training programmes. In the blogs, workshops, and

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1   Konrad's emphasis.

publications on the topic it seems that gamification is working so well that the last thing it needs is second guessing. Consumer loyalty, issues related to finance and governance, workers' productivity, training and development – these are only some of the areas that are allegedly being positively revolutionised by the emergence of gamification.

However, if we have to summarise why gamification needs to be rethought in a sentence, it would be: Precisely because it "works". The number of statements produced in support of the rise of gamification and the wide adoption of this concept, in both private and public sectors, force us, thinkers and players, to consider what exactly is at stake in its emergence. What could it possibly be that makes such an enthusiastic narrative apparently fulfil itself so perfectly? How come the ideas surrounding gamification happened to confirm themselves with no need for further discussion?

The number of critiques of gamification is in fact already quite large. As outlined by Ian Bogost in several contexts (2011a, 2011b), gamification has little to do with the design of games (or an allegedly salvific process), and much more with the exploitation of consumers. It frustrates the practice of game design and reduces playing to a stimulus-response experience; whereas, games, and video games in particular, have been trying to differentiate and complicate the meanings of play in a digital culture. Gamification so far has been a bad word for those involved in the study and understanding of video games, as it has been associated with a process of appropriation of the values of digital gaming by marketing and business interests. It seems that gamification "works" only in the eyes of those who have been inventing and promoting it in the first place. In other words, gamification needs to either disappear or be rethought, if it wants to gain the respect of those who have been working with games over the last decades.

This book proposes to keep the word, but change its meanings and the ideas associated with it. While gamification might work just fine as it is now for those who have been evangelising about its redeeming properties, it is also too limiting a concept for conveying political statements, artistic values, educational content or any sort of unconventional message through games.

The first section of this book is a collection of articles that try to grasp how gamification appears to be rooted in a specific understanding of the concept of behaviour, as something to be affected through the design of a game-like environment. Behaviour has been extensively discussed in nu-

merous texts on gamification. Niklas Schrape proposes looking, through Foucault, at how gamification might work as a method to regulate individuals and their social lives. It also works as a pleasant regulator of behaviour because it offers positive feedback (rewards, leaderboards, etc.) rather than negative penalties (fines, prison, etc.). Schrape first looks at how airline frequent-flyer programmes operate. Extrapolating this example, he sketches a libertarian and dystopian society that would result from the domestication of human beings via governance mechanisms modelled on customer loyalty programmes, putting the very concept of democracy in crisis. In such a scenario, the very concept of free will can be disputed and questioned.

Paolo Ruffino looks instead at engagement, another keyword in the studies on gamification, and proposes to rethink the models underpinning the discourses on gamification and its capacity to affect the behaviour of players. Ruffino looks at the work of Tim Ingold and his reading of Bergson and Heidegger and argues that participation, dwelling and co-existence could be seen as alternative ways of thinking about engagement: less as a transitive process that goes from games to their players and more as an intransitive status that needs to be narrated in order to be of any value. He then proposes recuperating, from the theoretical perspective he offers, the notion of life itself, a topic rarely debated in relation to gamification, which could instead help us in the invention of a creative way of approaching games both in our playing and research practices. Ruffino explores the implications of switching the focus from the idea that games "affect us" on the possibilities offered by thinking of games as things we live with and within. He concludes by showing how some artistic projects could be seen as examples of different ways of being engaged with both video games and gamification.

Life and movement are also relevant in the following contribution by Maxwell Foxman, who provides a deep look at one of the most notorious gamified applications, Foursquare. The author's main concern is to explore what it is that drives players to engage with an app like Foursquare, and how it affects the ways in which movement and body presence are understood. He argues that Foursquare alters the experience of moving about on the streets of a city and establishes a form of communication based on bodily proximity. It is a form of expenditure, as Bataille would put it, which preserves competition and rivalry, but now entirely based on movement.

Joost Raessens examines how gamification could be seen in the context of a more general "ludic turn", which affects society and culture at many different levels. This century, Raessens notes, has seen several different kinds of "turns": We have seen the linguistic turn, the digital, followed by the material one and many others. To what extent could we say that we are now experiencing a playful turn – in the sense of a cultural shift that brings playful experiences to the centre of the use, design, and study of media and technologies? Raessens argues that this perspective could in fact be useful in understanding contemporary Western culture, drawing on several examples from a variety of contexts. Gamification could then be understood as another example of this more general process. The ludification of culture, as Raessens puts it, thus becomes a strategic concept for understanding and making sense of current changes in contemporary culture.

The second part of the book looks at the history of games as a potential source for formulating different definitions of gamification. Similarly to Raessens, Mathias Fuchs intends to put gamification into a cultural-historical context. Fuchs offers a retrospective on the use of games in various spheres of social life, including religion and economy. The ways in which games permeate these aspects of culture is not, according to Fuchs, a prerogative of the digital era. It is in fact an ongoing and continuous influence, which also generates similar forms of hysteria towards the ludicisation of society in different ages. Gamification becomes, through the historical overview offered by Fuchs, the name of a relatively recent development in a much longer process, whose origins are difficult to trace, but which nonetheless presents interesting similarities with the hopes and concerns raised today in the discourses surrounding gamification.

Points and rankings, another oft-debated part of gamification, are the subject of Felix Raczkowski's contribution. The author perceives this aspect as a legacy of behaviourism and psychiatry as these disciplines developed during the 1960s. He then argues that a critique of gamification has to deal with this theoretical heritage, which is not always made explicit but indeed nevertheless informs a great many of the current discourses on the topic. The author proposes, for instance, that the enthusiastic views on the effects of gamification and gamified apps might in fact be consistent with this background. The complex position of the player, who is mostly expected to follow precise guidelines in order to win the game, also raises issues about the

value of these kinds of playful practices since they appear to be capable of altering the user's behaviour. Raczkowski also suggests that gamification can and should be critiqued from an historical perspective, looking at the intricacies of its origins and the ideas that have made it possible, at one point in history, to institutionalise the practice of making games with the purpose of affecting players' behaviours.

The third section of the book looks at gamification in relation to the contexts of making and playing. This area is approached in different ways by the authors. Fabrizio Poltronieri brings to video games and gamification the concepts of communicology, apparatus, technical images, and post-history, as initially proposed by Vilém Flusser. An historical overview is presented from Flusser's perspective in order to argue that gamification might represent a phase in a post-historical era, one where the projection of realities on the natural world plays a dominant role. Poltronieri's proposal shows the potential for studying digital games in general by applying Flusser's theories, which he brilliantly presents and introduces to the readers in all their complexity. In this paper the context in which games are played and understood moves radically from the usual understanding of both video games and gamification, opening up many potential consequences for game studies.

Gabriele Ferri looks instead at competition and antagonism in gamification, at how these are usually presented in the apps and systems that rely on gamification techniques and how they have been understood thus far. Ferri proposes a semiotic perspective on the issue of competition, re-evaluating concepts such as the actant and the semiotic square. He also proposes distinguishing between what he calls "interstitial" and "exclusive" gamification; the former being an activity that is carried out simultaneously to other activities, and the latter being instead a text that completely absorbs the player. From this theoretical background, Ferri establishes some crucial distinctions in the varied field of gamification and explores how competition could become a key element in understanding the different values and meanings at stake while rethinking gamification.

Thibault Philippette offers a reading of gamification based on the work of Jacques Henriot and his *sciences du jeu* or "play studies", whose work, according to Philippette, could be used to reconsider some of the basic concepts of gamification as proposed by designers and gurus of the concept. The main problem Philippette is concerned with is the arbitrary distinction

between games and non-games, a distinction implied in the definition of gamification as the use of game elements in a non-game context. While this distinction is arbitrary, it also reveals a rather static view of games, which could instead become more interesting if opened up to other kinds of definitions. Philippette suggests the very idea that games that can influence the non-game context could be re-interpreted following Henriot's theories on play.

Daphne Dragona introduces the fourth section of the book, which is focused on forms of antagonism and opposition to gamification. Dragona illustrates what she defines as "counter-gamification". Counter-gamification is not a precise practice; it is not defined in guidebooks, workshops, or tutorials. It is instead a form of appropriation of playful elements by artists in order to promote radical and oppositional values. Dragona comments on several projects, less known than the marketed apps that strongly rely on gamification techniques, but still based on a game-like environment. Dragona's ambition is to map the territory outside the most well-known forms of gamification and expand it by including alternative practices of political disobedience that come to be organised as games. Dragona expresses the need to oppose the current trends of gamification and to expand what could potentially be defined as an alternative use of games. Dragona's main focus is on the effects of gamification on social networking sites and on the process of "datafication", which generates forms of resistance from users and artists.

Matthew Tiessen expands Dragona's perspective by asking to what extent gamification can be viewed as desirable by players and society in general. To what extent are gamification apps to be "played" rather than accomplished and fulfilled to receive pre-established rewards? How much enjoyment is expected from playing with gamified apps? If gamification is mostly about directing players' behaviour then it also results, Tiessen suggests, in the objectification of human agency and in the elimination of choice in the practices of playing. Gamification risks leaving players in a passive condition rather than giving them an active role in choosing how to change themselves and the worlds surrounding them.

The final part of the book explores issues related to design, with three important contributions that offer original ways of thinking about how to use gamification. The authors have in fact explored those techniques and

reinvented them in order to forge a new approach to the creation of playful environments. None of them offer a proper step-by-step guide, as might be expected in a typical gamification textbook. Instead, they discuss their experience and practice as a way of reimagining the use of games in a non-game context, and as a theoretical contribution to the debates on gamification.

Sonia Fizek looks at how gamification might look like in the "post-bullshit" era, when the focus on points, leaderboards and more generally on the one-size-fits-all approach will be over. Fizek argues that emergent playfulness, a concept she elaborates by drawing on the work of Eric Zimmerman mostly, might be a more interesting concept to look at, rather than the design techniques proposed so far by gamification experts. However, it is also a much more complex concept, difficult to grasp and yet more capable of capturing the interest of the players. Gamification gurus themselves, Fizek says and as has emerged in some of the most recent conferences on this topic, are not completely satisfied with the practice they are supporting and contributing to establish. There is a shared feeling that gamification, as it is now, might be missing the point, and be successful only in very precise and much more limited circumstances than what originally had been proclaimed possible. Fizek's proposal is to expand the concept of play and fun and to introduce new forms of engagement in the practice of gamification.

Scott Nicholson turns to the relation between "grinding", a concept mostly used in massively multiplayer online role-playing games, and gamification. Grinding consists of accumulating points and improving the player's statistics. Nicholson argues that many gamification apps and systems tend to re-purpose a similar approach in a different context. However, these specific types of role-playing games also have an "endgame" component, where players, once all has been achieved that could be possibly accomplished, continue to exploit the game's open-worldness, caring less for game tasks and focusing more on non-progression-motivated play. If the endgame approach were applied to gamification, Nicholson argues, we could see very different ways of designing and playing. The author explores these alternative modes of gamifying things through a text that offers both a theoretical understanding of gamification and exceptionally useful suggestions for designers.

Last but not least, Sebastian Deterding closes the publication with a re-interpretation of his original definition of gamification as the "use of game design elements in non-game contexts", as formulated with colleagues

Dixon, Khaled, and Nacke in 2011. Here he presents six critiques of the current dominant models for the understanding of gamification, starting from the deterministic models of game design that he considers to be replicated in this new context. Deterding proposes an optimistic view of gamification, that still preserves its transformative and critical values but from a more complex, relational, and emergent perspective. He names this new form of design "eudaimonic", an autotelic practice which is equivalent, in Aristotle's original view, to the "good life". The instrumental element that gamification all too often brings to games and work risks perpetuating a "bad life" instead, one where self-discovery and pleasure rarely happen. Instead, an eudaimonic view of gamification could bring a "good" way of living and playing, one where joy and satisfaction are at the centre of a responsible practice. Gamification, according to Deterding, could become the name of a play practice that truly helps human beings in fulfilling their own lives and those of others, but it needs to change in order to do this – it needs to be "rethought". His text can be read as a final and conclusive manifesto for anyone who is involved in gamification, from a theoretical or practical standpoint.

In conclusion, we hope this publication will revamp the debate on gamification as a much more general concept for the study and adoption of games, or game-like environments, and their influences in contemporary life. This is also the ambition and goal of our research centre, the Gamification Lab, where we have just started to investigate the many implications of game technologies, and their ethical, political, artistic, and educational values. We believe that gamification has the potential to become a common term for thinking about and doing games – both practices seen as dependent on and in communication with one another. We hope this book will raise questions on this subject and contribute to further innovative research directions for gamification.

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