

# Punctuated Play: Revealing the Roots of Gamification

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## ABSTRACT:

Even at the apex of its hype cycle in the 2010s, game studies scholars and designers derided gamification. This article first explores why gamification inspired such vitriol. It finds the incursion of non-game corporations and entities into the field was a threat to those who fought so ardently to legitimize the profession and promote a more playful or ludic 21<sup>st</sup> century. The article then delves deeper into the literature of play to redefine what occurs when a player engages with a gamified app, such as the social media application *Foursquare*. It rescripts their activity as 'punctuated play', or when the competition, conflict, glory, and other aspects of traditional play pierce a moment but do not necessarily define it.

## KEY WORDS:

Foursquare, game design, game studies, gamification, ludology.

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# Introduction

The rise of the term *gamification*, or „the use of game design elements in non-game contexts“,<sup>1</sup> was almost a rhetorical inevitability given the massive growth of games in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As digital games pervaded mobile technology and digital game platforms assumed a multitude of functions, it is unsurprising, from an entrepreneurial standpoint, that they might open new avenues for motivating and enticing users. Less expected was the vitriolic reaction to gamification from game studies scholars, who tended to criticize the concept for, among other reasons, its corporate affiliations. However, these same scholars acclaimed the ubiquity of play outside the realm of digital games and their dissemination into all facets of everyday life. They predicted that the 'ludic' or playful quality of games would become integral to contemporary media systems and social order. This article scrutinizes the literature surrounding gamification during the peak of its hype cycle – from 2010 to 2013 – to establish its relationship to game studies and, more specifically, to reveal how the term blurs the lines between frivolous and 'serious' ludic approaches to games. Critics considered gamification as merely an imposition upon their discipline. Since then, gamification has grown into a robust, even 'mature'<sup>2</sup> research area. However, adherents still advocate for further theorization around the concept and more clarity about its place within game studies. I argue this ambiguity is a repercussion of that early moment when gamification seemingly repudiated some foundational game studies concepts espoused by designers, such as the 'magic circle' and the 'frame' of play. These too rigidly account for the type of activity occurring within gamification; instead, it is a form of 'punctuated play' that unexpectedly pierces the everyday experiences of participants with brief, yet meaningful, ludic moments.

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- 1 DETERDING, S., KHALED, R., NACKE, L. E., DIXON, D.: Gamification: Toward a Definition. In *CHI 2011 Gamification Workshop Proceedings*. New York : ACM, 2011, p. 1. [online]. [2020-07-28] Available at: <<http://gamification-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/02-Deterding-Khaled-Nacke-Dixon.pdf>>.
  - 2 NACKE, L. E., DETERDING, S.: The maturing of gamification research. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2017, Vol. 71, No.1, p. 452.

# Gamification and Its Discontents

Before evaluating the impact and character of gamification, it is necessary to dissect the term's meaning during this seminal period. S. Deterding and his colleagues' often cited definition came from an article meant to establish gamification's place within the context of play and serious games fashioned for instruction about subjects like climate change and history. They characterized game elements as parts of games, while "complete game[s] would be produced by a game designer". Similarly, non-game contexts encompassed situations outside of the "normal expected use for entertainment". Additionally, S. Deterding et al. emphasized the voluntary nature that surrounded play in gamification. The difference between 'play' and 'use' for any given player depended on 'perceptions and enactments' of the applications and situations that were gamified.<sup>3</sup> Almost anything can be 'gamified' based on user perception. Are the gold stars meted out in a classroom a type of gamification or a reward? What rewards are 'characteristic' to games?<sup>4</sup> The article's quintessential example, the location-based social networking application *Foursquare*,<sup>5</sup> in which users *checked into* particular locations in order to collect virtual badges and points to compete on an arcade-style leaderboard, might or might not be considered a game, based on who uses it.<sup>6</sup> Tensions between games and gamification have persisted despite the rapid growth of research, particularly by those in human computer-interaction and information systems,<sup>7</sup> as well as professions like business and education.<sup>8</sup> Beyond drawing inspiration from 'fully-fledged games',<sup>9</sup> as well as engaging users, definitions of gamification are inconsistent; for instance, G. Baptista and T. Oliveira identify 'several distinct definitions' that include everything from design to service and product enhancement, and even a driver of user/customer behaviour.<sup>10</sup>

Defining the concept has been problematic from its inception. In 2012, M. J. Nelson, eschewing the design viewpoint, searched for gamification's historical predecessors, beginning with Vladimir Lenin's socialist competitions between factory workers that conferred points and medals, such as the *Order of the Red Banner of Labor*.<sup>11</sup> His second precursor resided in a movement in the 1980s by American businesses to make work like play, which served two interrelated goals: to substitute monetary bonuses with fun and to practice the belief that non-monetary motivations intrinsically make workers happy. This 'funsultant' model supported the conviction that behaviour can be incited or conditioned using the positive reinforcement of games.<sup>12</sup>

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3 DETERDING, S., KHALED, R., NACKE, L. E., DIXON, D.: Gamification: Toward a Definition. In *CHI 2011 Gamification Workshop Proceedings*. New York : ACM, 2011, p. 2. [online]. [2020-07-28] Available at: <<http://gamification-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/02-Deterding-Khaled-Nacke-Dixon.pdf>>.

4 Ibidem, p. 3.

5 *Foursquare. Where matters*. [online]. [2020-07-28] Available at: <<http://www.foursquare.com>>.

6 Remark by the author: The application has subsequently split into *Foursquare* and *Swarm*, the latter of which retains the points, badges and leaderboard.

7 For more information, see: KOIVISTO, J., HAMARI, J.: The rise of motivational information systems: A review of gamification research. In *International Journal of Information Management*, 2019, Vol. 45, No. 1, p. 191-210.

8 RODRIGUES, L. F., OLIVEIRA, A., RODRIGUES, H.: Main gamification concepts: A systematic mapping study. In *Heliyon*, 2019, Vol. 5, No. 7, p. 2-12. [online]. [2020-11-26]. Available at: <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2019.e01993>>.

9 SEABORN, K., FELS, D. I.: Gamification in theory and action: A survey. In *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 2015, Vol. 74, No. 1, p. 27.

10 BAPTISTA, G., OLIVEIRA, T.: Gamification and serious games: A literature meta-analysis and integrative model. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2019, Vol. 92, No. 1, p. 306.

11 NELSON, M. J.: Soviet and American Precursors to the Gamification of Work. In LUGMAYR, A. (ed.): *Proceedings of the 16th International Academic MindTrek Conference*. New York : ACM, 2012, p. 24. [online]. [2020-07-28] Available at: <<http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2115483>>.

12 Ibidem, p. 24.

Nelson contrasted these models with what he believed was the contemporary justification for the rise of gamification, namely that digital games and game mechanics had become normalized and embedded in everyday life. This divergent concept disclosed the paradox within *gamification* as a term: it at once presumed that play ameliorates the tedium of work, among other functions, while also associating work-based play with digital game history, scholarship, and industry, which generated nearly 75 billion USD in revenue worldwide at that time.<sup>13</sup> In a world saturated by digital games, it was almost impossible to see gamification outside of their shadow.

Perhaps it was the paradoxical affiliation between digital game scholarship and gamification strategy that caused game designers and scholars to bitterly attack the term. Among the most caustic was I. Bogost, who called gamification 'bullshit' in a piece for *The Atlantic* in which he denounced its corporate associations.<sup>14</sup> In a more comprehensive article, he detailed his censure; the gamified program acted as a superficial 'confidence trick'<sup>15</sup> persuading players to make 'winning' choices. Even though this practice might generate favourable results,<sup>16</sup> I. Bogost warned that players required the ability to deliberate over why they were being rewarded. "Otherwise, one code of conduct is as good as another, and the best codes become the ones with the most appealing incentives".<sup>17</sup> While the process designed into traditional games served as lessons for 'how things work', they were absent from the incentivizing systems of gamification.<sup>18</sup> M. Robertson and PJ Patella-Rey expanded on the superficiality and consequences of motivating through incentive-based gamified systems. Robertson, also a game designer, replaced the term gamification with *pointsification* to describe the use of rewards and incentives to induce behaviour.<sup>19</sup> She recognized the potency of such incentive systems, but did not consider gamified applications like *Foursquare* as games and noted that designers were rarely involved in their development. She referred to rewards as something to which corporations 'resort' because they stimulated behaviour.<sup>20</sup>

While both I. Bogost and M. Robertson recognized that games influenced behaviour, a key factor was absent from their arguments. They did not fully account for the actor as an agent who can choose whether they are playing or using a gamified application. What is the user's role in their descriptions? Can they distinguish between rewards and games? How differently might they be motivated by a well-designed game versus the pointsification of their everyday activities? PJ Patella-Rey began to deal with these questions when he characterized gamification's activity as *playbor*, in which "productive activity [becomes] an end in-itself (namely, fun)... The object of production is no longer to create value; instead value becomes a mere byproduct of play".<sup>21</sup> Playbor dissolved traditional notions of economy and the separation of work and play – a bifurcation that PJ Patella-Rey attributed

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13 SINCLAIR, B.: *Global Games Market at \$74.2 Billion Annually – Superdata*. Released on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015. [online]. [2020-11-10]. Available at: <<http://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2015-05-20-global-games-market-at-usd74-2-billion-annually-superdata>>.

14 BOGOST, I.: *Gamification is Bullshit*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2011. [online]. [2020-07-28]. Available at: <<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/08/gamification-is-bullshit/243338/>>.

15 Ibidem.

16 For a review of gamified applications' efficacy, see: HAMARI, J., KOIBISTO, J., SARSA, H.: Does Gamification Work – A Literature Review of Empirical Studies on Gamification. In SPRAGUE, R. H. (ed.): *Proceedings of the Forty-Seventh Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*. Waikoloa : IEEE, 2014, p. 3025-3034.

17 BOGOST, I.: *Persuasive Games: Shell Games*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2010. [online]. [2020-07-28] Available at: <[http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/132682/persuasive\\_games\\_shell\\_games.php?page=1](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/132682/persuasive_games_shell_games.php?page=1)>.

18 Ibidem.

19 ROBERTSON, M.: *Can't Play, Won't Play*. Released on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2010. [online]. [2020-07-28] Available at: <<https://web.archive.org/web/20170122030924/http://hideandseek.net/2010/10/06/cant-play-wont-play>>.

20 Ibidem.

21 PATELLA-REY, P.J.: *Gamification, Playbor & Exploitation*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2012. [online]. [2020-07-28]. Available at: <<http://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2012/10/15/gamification-playbor-exploitation-2/>>.

to the rise of the industrial age. Playbor through gamification caused play to lose its 'innocence', no longer having 'intrinsic value'.<sup>22</sup> While PJ Patella-Rey focused on the corporate use of game elements to capitalize on players' activities, he did not acknowledge that the digital-gaming industry built itself on the exchange of value and time for the sake of play. Digital games and gamification alike required time and effort to complete. The boundaries between space and play were different in gamification, where game elements pervaded non-game spaces and vice versa. Furthermore, PJ Patella-Rey, like M. Robertson and I. Bogost, did not consider the nuances of players' motivations.<sup>23</sup> Users flocked to and engaged with applications like *Foursquare*, which at the time boasted a subscription base of at least 40 million.<sup>24</sup> Critiques of gamification dwelled more on the fear of exploitation of games by non-game designers for the sake of corporate profit, and less on what impelled players to engage in a gamified application in the first place. This discrepancy is notable because play was simultaneously heralded as a necessary component of 21<sup>st</sup>-century life through theories like 'ludification' and 'ludicization'.

## Living for Ludus

One reason for corporate interest in gamification was suggested in M. J. Nelson's affirmation of the elevated status of digital games in everyday life, and specifically their ludic or playful qualities. A visceral prognostication of this appeal came from Eric Zimmerman. In *Manifesto for a Ludic Century*, he predicted a 21<sup>st</sup> century in which games were the primary form of literacy in an increasingly digital, networked, and complex world. The specific pillars of this new literacy were play, design, and systems. He argued that information had been 'put at play' within modern systems resulting in communities such as Wikipedia that interacted more playfully than expertly.<sup>25</sup> While E. Zimmerman's manifesto is both western-centric and treats games as a novelty, it represented his worldview as a designer, who developed many games for non-game settings, including corporations and conferences. For him, the world of play had broad applications, particularly if games were thoughtfully designed. V. Frissen et al. promoted a more inclusive view through their exploration of *ludification* or the increasing pervasiveness of play in culture. In *Homo Ludens 2.0*, the three scholars updated Dutch historian Johan Huizinga's conceit that play and playful activity were at the core of civilization. They asserted that play and games fundamentally changed in the postmodern era and no longer had a "clearly demarcated transformational (liminal) period, but have become a never-ending (liminoid) phenomenon".<sup>26</sup> The effect of modern digital and networked technologies altered four fundamental qualities of play: limiting the expression of human freedom that games usually facilitated; hindering the ability to pretend; intermixing the pleasure of play with the boredom of work, reminiscent of PJ Patella-Rey's

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22 PATELLA-REY, P.J.: *Gamification, Playbor & Exploitation*. Released on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2012. [online]. [2020-07-28]. Available at: <<http://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2012/10/15/gamification-playbor-exploitation-2/>>.

23 Remark by the author: This subject is of particular interest to contemporary gamification scholars who tend to rely on self-determination theory (SDT), which suggests that games and related elements are uniquely able to direct the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of users.; KOIVISTO, J., HAMARI, J.: The rise of motivational information systems: A review of gamification research. In *International Journal of Information Management*, 2019, Vol. 45, No. 1, p. 193.

24 *About us*. [online]. [2013-12-10]. Available at: <<https://foursquare.com/about/>>.

25 ZIMMERMAN, E., CHAPLIN, H.: *Manifesto: The 21st Century will be Defined by Games*. Released on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2013. [online]. [2020-07-28]. Available at: <<http://kotaku.com/manifesto-the-21st-century-will-be-defined-by-games-1275355204>>.

26 FRISSEN, V., DE MUL, J., RAESSENS, J.: *Homo Ludens 2.0: Play, Media and Identity*. In THISSEN, J., ZWIJNENBERG, R., ZIJLMANS, K. (eds.): *Contemporary Culture: New Directions in Arts and Humanities Research*. Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 2013, p. 82.

playbor; and dissolving the 'specific limits of time and space' previously inherent to the concept of play.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, S. Genvo's neologism 'ludicization' or 'processes by which situations are transformed into games'<sup>28</sup> was purposefully developed in response to gamification's emphasis on 'fixed characteristics'.<sup>29</sup> Instead, the scholar countered that playful situations are a 'multitude of assemblages'<sup>30</sup> comprised of 'rules', 'a fictional world' and a 'pragmatic context'<sup>31</sup> as well as 'functions (entertainment education, providing information, etc.)'.<sup>32</sup> In other words, gamification establishes socio-cultural parameters by which to orient a player who through the process of ludicization may assume a playful attitude to varying degrees. Both terms resonate with what I will describe as 'punctuated play', but ultimately depict a world in which players continuously shift between what is playful and what is not.

J. McGonigal, a designer closely aligned with serious games, provided an interesting contrast. In *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*, she contended that as a society, given the ubiquity of play, we should be more 'gameful' by harnessing the passion that players invest in games.<sup>33</sup> While currently most of this passion was appropriated for entertainment, J. McGonigal claimed that digital games already benefited society, pointing to, among other examples, *Foldit*<sup>34</sup>, which used gameplay to unravel the structure of a simian AIDS retrovirus in only ten days, when this puzzle stymied scientists for 15 years.<sup>35</sup> Although it may seem specious to assume that digital games like *Foldit* can solve all of life's complex problems, J. McGonigal was most criticized for not distinguishing between 'gameful' design and gamification, although she never mentioned the latter in her book.<sup>36</sup> However, the rewards disparaged by M. Robertson and PJ Patella-Rey were integral to J. McGonigal's work as a game designer. She attributed them as a way of getting things done by provoking an '*I rock*' vibe or "another way of talking about classic game rewards, such as having a clear sense of purpose, making an obvious impact, making continuous progress, enjoying a good chance of success, and experiencing plenty of fiero [prideful] moments".<sup>37</sup> J. McGonigal took the stance that rewards have vast potential, particularly in work and education – which, as stated earlier, continue to be drivers of gamification research – and even to make life more meaningful in general. She seemed at odds with many fellow designers because her main concern was the use of games to enliven and produce changes in users. As opposed to E. Zimmerman, who foresaw a world that conformed to the principles of game design, J. McGonigal envisioned design adapting to the needs of users, specifically larger educational and commercial institutions.

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- 27 FRISSEN, V., DE MUL, J., RAESSENS, J.: Homo Ludens 2.0: Play, Media and Identity. In THISSEN, J., ZWIJNENBERG, R., ZIJLMANS, K. (eds.): *Contemporary Culture: New Directions in Arts and Humanities Research*. Amsterdam : Amsterdam University Press, 2013, p. 85.
- 28 GENVO, S.: Looking at the history of video games through the prism of ludicisation processes. In THERRIEN, C., LOWOOD, H., PICARD, M. (eds.): *Kinephanos: Journal of Media Studies and Popular Culture, History of Games International Conference Proceedings*. Montréal : Université de Montréal, 2014, p. 120. [online]. [2020-11-26]. Available at: <[https://www.kinephanos.ca/Revue\\_files/2014-Genvo.pdf](https://www.kinephanos.ca/Revue_files/2014-Genvo.pdf)>.
- 29 Ibidem, p. 120.
- 30 Ibidem, p. 130.
- 31 Ibidem, p. 122.
- 32 Ibidem, p. 130.
- 33 MCGONIGAL, J.: *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*. New York : Penguin Books, 2011, p. 483.
- 34 CENTER FOR GAME SCIENCE, DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY: *Foldit*. [digital game]. Seattle : University of Washington, 2008.
- 35 MCGONIGAL, J.: *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*. New York : Penguin Books, 2011, p. 3925.
- 36 Remark by the author: The term continues to be a point of contention in gamification scholarship, where it is generally considered part of effective gamification.; KOIVISTO, J., HAMARI, J.: The rise of motivational information systems: A review of gamification research. In *International Journal of Information Management*, 2019, Vol. 45, No. 1, p. 193.
- 37 MCGONIGAL, J.: *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*. New York : Penguin Books, 2011, p. 3619.

The debate between J. McGonigal and her detractors reveals a defensiveness by designers about their privileged position. Gamification was attacked based on those advocating for it, namely businesspeople who were frequently portrayed as naive about game design. Both designers and scholars warned about the hazards of poorly designed games. I. Bogost, M. Robertson, and PJ Patella-Rey equated gamification with the appropriation of games by unqualified outsiders. At the same time, both E. Zimmerman and J. McGonigal concurred that games could effectuate societal change when expertly crafted by professionals. Beyond these attacks, it is unclear whether gamification is just a subset of games, or a corporate pseudonym for a 'Ludic turn' as described by V. Frissen et al. and predicted by E. Zimmerman. To better theorize gamification aside from game scholars' assaults, we must examine its connection to the medium, play and design.

## For the Greater Game

Ironically, some of the definitions for games were as restrictive as those for gamification during this period. For instance, K. Salen and E. Zimmerman define them as „a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome“ in *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*.<sup>38</sup> The book, in which the two articulated both theory and practice about game design, was archetypical of a branch of game studies where theory was somewhat subordinate to practice and the divulging of techniques to use in development. In academia, game studies programs started as part of design schools and computer science departments, in many cases, with an applied bent. C. Geertz advanced a more holistic theory of the relationship between games and culture in *Blurred Genres*.<sup>39</sup> Written several decades before the rise of game studies, C. Geertz suggested that cultural activity could be discerned through a combination of different approaches to games: namely, the study of *ludology*, attributed to J. Huizinga; *performance*, which he ascribed to E. Goffman; and the *game theory* of J. von Neumann, who used it to predict behaviour, particularly concerning economics and politics. This advocacy for a multidisciplinary field anticipates game studies, but itself is limited. C. Geertz critiqued his own approach for defying a humanist worldview. Rather than being free to make their own choices, when seen as players in a game, individuals' everyday activities were always predetermined. Also, C. Geertz only proposed to use games as a framework for cultural activity. By contrast, game studies scholars were additionally interested in the ontological origins of games, leading to the design-oriented predilection of some theorists. Their positions coalesced from a series of debates through which they aimed to distinguish games from other forms of entertainment and culture, as well as child's play.<sup>40</sup>

Their efforts to cultivate a theoretical lineage around design and play are well illustrated in the debate between *narratology* and *ludology*, which although unconcluded,<sup>41</sup> has been mostly abandoned. G. Frasca lays out the foundation of the dispute in *Ludology Meets Narratology*. Rather than restating both sides, I want to emphasize his proposition of „ludology“ as an alternative to narratology, which explained the actions of games as

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38 SALEN, K., ZIMMERMAN, E.: *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2003, p. 1300.

39 GEERTZ, C.: *Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought*. In *The American Scholar*, 1980, Vol. 49, No. 2, p. 166-178.

40 For more information, see: SUTTON-SMITH, B.: *The Ambiguity of Play*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1997.

41 For more information, see: SIMONS, J.: *Narrative, Games, and Theory*. In *Game Studies*, 2007, Vol. 7, No. 1. [online]. [2020-07-28]. Available at: <<http://gamestudies.org/0701/articles/simons>>.

being driven by players through sets of given rules, or 'possibilities', rather than 'chained actions'.<sup>42</sup> It was this ludic activity, 'independent' of digital games, for which G. Frasca advocated. As J. Juul stated in the introduction to *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*, ludology allowed scholars „to carve out video game studies as a separate academic field“<sup>43</sup> by situating play as the primary focus for the discipline. Games are driven by playful activity, as opposed to their content. The experience of play, or how it occurs, would be the domain of game designers. G. Frasca also noted that games were shaped socially, stating that “players need first to be socialized in order to perform” within games.<sup>44</sup> Narrative and content can shape the aesthetics of the game experience, but he placed the action of play as the central concept of study.

## The Magic Circle

To support their hypotheses, G. Frasca and other ludologists relied on two earlier works of theoretical scholarship that proposed play was foundational to society. R. Caillois' *Man, Play and Games* provided a somewhat 'tokenized'<sup>45</sup> vocabulary for their discussion of play.<sup>46</sup> R. Caillois, in turn, based his work on J. Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. In this text, the author proposes that play shapes the behaviour and lifestyle of individuals. Play preceded contemporary culture by providing a safe and rarefied space for conflict, heroism, knowing, and daring. Steeped within ritual and religion, J. Huizinga characterized this space as the now-infamous *magic circle*, a concept attractive to game studies scholars because it denoted the distinction between play and ordinary activity. Designers adopted the concept of the magic circle and repurposed it as a theoretical basis for their work: to construct the 'boundaries' of the magic circle within which the subject plays. It acted as a potent metaphor although J. Huizinga mentioned it sparingly. His larger goal was to show that play and culture were inherently intertwined rather than separated.<sup>47</sup> J. Huizinga described several play spaces – from religious to legal – “temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart”.<sup>48</sup> By creating 'order' through a separate set of rules, the magic circle was able to divorce play from the natural world. An example is a boxer, who, when entering the magic circle of the boxing ring, takes actions deemed aggressive and transgressive in regular life, and is granted the freedom to commit them because of the rules imbued within the context of the ring. However, most play spaces are hardly so clearly demarcated. K. Salen and E. Zimmerman themselves confessed in their chapter on the magic circle – in which they fleshed out the concept in terms of game design – that play has permeable boundaries; people passed into and out of it – like a child who plays with a toy, pauses, then returns to his amusement.

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42 FRASCA, G.: *Ludology meets narratology: similitude and differences between (video)games and narrative*. [online]. [2020-11-26]. Available at: <[https://ludology.typepad.com/weblog/articles/ludology.htm?fbclid=IwAR0LQ10Tpmg2c\\_Gt7VBpJ1A-ulvh8Lo2mISEYhv2L5LQ-qBd-pxwiMGRns](https://ludology.typepad.com/weblog/articles/ludology.htm?fbclid=IwAR0LQ10Tpmg2c_Gt7VBpJ1A-ulvh8Lo2mISEYhv2L5LQ-qBd-pxwiMGRns)>.

43 JUUL, J.: *Half-Real: Video Games Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005, p. 16.

44 FRASCA, G.: *Ludology meets narratology: similitude and differences between (video)games and narrative*. [online]. [2020-11-26]. Available at: <[https://ludology.typepad.com/weblog/articles/ludology.htm?fbclid=IwAR0LQ10Tpmg2c\\_Gt7VBpJ1A-ulvh8Lo2mISEYhv2L5LQ-qBd-pxwiMGRns](https://ludology.typepad.com/weblog/articles/ludology.htm?fbclid=IwAR0LQ10Tpmg2c_Gt7VBpJ1A-ulvh8Lo2mISEYhv2L5LQ-qBd-pxwiMGRns)>.

45 CARBONE, M. B., RUFFINO, P., MASSONET, S.: Introduction: The Other Caillois: The Many Masks of Game Studies. In *Games and Culture*, 2017, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 306-308.

46 For more information, see: CAILLOIS, R.: *Man, Play and Games*. Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

47 For a broader critique of the magic circle, see: CONSALVO, M.: There is No Magic Circle. In *Games and Culture*, 2009, Vol. 4, No. 4, p. 408-417.

48 HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. London: Routledge, 1971, p. 10.



Games, by contrast, have defined rules and specific points of entry or exit. Missing in K. Salen and E. Zimmerman's definition were all the moments that preceded the game and the reality that infiltrated it. During a poker game, for instance, the rules prescribe the way it is played. However, a complex series of other factors affect play within the magic circle: bluffing, knowledge of players' 'tells', etc. Furthermore, looking forward to a weekly poker game might colour a person's entire day, making the monotony of work seem endless or go by faster. The game itself might be a form of socializing, peppered with conversations that have nothing to do with poker. In other words, the boundaries of the magic circle are hardly fixed. Ten years later, E. Zimmerman developed the work he did with K. Salen. He signalled that his conception of the magic circle should be interpreted within the context of design, diverging from the traditional views of both J. Huizinga and R. Caillois. However, for E. Zimmerman, this was precisely the point: "When we use one schema to understand, analyze, or design games, other schemas may need to be ignored or repressed".<sup>49</sup> E. Zimmerman appreciated and hoped to foster „contradictory points of view“<sup>50</sup> in his work, so that the magic circle, even if it was a hyperbolic metaphor of the play experience, still informed other practices. While not discounting his predisposition as a game designer, he saw applications for his framework in broader societal contexts. He used the example of chess, rather than poker, to describe the series of interpersonal and social cues that were mediated through the game, concluding that "there's no need to think about the magic circle (a context for meaning creation) as something exclusive to games. Could one think of almost any physical or social space as a magic circle in this way? Probably...".<sup>51</sup> As in his manifesto, E. Zimmerman affirmed the importance of the game designer who can construct the rules and boundaries of not only the magic circle but also realms beyond games.

## From Circle to Frames

While useful for development, E. Zimmerman showed that the boundaries of the magic circle were not only porous but intertwined, affected by and linked to other social activities. As he and K. Salen proclaimed in *Rules of Play*, it was a 'frame' through which the actions of the game are viewed, creating a feeling of 'safety'.<sup>52</sup> Frames not only provided an alternative viewpoint to the circle but also tied gameplay to broader social and communicative activity. The idea led J. Juul to appropriate a new metaphor for the study of digital games, puzzle pieces, whose shape allowed them to fit together within a larger picture. Players negotiated the game's boundaries. Within the magic circle, this might be conceived as players navigating along, aware of, and interacting with its borders. In other words, context was significant: "It is meaningless to make an ahead-of-time call about whether games are either supremely dissociated from or integrated with the context in which they are played. The question is in itself subject to continued negotiation between players".<sup>53</sup> One of J. Juul's goals with the puzzle piece metaphor was to re-situate the role of the designer, critiquing his singular and elevated status as part of the digital-game industry.

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49 ZIMMERMAN, E.: *Jerked Around by the Magic Circle – Clearing the Air Ten Years Later*. Released on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2012. [online]. [2020-07-28]. Available at: <[http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/6696/jerked\\_around\\_by\\_the\\_magic\\_circle\\_.php](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/6696/jerked_around_by_the_magic_circle_.php)>.

50 Ibidem.

51 Ibidem.

52 SALEN, K., ZIMMERMAN, E.: *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2003, p. 1486.

53 JUUL, J.: The Magic Circle and the Puzzle Piece. In GÜNZEL, S., LIEBE, M., MERSCH, D. (eds.): *Conference Proceedings of the Philosophy of Computer Games 2008*. Potsdam : Potsdam University Press, 2008, p. 62. [online]. [2020-07-28]. Available at: <<https://www.jesperjuul.net/text/magiccirclepuzzlepiece.pdf>>.

To understand the interface between games and players more intimately, J. Juul, like K. Salen and E. Zimmerman, adopted the idea of frames. He described an inner frame of competition, surrounded by a frame of experience, which, in turn, was framed by social consequences. Each player navigated and experienced these frames differently. J. Juul's use of frames corresponded to that of E. Goffman. Additionally, game studies scholars cite E. Goffman's theory of *rules of irrelevance*<sup>54</sup> in which the particular pieces of games were arbitrary but understood within the mutually agreed frame of the game. More broadly, they appear to have tacitly accepted Goffman's contention that social frameworks organized and governed everyday life, within which individuals performed. While the rules could be broken and reassessed, generally they provided boundaries similar to those of a game.<sup>55</sup> The frame, therefore, offers an alternative to the magic circle for understanding the role of play and games in everyday life, which explains its application to the experience of gamification. However, many gamified experiences do not present clear or coherent playful frames. J. R. Whitson, for instance, referenced the frame to argue about the limits of gamification in terms of surveillance. When gamification was applied to institutional and work settings, such as a call-centre, its effectiveness and enjoyment was diminished, because the gamified activities were 'framed' in a larger sense as work and not play. J. R. Whitson contended: „ play is important to Goffman [...] because its very existence and persistence depends on the participants agreeing to play the game, and in doing so constructing and upholding a shared set of rules that govern the experience”.<sup>56</sup> With gamification, the agreement to play was based on particular activities, which digital media were able to quantify and for which they provided immediate feedback, often in the form of visualizations, leaderboards, or charts. “Players interpolate themselves in this data, seeing the messiness of everyday lives and the interiority of their selves as something that can be meaningfully collected into a database to be rendered understandable and actionable”.<sup>57</sup> This was evident in examples of self-care, such as losing weight, where gamification had achieved significant success. In these cases, J. R. Whitson argued, we always have gamified to some degree, framing and assessing our long-term goals around “narratives of success and failure, and develop[ing] strategies for attaining victory”.<sup>58</sup> Gamification merely facilitated this process and offered a new means of self-surveillance, when we opt into it. When imposed upon institutions like the workplace, where what constituted victory is less obvious, the association between non-game contexts and game elements was less straightforward.

J. R. Whitson's account strikingly contrasts with previously stated criticisms about gamification, while still utilizing a theoretical framework popular among game studies scholars. However, her proposition was inherently narrow. She implied that as a self-surveillance tool, gamification presented a new frame by which to articulate and improve lives and attain a kind of mastery. Her view highlighted gamification's potential to help users obtain skills through games and play. J. R. Whitson pointed out how gamified applications frame exercise socially and personally, driving the activity through the promise of feedback and reward. At its best, this path to mastery is quite liberating and very appealing, affording the possibility of gaining control over any condition, from obesity to climate change. However, her commentary raises two closely related questions: What if we do not know the games we are playing when engaging with gamification? What if we do not know

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54 For more information, see: GOFFMAN, E.: *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction*. Eastford: Martino Fine Books, 2013.

55 *Ibidem*, p. 378.

56 WHITSON, J. R.: *Gaming the Quantified Self*. In *Surveillance & Society*, 2013, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 165.

57 *Ibidem*, p. 170.

58 *Ibidem*, p. 169.

or respect the rules of the game? Gamified applications may offer the means to 'master' the 'messiness' of real life, which paradoxically changes the context of the game. One example comes from accusations of 'cheating' to obtain virtual 'badges' in the application *Foursquare*. R. Glas recounted the controversy over Indonesian *Jumpers*, a small collective of Indonesian *Foursquare* users who used their computers to attain fraudulent badges from the US by checking-in to venues across America from their distant homes.<sup>59</sup> Although there was no monetary benefit for the acquisition of these badges, other subscribers felt slighted. Domestic users were often surprised that they could not receive a particular badge when Indonesian users were being rewarded for something they were pretending to do. Rather than attaining a kind of self-motivated mastery of their daily interactions, they were worried about the intrusion of *Jumpers* into the game, violating the rules of their everyday lives. As J. Juul suggested, *Foursquare* acted as a boundary, circumscribing not only how people play the game, but conversely, how the game affected them. Unlike J. R. Whitson's description, the 'mastery' over the game, as exhibited by cheating and the *Jumpers*, does not adhere to the intended rules of the application.

This ambiguity of emotion reflects an inherent issue with frames as a predominant metaphor for the play experience through gamification, and one well expressed decades earlier by G. Bateson in his analysis of play as a meta-communicative process. For G. Bateson, like C. Geertz, play was a contrivance for seeing the world, though Bateson utilized it specifically to look at psychological practices. He illustrated how communicative frames functioned using two analogies. The first was mathematical sets, framed by imaginary lines, and the second was picture frames.<sup>60</sup> G. Bateson criticized the first for being too intangible – play itself often included this type of self-aware meta-communication – and the second for being too concrete. He contended instead that people were both aware of and adherent to frames when they interacted. Players worked, as J. Juul suggested, between what they understood as the context of the game and the strict rules that shaped it. They were aware of the frame as not only the centre of action but also as a frame in and of itself. By being able to discern the frame, and the world beyond it, players were able to navigate the rules of the game while mindful that they were playing.

Gamification has the potential to displace the awareness of the frame altogether. When applied to a specific achievable task, such as weight loss, which is already framed as a type of game (with quantifiable weight loss goals), the boundaries of the frame may be more apparent. By contrast, in the example of social media applications like *Foursquare*, it is not as easy to discern the potential 'frames' at play within the 'game'. At the same time, the 'game' has the potential to invade other frames and inform them. When *Foursquare's* priorities, to check-in at all costs, override rational decisions, the frame of the game is obscured. The frame seems too rigid a structure for explaining the infiltration of game elements into everyday experience that is allowed by gamification. In fact, researchers still advocate for the development of theories and measures,<sup>61</sup> or stress the lack of a 'unitary framework'<sup>62</sup> to tie these fields of research together. Thus, a return to the types of play that derive from games is warranted.

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59 See also: GLAS, R.: Breaking Reality: Exploring Pervasive Cheating in Foursquare. In COPIER, M., WAERN, A., KENNEDY, W. H. (eds.): *DiGRA '11 – Proceedings of the 2011 DiGRA International Conference: Think Design Play*. Hilversum : Digital Games Research Association, 2011, p. 1-15. [online]. [2020-07-28] Available at: <<http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/11307.57380.pdf>>.

60 BATESON, G.: A Theory of Play and Fantasy. In SALEN, K., ZIMMERMAN, E. (eds.): *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*. Cambridge : MIT Press, 2006, p. 322.

61 For more information, see: NACKE, L.E., DETERDING, S.: The maturing of gamification research. In *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2017, Vol. 71, No. 1, p. 450-454.

62 CASSONE, V. I.: Mimicking Gamers: Understanding Gamification Through Roger Caillois. In *Games and Culture*, 2017, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 348.

# From Gamification to Punctuated Play

Theories like the frame seem to insufficiently capture the complicated form of play that occurs with gamification. Therefore, I revisit the literature surrounding how games spawn play in which rules emerge from game interaction and/or guide the player through the game. However, in the application *Foursquare*, unexpected, and even antithetical forms of play surface when it comes to gamification.<sup>63</sup> J. Juul devised informative criteria for evaluating gameplay in an essay entitled *The Open and the Closed: Games of Emergence and Games of Progression*, where he analyzed open-ended massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) in opposition to traditional digital games.<sup>64</sup> Classic digital games have beginnings, middles, and ends, with often specific goals. MMORPGs, however, offer game players a multitude of options for what they could do in a game – from trading items with other online players to waging collective battles and are specifically designed for open-ended play, and ultimately cannot be beaten. Therefore, MMORPGs represent a distinct difference from the codified world of both traditional and digital games.

This led J. Juul to conceive of two types of games: games of emergence and games of progression. Games of emergence usually have a set of limited rules, which allow for divergent and emergent activity within it. In a game of poker, the rules permit many variations of the original game, ranging from the amounts that can be bet to new versions of the game, such as *Texas Hold 'Em*.<sup>65</sup> Not all emergent behaviour is preferred. Anything that makes the game more fun or adds complexity is ideal, but rules can be exploited so that players without skill can win. J. Juul highlighted a spectrum of emergent activity in games, from interacting with the basic rules, which may appear emergent but is not, to researching and employing strategies that come from sources outside of play. He claimed games of progression were a recent phenomenon, becoming even more popular with the rise of digital media. In games of progression, the user is directed very explicitly by a series of rules to know what to do next. Computers notably facilitated this because all player actions were, in theory, pre-programmed. The sequence of actions in the game are, even if they seem open-ended, predetermined.

J. Juul also stated that both types of games were present in MMORPGs. He described *EverQuest*<sup>66</sup> as “a game of emergence, with embedded progression structures”.<sup>67</sup> The rules of the digital game informed and curated the activities of the player, who often followed somewhat predictable strategies that emerged from it. A conventional means of advancing in the game was to defeat particularly formidable monsters by coordinating activities with other players. It was a strategy that was emergent and unanticipated, but common because of players' mutual goals. MMORPGs afford an important distinction between the activity

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63 Remark by the author: See R. Caillois and B. Sutton-Smith's work in the bibliography for other substantial typologies.

64 See also: JUUL, J.: The Open and the Closed – Games of Emergence and Games of Progression. In MÄYRÄ, F. (ed.): *Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference Proceedings*. Tampere : Tampere University Press, 2002, p. 323-329. [online]. [2020-07-28]. Available at: <<http://www.jesperjuul.net/text/openandtheclosed.html>>.

65 *How to Play Texas Hold'em Poker*. [online]. [2020-11-22]. Available at: <<https://www.pokernews.com/poker-rules/texas-holdem.htm>>.

66 VERANT INTERACTIVE, 989 STUDIOS: *EverQuest*. [digital game]. San Diego : Sony Online Entertainment, 1999.

67 For more information, see: JUUL, J.: The Open and the Closed – Games of Emergence and Games of Progression. In MÄYRÄ, F. (ed.): *Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference Proceedings*. Tampere : Tampere University Press, 2002, p. 323-329. [online]. [2020-07-28]. Available at: <<http://www.jesperjuul.net/text/openandtheclosed.html>>.

occurring in gamification and that of traditional digital games, particularly regarding a rarefied time and space. MMORPGs and gamification might be judged as complicating the temporal and spatial understandings of ludus (playful activity) as advocated by early game studies scholars. Instead, these multiplayer games do not exist within a specific time or place but incite continuous playful action. Gamification, aside from being utilized in non-game contexts, might be the limit to which the boundaries of play can be stretched.

A close assessment of a program like *Foursquare* in the early 2010s, in terms of games of emergence and progression, reveals that it hardly adhered to either definition. Along with its modern incarnation Swarm, the app shared some commonalities with games of emergence, but only at the most rudimentary levels. There was a set of actions that occurred based on 'game' rules, namely that people checked-in to venues and received rewards for their efforts, but as previously stated, this was dictated by the perceptions of the user. In a study of *Foursquare* user motivation, Frith discovered that players checked-in for both game-like and non-game-like aims: "to score points, earn badges, present themselves to others, and remember where they have been".<sup>68</sup> The Jumpers had even more unconventional motivations. As a niche group, they socialized around illicit check-ins, collectively coordinating activities online in a manner that subverted any predictable behaviour within the 'game'. *Foursquare* users chose whether to opt-in or out of the more playful activities. Furthermore, activity also emerged which seemed antithetical to the playful elements of a game; specifically, PJ Patella-Rey's playbor was common on *Foursquare*. This sort of emergent activity did not spring from the game rules as much as from the behaviour of users who invested time and effort in the program. The rules of *Foursquare* were so open-ended that it could easily be argued that the emergent behaviour came from the users' personal choices within the program and the degree they chose to treat it as a game, as opposed to another kind of social activity. The emergent activity, in other words, may have had little to do with the characteristics of the application, as suggested by ludicization's assemblage of playful processes mentioned earlier.

Yet for those who chose to play, such gamified applications incentivized the player to heed their rules and accept a constricted set of choices through which to progress. In *Foursquare*, these choices might be considered more persuasive than progressive. Users were aware of potential points and other rewards but checked-in for their own reasons. J. Frith, for instance, explained how users had been known to cultivate their activity in unfamiliar cities to get badges, but might conduct themselves differently in their hometowns.<sup>69</sup> Behavioural patterns also might be influenced by communities, rather than the explicit rules of the game. For instance, Whitson described how one of the reasons she used a gamified running application had less to do with the app itself than the group of users to whom she felt obligated.<sup>70</sup> This final point underscores key differences between the sort of 'play' transpiring within a gamified, as opposed to a digital game, system. Gamified systems like *Foursquare* have rules from which predictable behaviour can emerge, and at least superficially, might appear to resemble a MMORPG in their construction. Emergent behaviour is more difficult to predict and is predicated on the user assuming the role of the player at a moment in time. While sometimes a program like *Foursquare* might be used as a game, it may just as often be used as a social media application. Online multiplayer games may be employed for this purpose as well, but such activity is a byproduct of play. By design and marketing, *Foursquare* does not aim for users to play as much as perform

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68 FRITH, J.: *Constructing Location, One Check-in at a Time: Examining the Practices of Foursquare Users* [Dissertation Thesis]. Raleigh: North Carolina State University, 2012, p. 189.

69 FRITH, J.: Turning Life into a Game: Foursquare, Gamification, and Personal Mobility. In *Mobile Media & Communication*, 2013, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 251.

70 WHITSON, J. R.: Gaming the Quantified Self. In *Surveillance & Society*, 2013, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 170.

any number of activities, from lifelogging to social communication. Therefore, play does not lie at the surface of the experience. Even for those to whom it is a game, the experience of play may be staggered and unintended, a fleeting moment that might occur in passing and then quickly subside after his/her engagement with the application concludes, a pace very different from deliberately sitting and deciding to play.

## Punctuated Play

When the moments between the frames of a game and everyday life become this granular, do they become indistinguishable? A frame hardly seems like the appropriate metaphor for describing the experience. In his advocacy for frame analysis, Goffman identified what he called the negative experience of frames, which temporarily broke the more positive frame of everyday existence.<sup>71</sup> However, even this disruption seems too blatant to describe the subtlety of gamification, which does not disrupt as much as give a playful jolt, even a playful reminder, without disturbing or breaking a frame. Therefore, what has been called *gamification* might also be considered 'punctuated play' in gamified applications. While gamification tends to primarily reference design, punctuated play centres on the player and how they play. In this way, it bridges some of the gaps between game design theories and the applications/experiences that preoccupy gamification research. At the same time, it posits such play is not driven by specific elements (e.g., points, badges, leaderboards) that typified early gamification strategies, but incites playful activity through multiple techniques. Punctuated play pierces a particular moment unexpectedly, interjecting the game-like qualities described by J. Juul, K. Salen, and E. Zimmerman. This is no small feat. As J. Huizinga noted, the safety and freedom of play are both inherent and desirous in culture, and the ability for them to punctuate life unexpectedly, as opposed to requiring a frame or boundary of play, is strikingly different from the models and inclinations of early game studies scholars.

This type of play can be seen in studies of mobile media. C. Moore, in *The Magic Circle and the Mobility of Play*, demonstrated the shifting nature of play due to mobile devices, and with it, the punctuated play I have described. His goal was to articulate how mobile media had broken down traditional ludic notions as espoused by J. Huizinga, J. Juul, and E. Zimmerman. Mobile "play in these instances is not set apart, but usually found in the margins",<sup>72</sup> as we wait in lines, distract ourselves during lectures, or fill time in waiting rooms. In many ways, this describes the attitude of mobile media users, occupying their time differently from their predecessors. Absent, however, from this description is the reciprocal influence of media on users, and that the mobile device permits interruptions into their activities. The smartphone disturbs activity with reminders, buzzing, beeping, etc., making it an ideal platform for punctuated play. This omission may explain why C. Moore came to an opposite conclusion from mine, namely what he called the 'gameur', who intentionally appropriated different playful identities throughout his day, meandering from one personality to another. C. Moore claimed that mobile and social media act as a means of "decentring... the self".<sup>73</sup> I argue the reverse. Rather than imagining a dissociated self, different media and content punctuate the daily life and activity of the user, not so much 'decentring' them as presenting new potential avenues that they could or could not traverse.

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71 For more information, see: GOFFMAN, E.: *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York : Harper & Row, 1974.

72 MOORE, C.: *The Magic Circle and the Mobility of Play*. In *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 2011, Vol. 17, No. 4, p. 378.

73 *Ibidem*, p. 382.

The idea of punctuated play conforms to the notion of *punctum* as put forth by R. Barthes in his examination of the effects of photography on the viewer. R. Barthes suggested that a photograph contained both an informational *studium* and an emotional 'punctum', which was often present in the details of the photograph. It disturbed the *studium* and was a brief "sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)".<sup>74</sup> In fact, much of the *punctum* appeared both playful and yet dangerous. R. Barthes went on to describe *punctum* in terms of requiring no analysis, but instead being felt, "show[ing] no preference for morality or good taste: the *punctum* can be ill-bred",<sup>75</sup> was "brief and active",<sup>76</sup> but could come after the viewing of a photograph.<sup>77</sup> While punctuated play may not precisely adhere to this definition, it corresponds to the same basic concepts, infusing experience with a moment of play, a detail felt rather than rationally perceived. I contend that this punctuated moment is specifically a playful one, where drives like competition, fantasy, and winning pierce a moment, affecting it deeply, and have lasting effects or bruises. Punctuated play is a powerful behavioural moment that can be utilized by game designers and non-game designers alike. It taps into our inherent desire to and injects unexpected moments of play that are at once felt persistently and persuasively. Unlike the safety of the magic circle, the boundaries of punctuated play are nonexistent. It acts as a surprise, which can generate feelings of glory, defeat, anxiety, or no effect at all, based on the personal choices of the user and the way they engage with or determine the seriousness of the play.

## Conclusion

I have endeavored to dissect and redefine the notion of gamification as the concept emerged in the early 2010s. Game studies scholars' early critiques distinguish the practical and theoretical use of games in order at least partly disassociate gamification from their discipline. Some of these authorities embraced play as an essential component of their studies. I accept that 'gamification', as it is known, contains ludic elements and incites ludic behaviour, albeit in a punctuated and unexpected manner, rather than in the strict confines of a magic circle, or within a prescribed frame of play. The idea of the ludic century or the ludification/ludicization of culture seems prescient. The question of whether media content and cultures lend themselves to play is still worth contemplating. Current digital technology abets the sort of activity described by punctuated play. With the proliferation of mobile media, real-time notifications, and digital platforms, the possibility of our lives being punctuated by varied and unexpected forms of content and culture has become commonplace. The very act of punctuating incites playful activity. It becomes easy, when using social media, to play as we communicate – for example, we may compete trying to respond quickest to a message in a group chat, which is just one instance of punctuated play that may occur. Quantification provides rewards, rankings, and other feedback mechanisms. Technologies, ranging from mobile phones to email, exhibit the sort of play and interplay that might be expected from a game. Playfulness is just one aspect of what happens when we interact with these technologies. It punctuates and dissipates, leaving an impression but does not define the experience. It is one facet of a larger whole, one piece of a larger puzzle, one move in the larger social game we are all playing.

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74 BARTHES, R.: *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York : Hill and Wang, 1981, p. 27.

75 Ibidem, p. 43.

76 Ibidem, p. 49.

77 Ibidem, p. 53.

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