Abstract

Gamification is often promoted as a user-centred initiative, engaging and motivating the alienated masses. Yet is such rhetoric reinforced by the design of these programs? By incorporating a diverse suite of theoretical frameworks that accounts for the social, cultural, and psychological effect of design features, this article argues that gamification too often invokes organisation-centred design, treating users as zombies: senseless mechanisms urged onwards by a desire for extrinsic rewards. Gamification still often fails to acknowledge the user’s context and innate psychological needs. This can be accomplished in practice through an incorporation of motivational psychology and a concurrent shift toward user-centred design, accounting for the situatedness of the participant. Further, this article claims that for gamification to reach its full, radical potential, it must not only transform the way the user is evaluated and rewarded but also the activity the subject is tasked with performing.

Keywords: gamification, motivation, self-determination theory, user-centred design, simulation, immanent critique

Achievement Unlocked: Zombie-Centred Design

Deterding et al. (2011a: 1) concisely define gamification as the use of game design elements in non-game contexts. As this analysis will illustrate, to offer a more accurate picture, this definition should perhaps be modified to ‘the use of game-like features in non-game contexts’; this is particularly true within enterprise gamification, as Raftopolous’ article in this issue outlines. Gamification.org (2013), the self-styled gamification industry wiki—exclusively sponsored by gamification provider Badgeville—offers such a definition of its activity:

Gamification typically involves applying game design thinking to non-game applications to make them more fun and engaging. Gamification has been called one of the most important trends in technology by several industry experts. Gamification
can potentially be applied to any industry and almost anything to create fun and engaging experiences, converting users into players.  

With examples:

- Unlocking badges in foursquare [sic] for visiting new or unique places.
- Earning points and unlocking avatars for DJing in virtual spaces.
- CrowdTap allows users to level up and earn money for doing surveys and other activities. (ibid.: online)

Gamification as an industry is set to generate 2.8 billion U.S. dollars by 2016, utilized by more than 70% of Global 2000 companies by 2014 (Workman 2013). Jane McGonigal’s Reality is Broken (2011), a treatise on gamification as a sort of panacea, is a global best-seller, whilst her TED talk (2010) on the subject has been viewed over three million times as of writing. Clearly, gamification is an important cultural trend with significant social and economic repercussions, underwritten by, as Mathias Fuchs mentions in this issue, a ‘necessary false consciousness’ (2014: forthcoming).

If we take the definition supplied above by gamification.org as an authentic reflection of industry praxis, we must question its basic ontological assumption: that fun and engagement are endogenic properties of games. It suggests that we can simply add gameness to an endeavour, sprinkling it on like so much spice, paradoxically in the form of reward structures exogenic to games such as trophies, badges, and achievement lists (Mosca 2012). This sits in stark contrast to much work on play, such as Piaget’s (1962) argument that play is an intrinsically rewarding activity, autotelic in that it is performed for its own purpose.

Consequently, implicit within the rhetoric espoused by gamification.org is a set of broad epistemological assumptions concerning the player: She understands the rule set and will enact it as prescribed, and extrinsic rewards motivate her to pursue the goal. At its extreme, this definition leads not only to a separation between game and player, which, as Mosca notes, is an enduring myth of game studies (2011: 3), but to a complete dismissal of the historical and socio-cultural locatedness of the player. This extends to much of gamification, which, borrowing Nicholson’s phrase, can be termed ‘organization-centred design’ (2012: 5) as opposed to user-centred design.

Further, many gamification projects, often titled ‘serious games’ or ‘educational games/games for education’, purport to improve learning and knowledge retention. But do
such designs offer constructive alignment and deep learning (Biggs 1996)? Do they facilitate engagement? Overall, how might current gamification design affect the worker’s, learner’s, or consumer’s motivation to perform the activity? Beyond its rhetorical vogue as marketing paradigm (or ‘bullshit’, as Ian Bogost observed [2011]), can gamification claim to offer anything beyond the thrill of consuming signs (Baudrillard 1998)? Can it encourage anything but maladaptive behaviour? Could it, in fact, demotivate the user?

This article will offer an immanent critique of certain gamification paradigms that propose to enhance user motivation and engagement. Immanent critique (via critical theory) seeks to illuminate the gap between ideology and practice ‘by revealing the contradictions of claim and context, to transform legitimations into emancipatory weapons. The goal is to replace the inaction based on the false correspondence with emancipatory praxis aimed at making the ideal real’ (Antonio 1981: 338). Simply put, the goal is to highlight dissonance between the emancipatory rhetoric of certain popular gamification providers versus the oppressive impact of their designs.

I ultimately argue toward three conclusions: firstly, that there can be value in applying game design features within non-game contexts, but only when aligned with a constructivist, user-centred design sensitive to the socio-cultural situation. Secondly, that the injection of explicit game-like features into areas of social reality traditionally separate from games, without consideration of the situation, can prove hazardous in a number of ways. Finally, for gamification to fulfil its premise, I argue that it must fundamentally transform the user activity rather than simply adding superpanoptical1 (Poster 1990) structures to the old.

To support this analysis, I build upwards from a game-ontology that includes the player as an essential property. In doing so, I draw upon a diverse set of theoretical perspectives: self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan 2000, 2002), ecological psychology (Linderoth 2012) and positive psychology (Csikszentmihalyi 2004), Baudrillard’s social critique (1998), Bourdieu’s concept of capital (1984), the sociology of Goffman (1986), Latour’s Actor-Network Theory (2005), the phenomenology of McLuhan (1964), and the anthropology of Turner (1982). I also draw broadly upon a number of perspectives from psychology, in particular Apter’s reversal theory and protective frame (1989).

Key concepts from SDT will be used within this article; therefore, I briefly outline its fundamentals. SDT proposes that three innate psychological needs underline human
motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Fulfilment of such needs has a direct influence upon an individual’s ‘development, performance, and well-being’ (Deci and Ryan 2000: 263). Autonomy is defined on ‘a phenomenological level [. . .] reflected in the experience of integrity, volition, and vitality that accompanies self-regulated action’ (Deci and Ryan 2000: 254). Anything that takes away one’s sense of control and choice is demotivational. Competence is the ability one has to succeed in meeting the goals of an activity; it is thus always relational, based upon the capacities of the actant within her environment as outlined within ecological psychology (cf. Linderoth 2012). Relatedness is defined as the feeling of connection to others: trust, love and care are all signifiers of a deep sense of relatedness (we may extend this to feeling connected to the goals and practices of an organization). These three innate needs will be expanded upon throughout the article.

Achievement Unlocked: Levelling Up

Identity, space, and time, already inextricably linked, are traditionally transfigured by play. As Turner has discussed (1985), tribal man is well aware of this. Turner articulates two modes of mass social engagement: the ritual-liminal and the industrial-liminoid. The former is prevalent in tribal society: festivals and ceremonies intimately connected to the seasons of nature, physical changes in tribe members (such as the onset of puberty) and so on. Conversely, the industrial-liminoid is the commodification of such phenomena, available daily (in sports stadiums, nightclubs and Zumba classes), disconnected from the rhythms of nature, from physical or social change in the person.

The ritual-liminal process of the tribe is suitably attuned, highly context sensitive: play is only allowed in particular times and spaces, often connected with the cycle of nature, during which participants assume altered identities. Conversely, the modern industrial-liminoid shows no such sensitivity, ‘as society increases in scale and complexity [. . .] these strands of symbolic action are torn from their original connection in ritual and become independent modes of expression’ (237), reconfigured for the needs of capitalism. Simulacra of the liminal, the liminoid genres ‘are not context-sensitive’ (243), often embedded within the everyday of post-industrial society.²

Confined by the cultural logic of capitalism, play within industrial-liminoid structures loses much of its transformative potency; games are often consumed, as an opium, a
distraction: ‘escapism’ in the most toxic sense. As touched upon within the introduction, Jane McGonigal (2011), perhaps gamification’s most visible proponent, supports in her work this idea of games as *nepenthe*, a drug for forgetting, since ‘reality is broken’ (ibid.). Games in modern times lose much of the former symbolism which demanded deference, even reverence: ‘it’s just a game’ would make little sense to the tribe.³

Building upon this industrial-liminoid trajectory, though the gamification movement claims to be fundamentally humanist, it is in fact the opposite. As the pinnacle of industrial-liminoid logic, it is often an organisation-centred design (Nicholson 2012) insensitive to the user. Instead of encouraging the participant through enhancing her autonomy, competency, and relatedness, the industrial-liminoid simply ignores or, at best, simulates such qualities. As deWinter et al. discuss in this issue, the organisation-centred design is predicated upon standardization: accounting for the unique (even brilliant) user is inefficient, and therefore such design parameters remain unattended.

To provide a concrete example, the monitoring and conveyance of ‘progress’ (as an employee, learner, or consumer) is often touted as a major innovation by various strands of gamification (Kleinberg 2011); from Hoopla to Badgeville’s suite of products to the SAP Community Network and others. Secure a new client, see it on the employee scoreboard; make ten calls in an hour, enjoy a ‘goal scored!’ animation and soundtrack; complete corporate training, earn points, unlock a badge. It is claimed that in this way, the worker is engaged and motivated—i.e. a more productive agent—as she gains a sense of advancement in her working life.

Yet in articulating ‘progress’ to employees, learners, and consumers through use of points, badges and levelling systems, gamification is in fact an engine for stasis: the liminoid masquerading as the liminal. In structuring work, learning, and consumer engagement through these features, gamification often creates nothing more than a Debordian spectacle of progress: What was once symbolic becomes pure semioticization (cf. Baudrillard 1996), and the subject is simply concerned with the consumption of signs (‘I’m now level 80!’) rather than being tied to the transformation of an individual’s comprehension, social status, or political relations. The user is encouraged toward a heterotelic mindset, only caring for the endgoal (the sign), rather than autotelic, valuing the activity in itself as a worthwhile endeavour (Piaget 1962). Whilst this form of extrinsic motivation may be successfully
applied to the most menial of employment, if applied to work of sufficient complexity and interest, it may actually devalue the activity and lessen one’s motivation.

Jakobsson (2011) offers an interesting autoethnographical account of such engagement in regards to digital game console achievement systems (Xbox Live Achievements/Playstation Trophies), whereby the extrinsic motivation of the achievement system began to dictate his engagement with games: He would only play games to gain achievements, and the autotelism of play was diluted. This is particularly evident in Jakobsson’s (ibid.) example of one player who built a machine (the ‘xbot’) to manipulate the console controller in his absence, earning more Xbox Live Achievements; the actual activity of play was, due to the introduction of achievements, devalued. The consumption of signs became the zombie-player’s entire goal, a compensatory motive for achievement that is often spawned from one’s need for relatedness being thwarted meanwhile, self-conception, development, and well-being often fail to progress (Deci and Ryan 2000).

Achievement Unlocked: Mundane Circles

Although, as Garry Crawford (2011) and others have convincingly argued, any theory which draws a sharp distinction between games and other areas of social life is myopic, I believe that, phenomenologically at least, such proposals are due a requiem of sorts. One of the main ways I contend that play maintains a separation from the everyday is the psychological concept of the protective frame, introduced by Michael J. Apter (1989). As Hook explains:

[A] protective frame around play [...] psychologically shields players from the ‘real world.’ Though this frame is located in the minds of participants, it sometimes attains physical representation, for example, by the arch of a theater or the boundary line in cricket [...]. The presence or non-presence of Apter’s frame may determine whether an emotionally potent experience can cause anxiety or arousal [...]. The frame is not always physically embodied—a rock climber’s confidence in his/her own skill and ability might constitute their protective frame. As a hobby, role-playing can also be considered a form of protective frame. (2012: 52-53, italics in original)

As Hook notes (ibid.), there are many correspondences between Huizinga’s (1971) concept of the magic circle and Apter’s (1989) protective frame; the key distinction being that the former
is the social contract that allows play and is therefore interpersonal, whilst the protective frame is wholly individual and optional for play.

Though the notion of the protective frame is not synonymous with games, I would argue that many games demand a much stronger protective frame than other activities if they are to be pleasurable as opposed to anxiety-inducing experiences: It is very hard to enjoy boxing if one has no training, and even then, confidence in one’s ability is also required.

A strong protective frame in games may demand a quite complex confluence of alliances and translations between objects (Latour 2005): not only a host of supporting equipment in the form of an appropriate setting and technical apparatuses but also a wealth of embodied knowledge, beliefs, and skills. This ties in very well to SDT, which defines competence as an innate psychological need. Competence has as ‘its proximal aim the pleasure in being effective’ (ibid.: 253), which supports Csikszentmihalyi’s (1988) criteria for entrance into the flow state: an acceptable match between an activity’s challenge and the user’s skill. If the player’s skill is too low, he experiences anxiety; if his skill is too high, he experiences boredom. If the participant is incompetent, a protective frame is very hard to sustain, and the flow state impossible to achieve. Due to being unable to fulfill her innate need for competence, the user may respond with various maladaptive, even neurotic compensatory behaviours (Deci & Ryan 2002).

Let us apply this to the fundamental design principles espoused by a gamification provider, and how such design defines and communicates competence. Hoopla (www.hoopla.net) proposes to ‘motivate individuals to achieve big goals, while improving communication and fostering team spirit’ via ‘tapping into the sales rep’s natural competitive spirit’ (ibid.). Organisation-centred needs such as generating sales, scheduling appointments, and call handling of workers are given as examples to be displayed via ‘sports-style leaderboards’ (Hoopla 2013: online) updated in real-time. This is Taylorism 2.0 (cf. deWinter et al., this issue) where activities are more rigidly defined and processed than ever: evaluated, quantified, transmitted, and crucially, displayed. Workers are explicitly depicted as against one another, and an instrumental mentality is encouraged (as discussed in the next section).

Activities valued by the company, therefore, are assumed to be held in equal esteem by the users, and competence is defined through these metrics. One’s protective frame in the workplace, which must include not only competence but a sense of job security and
relatedness to company goals, becomes wholly dependent upon these communiques. Commercial desire, now in high-definition, is transmuted into a kind of Weberian legal-rational authority (1997). That is to say the corporation’s needs are now articulated through the rationality of Big Data (Hutchins 2014), organization-centred metrics processed by organization-centred rules, coalescing into an all-encompassing bureaucratic process labeled gamification.

Let us consider the hypothetical employee experience under such conditions. The reification of very particular work processes creates a superpanopticon, ‘[d]atabases “survey” us without the eyes of any prison guard and they do so more accurately and thoroughly than any human being’ (Poster 1994: 184); the worker may not only feel intimately surveilled but compelled to participate. This could not just undermine a worker’s sense of competence (‘I thought I was doing ok, but I’m nowhere near first!’) and relatedness (‘I hate Bob for being in first place!’), it may also have an enormous impact upon the individual’s sense of autonomy: that she is not in control of her activity and cannot make meaningful choices relevant to her sense of self. As Poster offers, ‘nominal freedom of action is canceled by the ubiquitous look of the other’ (1990: 91).

The locus of control, ‘a personality trait that represents the extent to which people believe that the rewards they receive in life can be controlled by their own personal actions’ (Wang et al. 2010: 761), begins to feel external, which is highly demotivational (ibid.). An organisation-centred design must interpellate broadly (see deWinter et al., this issue), and in the case of Hoopla and others, this assumption crystallizes in an idealized zombie user, mindlessly driven by the company’s needs, perhaps at the cost of her own.

Of course it is common for workers to be extrinsically motivated, ‘in which people’s behavior is controlled by specific external contingencies’ (Deci and Ryan 2000: 236), e.g., by offers of remuneration. Yet money has an embeddedness within our culture unmatched by most other resources, often leading to internalization: ‘people will identify with the importance of social regulations, assimilate them into their integrated sense of self, and thus fully accept them as their own’ (2000: 236).

The semiotic potency of money, so fundamental to Western society, is partially internalized by the participant as an essential facet of day-to-day life. Therefore, it is not an extrinsic reward comparable to the points and badges offered by many gamification
providers; these kinds of weak incentives have been analyzed by motivational psychologists and were found to be injurious to intrinsic motivation (see Deci et al.’s meta-analysis [1999]). Employee management based on this kind of incentive structure undermines every innate need crucial to development, performance, and well-being, and could prove to be much more demotivational over time than prior strategies, potentially meaning higher rates of burnout and turnover. As Bartle’s (1996) ‘four suits’ model is often used within gamification design (gamification.org 2013), let us say that, hypothetically, whilst achievers and killers may enjoy such an environment, socializers and explorers could endure significant disheartenment.

**Achievement Unlocked: Instru-Mental!**

The infiltration of money into gameworlds is traditionally a movement viewed as unethical, hence the illegality of gambling in many nations. Clearly, the gamification of a workforce faces similar issues: if one’s workplace is ‘gamified’ and the worker’s value (and often wage) is explicitly tied to particular performance metrics, there is a clear incentive for one to reach the set objectives over the observance of rules, i.e., cheating. This is perhaps most recently exemplified in the behaviour of Wall Street traders, which contributed to the global financial crisis of 2007-08. In the lead-up to the crisis, the pursuit of the goal (financial bonuses) took such precedence over the observance of rules (e.g., assuring the fidelity of game resources) that an absurd endgame became inevitable as the ‘irrational exuberance’ (Shiller 2005) of investors ended, and the unregulated, disingenuous resources lost a staggering amount of their previous value.

Even when such strong incentives are not so socially significant as to encourage cheating, their deployment may affect intrinsic motivation. As Deci et al. (1999) have found, extrinsic rewards ‘tend to have a substantially negative effect on intrinsic motivation. Even when tangible rewards are offered as indicators of good performance, they typically decrease intrinsic motivation for interesting activities’ (658-59). Thus The SAP Network’s points or Badgeville’s Behaviour Platform (2014) badges are equally likely to decrease intrinsic motivation, at best instrumentalizing the participant’s behaviour in pursuit of more extrinsic rewards.
Intrinsic motivation is intimately tied to the locus of control, part of one’s sense of autonomy. As we have discussed, external rewards can cause a shift in an individual’s sense of the locus of control, as moving away from the person towards the source of the reward. Following this, the individual may question the inherent value of the work and his or her attitude towards it. An instrumental mentality may, therefore, become exaggerated when the structuring element of the extrinsic reward is offered. Once this particular Pandora’s Box is opened, it can never be closed; as even proponent of gamification Gabe Zichermann acknowledges, ‘once you start giving someone a reward, you have to keep her in that reward loop forever’ (Zichermann and Cunningham 2011: 27).

The workplace and classroom are already areas of social reality that can be viewed, superficially, as containing certain structural elements that correspond to ludus design (Caillois 2001): participating (working/studying) for points (wage/grade) within an environment where special rules pertain. This is, of course, what makes businesses and schools such obvious clients for the gamification zeitgeist. Yet in simply adding further points systems, the designer may in fact demotivate the employee or learner whilst also increasing anxiety and stress through the increased monitoring, assessment, and competition that such schemata demand, as Deci and Ryan (1999) illustrated. Grades in the traditional American school system can already have a similar effect; indeed Anderson et al.(2002) found that grade retention was rated by students as more stressful than the loss of a parent. If gamification designers heat up (McLuhan 1964) the situation further via the superpanopticonal structure of pointsification (Mosca 2011), the workplace or classroom may become a site for further stress. To truly apply game design to the situation, the user’s activity should transform alongside the points system: She should not be awarded a badge for passing an exam; she should be performing the task in entirely new ways.

**Achievement Unlocked: It’s Gettin’ Hot in Here!**

Inspired by jazz, Marshall McLuhan wrote on the phenomenology of media consumption as either ‘hot’ or ‘cool’ (1964): the former is high definition, filling the sense (or senses) with information, requiring little interpretation; the latter is low definition, requiring much interpretation to metamorphose into comprehensible data. In this way, games are a
McLuhan-esque (ibid.) heating-up of a cool social reality; identity, relations, space and time in high definition. Piaget articulates this well, employing the terminology of Freud:

Conflicts are foreign to play, or, if they do occur, it is so that the ego may be freed from them by compensation or liquidation whereas serious activity has to grapple with conflicts which are inescapable [. . .]. In play, however, the conflicts are transposed in such a way that the ego is revenged, either by suppression of the problem or by giving it an acceptable solution [. . .] the ego dominates the whole universe in play. (1962: 149)

That is to say, if social relations are regularly cool (team-mates and rules are ambiguous, resources unclear, possible outcomes uncertain, space-time diffused), often causing psychological conflict, then games are hot (team-mates, rules, resources and potential outcomes are usually made clear to the player, space-time is often delineated), offering a sense of clarity and psychological comfort. In many ways, this can be mapped to Richard Dyer’s outlining of the utopian bent of entertainment: an engagement where relationships are transparent, intense, energetic, and offer a clear sense of belonging (1978: 4-5). This of courses ties very well to SDT’s innate needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Though still in trial stages within the United States, initiatives are afoot to reform modes of educational assessment. An example is the digital game Refraction (Center for Game Science 2010), designed by a team led by professors Zoran Popović and Erik Andersen at the University of Washington to teach fractions to children. In this tile-puzzle game, the player is required to aid marooned, animal-filled spaceships by configuring the direction and power of a laser beam using many puzzle pieces. Designed from the ground-up to take consideration of its intended user, Refractions employs a colourful cartoon aesthetic, combined with a simple game dynamic (tile placement) that offers increasingly complex, multivarious results; different routes to the power source supported by a variety of tile combinations that offer a wide range of scores. In this manner, it is very much a constructivist learning environment (CLE), ‘a place where people can draw upon resources to make sense out of things and construct meaningful solutions to problems. Adding “constructivist” [. . .] emphasizes the importance of meaningful, authentic activities’ (Wilson 1996: 3). This is a balanced application of gamification: the activity is transformed alongside the evaluation.
This kind of user-centred learning is very much within the mould of Dewey’s earlier constructivism: ‘all principles, by themselves are abstract. They become concrete only in the consequences which result from their application’ (1997: 20). Such design, taking account of the user’s situation and needs may lead to full integration of extrinsic motivation, ‘identifying with the importance of behaviors but also integrating those identifications with other aspects of the self [...] bringing them into harmony or coherence with other aspects of their values and identity’ (Deci and Ryan 2000: 236).

Such gamified learning is not only for younger demographics. In personal correspondence with a commercial airline pilot, it was highlighted how training simulators mandatory for qualification ‘absolutely make you a better pilot’ as ‘[f]lying is so procedure based that it allows you to practice without shedding out loads of cash to actually fly, not to mention the safety factors involved’ (Paul Whittingham, personal communication, 9 December 2013). The pilot even commented upon the value of consumer-oriented flight simulators, such as Microsoft’s Flight Simulator X (Microsoft Game Studios 2006), stating that ‘people use it to assist in their initial training, I can even fly a 737 on there pretty realistically, and it could improve my flying’ (ibid.).

Again, by aligning the system design with an understanding of the user’s needs and situation, extrinsically-motivated learning is integrated and identified with. Instead of autonomy being undermined, it is supported, and therefore competence may be achieved without subsequent demotivation.

**Achievement Unlocked: You’ve Reached The Conclusion!**

Intrinsically motivating activities are founded upon a need ‘for competence and self-determination [...] an optimal amount of psychological incongruity’ (Malone 1980: 3), which ideally is associated with the experiencing of the ‘flow state’ (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi 1988), an optimal balancing of challenge and skill. Moving from the micro-level of the individual to the macro of the social, Csikszentmihalyi further remarks:

A starting point would be to say that one society is ‘better’ than another if a greater number of its people have access to experiences that are in line with their goals. A second essential criterion would specify that these experiences should lead to the
growth of the self on an individual level, by allowing as many people as possible to develop increasingly complex skills. (78)

Such constructive alignment (Biggs 1996) of the user’s experience with his or her goals requires a design that begins with the person as opposed to the organisation. Gamification must show consideration of the innate psychological needs of its participants and the situation they are embedded within, as Deterding offers vis-à-vis his concept of situated motivational affordances:

Situated motivational affordances describe the opportunities to satisfy motivational needs provided by the relation between the features of an artifact and the abilities of a subject in a given situation, comprising of the situation itself (situational affordances) and the artifact in its situation-specific meaning and use (artifactual affordances).

(Deterding 2011b: 3)

If gamification service providers such as Hoopla, Badgeville and the like persist with an organisation-centred design (Nicholson 2012), insensitive to the participants and their need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, then personal development and well-being may suffer. At best, such designs offer a simulacrum of games and of psychological needs, fulfilling instead compensatory motives ‘that do not really satisfy the thwarted basic needs but provide some collateral satisfaction’ (Deci and Ryan 2000: 249). This is, to use Fuchs’ eloquent turn of phrase in this issue, not homo ludens but homo economicus.

In this way, gamification as it currently exists is at best a nepenthe. At worst, it simply treats the user as a zombie: a mindless automaton devoid of innate psychological needs. Instead, if by starting with the user, gamification design transforms the activity of participants as opposed to simply overlaying old activities with new signifiers, then it may still prove a worthwhile endeavour. Indeed, if it can transform workplace and classroom activity to constructively align with the above-mentioned needs, it could even become the liberative force it currently feigns to be.

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1 In using ‘superpanopticon’ Poster is building upon Foucault’s metaphorical adoption of the ‘panopticon’: the disciplinary and observational tendencies of modern society taken to a logical extreme through technologies of surveillance.

2 For further explorations of these concepts, see Crawford’s cogent critique of the magic circle (cf. 2011).

3 The implications of this are discussed further in the section ‘Achievement Unlocked: It’s Gettin’ Hot In Here!’