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**Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)**

Original citation:

Woodcock, Jamie and Johnson, Mark R. (2017) *Gamification: what it is, and how to fight it*. [Sociological Review](#). ISSN 0038-0261

DOI: [10.1177/0038026117728620](https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026117728620)

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Available in LSE Research Online: January 2018

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Gamification: What it is, and how to fight it

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Woodcock, J., and Johnson, M. R. (2017) 'Gamification: What it is, and how to fight it', *The Sociological Review*, online first:

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0038026117728620>

Abstract

'Gamification' is understood as the application of game systems – competition, rewards, quantifying player/user behaviour – into non-game domains, such as work, productivity and fitness. Such practices are deeply problematic as they represent the capture of 'play' in the pursuit of neoliberal rationalization and the managerial optimization of working life and labour. However, applying games and play to social life is also central to the Situationist International, as a form of resistance against the regularity and standardization of everyday behaviour. In this article, the authors distinguish between two types of gamification: first, 'gamification-from-above', involving the optimization and rationalizing of work practices by management; and second, 'gamificationfrom-below', a form of active resistance against control at work. Drawing on Autonomism and Situationism, the authors argue that it is possible to transform non-games into games as resistance, rather than transferring game elements out of playful contexts and into managerial ones. Since the original 'gamification' term is now lost, the authors develop the alternative conception as a practice that supports workers, rather than one used to adapt behaviour to capital. The article concludes with a renewed call for this 'gamification-from-below', which is an ideal form of resistance against gamification-from-above and its capture of play in pursuit of work.

Keywords

anti-work, labour, play, resistance, Situationist International

Introduction

'A concept is a brick. It can be used to build a courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window.'

Massumi in Deleuze and Guattari (1987:xii)

Gamification is a comparatively new phenomenon, unlike the brick - which has, of course, been used in varying ways for quite some time. The concept-as-a-brick analogy introduced by Deleuze and Guattari is an important starting point for our argument in this paper. The concept of 'gamification' is one which has become remarkably popular with striking speed - a Google Scholar search returns over 26,000 results, the overwhelming majority of which were written in the last five years. The approach traditionally termed 'gamification' proposes the restructuring of social behaviour according to systems and metrics drawn from games. It is increasingly - and uncritically - being applied to new fields, in the process finding new champions who herald the supposedly transformative potential. It is commonly treated, much

like contemporary digital technology as a whole, as an inherently and unproblematically *progressive* force. We argue that the opposite is true for gamification, beginning this paper as a critique of the main line of argument emerging on the practice: the fundamental failure to understand that technology has always been constituted within antagonistic social relations. Gamification is a tool (or a brick, if you will), and it is therefore vitally important to identify who *introduces* it, *uses* it, and for *what ends*. Gamification is not a *neutral* tool, and as it is currently implemented has become complicit in supporting and even further developing the economic relations of neoliberal capitalism.

Although they did not coin the term, Deterding *et al* (2011) have strongly influenced the development of the concept through their widely adopted definition. They propose that gamification is ‘the use of game design elements in non-game contexts’ and that gamification specifically ‘relates to games, not play’ (Deterding *et al.*, 2011:3). This is an important point that draws on Caillois’ (2001) distinction between ‘paidia’ (playing) and ‘ludus’ (gaming), where *paidia* demarcates a more anarchic mode of spontaneous interaction, against the structured competition of the latter. Drawing on this distinction, we propose the existence of *two* forms of gamification. We term these gamification-from-above and gamification-from-below, and that a focus on the former - the *ludic* - is core to the deep political problems of the established doctrines of gamification. Our distinction between these two forms borrows from Hal Draper’s (1966) discussion of Socialism-from-above and Socialism-from-below, developed in a new context to signal our desire to imbue the distinction with a sense of struggle and an orientation towards liberation. Gamification-from-above is the imposition of systems of regulation, surveillance and standardization upon aspects of everyday life, through forms of interaction and feedback drawn from *games* (ludus) but severed from their original *playful* (paidia) contexts. By contrast, gamification-from-below represents a true gamification of everyday life through the subversion, corruption, and mockery-making of activities considered ‘serious’.

We argue here that the early texts on ‘gamification’, starting with Deterding *et al.* (2011), represent a particular political discourse, one that stems from ‘the belief that technological innovations would not only solve all possible problems but more importantly the tendency to identify all possible situations and states as problems in the need of solving’ (Schrape, 2014:37). For example, Deterding (2014:326) later presented this position, explaining that:

We realise the good life to the precise extent that we are able to transform whatever situation we find ourselves in into a self-determined pursuit where we find some measure of excellence, some focus on mastery and joy, some connection to our goals, needs, and values – as if it were a game we chose to play.

This position imagines that the ‘dull economic compulsion’ (Marx, 1976) of work is something that workers can simply opt out of, individualising the systemic relationships of exploitation. It ignores the power dynamics in both the workplace and society, passing over the ways in which management actively seek to maximise exploitation. When at work, gamification is a ‘mode, [a] way used to enable exploitation and control’ (Dragona, 2014:237), replacing older forms of labour surveillance and oversight with equivalent seemingly ‘playful’ forms that workers engage with. This is an acquiescence to a particular narrow model of what ‘gamification’ can be, and one that deliberately elides its radical potential in favour of a form that is entangled with workplace exploitation.

The first part of this paper outlines the present state of gamification literature and the ideological problems within this body of work. We then explore a case study of gamification-from-below within call centres and argue that such behaviours - truly playful 'gamification' - are best understood with Autonomist and Situationist theory, which emphasize the deliberate refusal and undermining of ordinary rhythms of everyday life, highlighting their absurdism and arbitrariness in sharp contrast to the further reification of work by gamification-from-above. We examine this in detail, alongside other dimensions of practice that vary between the two forms of gamification, before developing a broader critique of the simplistic notions of 'fun' and 'play' within the literature supporting the value of gamification-from-above. We argue that although the term 'gamification' most likely cannot now be reclaimed and should therefore be critically expanded into the from-above and from-below distinction, it is a misnomer, and that a real *gamification* of everyday life would be the exact opposite of how the term is currently deployed. We conclude by relating the potential for a Situationist gamification-from-below for escaping the constraints of gamification-from-above, and outline a wider political agenda for the importance of a critical redefinition of the 'gamification' label.

Gamification-from-above

While the early proponents of gamification may have dreamt of bringing play and fun into the more banal activities of our lives, there is one primary area in which it has found the most application: work. Work remains the primary activity that most of us do for the majority of our time. Work is central to the functioning of capitalism, and requires effective management of labour power purchased by capital. In principle this is a straightforward task: capital employs workers for a set period of time, entering into a contract. The problem is that in practice this becomes far more complicated (Marx, 1976: 279), particularly in contemporary capitalism. While a contract has been made, labour has the unique and peculiar quality of indeterminacy. This indeterminacy refers to the fact the purchase of labour power involves buying a potential; the expectation that the worker will labour effectively in that time. However, it is not in the interest of the worker to maximise their effort or output, placing them in conflict with the interests of capital. The history of management has been a history of different approaches, theories, and techniques that seek to overcome this indeterminacy. For example, Taylor (1967) went to great lengths to develop ways to overcome the 'soldiering' (deliberate slow labour) of workers. These trends have continued to the present day with the rise of the euphemistically-named 'Human Resource Management', which continues to seek innovative ways to motivate workers and maximise the use of their time (cf. Townley, 1993).

For Taylor and his followers, the assembly line and time-motion studies provided one way to overcome the indeterminacy of labour power (Mumford & Moertl, 2003). This is represented most visibly in the iconic figure of the white-coated technician carefully monitoring, stopwatch in hand, the efforts of workers. This provided a twofold benefit: finding ways to speed up the labour process, as well as greatly increasing control over that same labour. New technology has provided increasingly detailed and granular ways to monitor workers (Moore and Robinson, 2016) that is found, for example, in the use of wearable devices in warehouses owned by global marketplace and commerce company *Amazon*. However, no matter how technologically advanced the means of surveillance in the workplace are, such systems cannot solve the problems of motivation on their own.

It is at this point along the path of the increasingly disciplinary uses of surveillance technology that gamification enters the picture. Due to its roots in marketing (Ruffino, 2014:51), it does 'not aim to change the way people think, but how they behave' (Schrape, 2014:22). For Deterding *et al.* (2011:4), gamification entails using 'elements of games for purposes other than their normal expected use as part of an entertainment game.' In a brief reflective moment implicitly drawing upon the sociology of design (eg Akrich, 1992; Bergman *et al.*, 2007; Redström, 2008; etc), they point out that the concept of 'normal use' is always a 'socially, historically and culturally contingent category' (Deterding *et al.*, 2011:4). As Foxman (2014:74) has noted, rarely do these kinds of 'invocation(s)' ask 'what it is like to live' in a 'gameful world.' This could have been an important point of departure for actually considering how gamification would be used in practice. However, the important question that is missed here is why one *should* take game elements out of their game context. What objectives are being met, and what agendas pursued? Deterding *et al.* (2011:6) continue to argue that an instance of gamification can only be identified by considering 'the designers' intentions or the user experiences and enactments', while a 'distinct quality of 'gamified' applications is their relative openness to varying situational modes of engagement – gameful, playful, and instrumental.'

Such an orientation detaches gamification from any social, historical, or cultural – and importantly, we would add *economic* and *political* – context. It is a very rare occurrence that designers get to design based fully upon their own intentions. Most designers are employed (whether directly or indirectly) to create something on behalf of someone else, while all are shaped by the wider social relations in which they operate. As an illustrative example, at a forum on gamification held in San Francisco, a number of self-described 'experts' made illuminating comments: Bob Marsh, the CEO of LevelEleven, pointed out that 'it's not about 'gamifying.' It's about driving revenue, saving costs, making people more efficient'; while Steve Sims, the VP Solutions & Design at Badgeville, explained, 'we like to think of it as behavior management. It's how to get people to do more stuff, more often, for more periods of time'; and finally Dave McDermott, Director of Sales Enablement at Kelly Services, argued that 'gamification is finding the way to incent the behaviors that you want your team to have' (quoted in Sharrow, 2013). These comments shed light upon the contexts in which gamification designers are 'gamifying' user experiences, and the decidedly *un-playful* motivations behind such activities. In this way, it has become a 'new form of ideology' (Fuchs, 2014:135) through which 'the proponents of gamification infer that a behaviourist stimulus-response-reinforcement process will naturally motivate the player to play' (Philippette, 2014:188). As Schrape (2014:21) puts it, in this way the 'techniques of gamification' can be read as a 'symptom for an emerging new mode of governmentality.'

There is consequently a strong separation between the supposed promise of gamification and its actual implementation. The root of this issue lies, in part, in the delineating of 'game studies' as a separate and self-contained intellectual discipline. If the object of study is 'games', it makes sense to want to bring the findings beyond the narrow boundaries of games, and contribute to debates outside of the discipline. If games are 'fun', and large portions of ordinary life are not fun, it makes a certain kind of sense to attempt to distill the core of the former, and transfer those into the latter - such a task seems inherently laudable. However, the failure to understand the way in which theory translates into practice, specifically within relations of power, has seriously impacted the development of gamification and transformed it into a management tool instead of anything resembling a playful experience. As the concept became

popular, there were many people eager to learn the 'secrets' of gamification. As Kelly (2012) has argued:

in the field of gamification [...] designers, consultants, theoreticians and idea-men write ream after ream of thoughtful intellectualised nonsense about the Meaning Of Things. [...] They hold conferences, speak, write books and develop courses (complete with certificates) for a subject that is largely make-believe. By which I mean impractical, over-thought fluff based in large part on a couple of source texts and the inferred conclusions from a few source examples.

Kelly is a consultant in the games industry and draws upon his experience of working with a wide range of games designers in making these comments, making these valuable insider perspectives on the practice. He argues that gamification 'boils down to one of three things: validation, completion and prizes' (Kelly, 2012). It is these elements that align gamification closely with the concerns of management. For example, the 'principal-agent problem', discussed by Jensen and Meckling (1976), starts from the need to align the interests of agents (workers) with that of the principal (capital) and the challenge in achieving any synchronicity between the two. If agents can be encouraged towards increased production for their own sake (as they perceive it), then the needs of management (production) can be met by making needs those the same as the agent (points, prizes, rewards, and so forth). Similarly, Vroom's (1964) 'expectancy theory' was concerned with motivational force: implementing a system whereby the agent believes that additional effort will increase performance, increased performance will lead to greater rewards, and that value is attached to said rewards, and therefore they should self-motivate towards increasing performance. It is readily apparent how such management challenges could turn to gamification as its solution. The three components outlined above by Kelly (2012) therefore map onto this easily just as they do to the principal-agent problem, immediately highlighting the potential conflation of management techniques and gamification, both in theory and practice.

The development of management theory from Taylor onwards remains fundamentally concerned with new ways to motivate, control, supervise, and ensure the maximum extraction of value from labour. At the current moment, the risks of the digital economy are increasingly being shifted onto workers with precarious employment relations, typified with companies such as *Uber* and the growing proliferation of zero-hours type contracts. This trend stands in opposition to the supposed 'ludification of society' proclaimed by many scholars (Raessens, 2006; Frissen *et al.*, 2015; Mäyrä, 2016), with many of the ludifying trends suggested being new forms of control and management as we outline here. While there may be more engagement with games of various sorts as a result of the rapid rise of game-playing as a primary and near-ubiquitous leisure time activity (Donovan, 2010), at least within the industrialised world, the growing wealth polarisation of society is far from playful. Instead, management is finding increasingly innovative ways to encourage workers to be productive and motivated, using game systems to aid them in that task.

This capture of game elements and repurposing in the workplace should not come as a surprise to those researching the topic of work, nor to many people in diverse workplaces that have seen these elements creeping into their day-to-day lives. In this context, there is a need for a terminological alteration to 'gamification', and we propose a twofold understanding: gamification-from-above and -from-below, adapting the distinction between 'Socialism-from-

above' and '-from-below.' While at first this may not seem like the most appropriate metaphor, it highlights an important dynamic that we will explore in the remainder of the paper. For Draper (1966:58), '-from-above' involved socialism being '*handed down* to the grateful masses in one form or another, by a ruling elite which is not subject to their control', typified with Stalinism. Gamification-from-above, therefore also entails an elite (whether academic or managerial) that decides to impose game elements into the lives of other people, purporting to improve their experiences without genuine engagement or dialogue; this is what has traditionally simply been called 'gamification', dominating the term and forcing any divergent views into the margins. This is a corruption of the original concept, as Stalinism was to socialism, so also is gamification when used as a 'tactic employed by repressive authoritarian regimes' (Chaplin, 2011).

Our understanding of gamification-from-above therefore builds upon the existing critiques of gamification, drawing on Schrape's (2014) notions of it as a form of 'governmentality' and the different ways of modifying behaviour. This conflation is also found in the growth of so-called 'serious games' (games designed for non-leisure purposes, such as education or scientific research), and the attendant implicit claim that games will be more *worthy* uses of our time if only they could be made 'more serious'. As Ian Bogost (2011a) has argued, it is a 'phrase devised to earn the support of high-level governmental and corporate officials' in mobilising the 'mysterious and wild' power of games in other contexts. There is, of course, nothing inherently undesirable about taking games seriously, as the rise of professional video gamers who have elected to pursue a career of game-play demonstrate (Johnson and Woodcock, 2017). However, in this case it is a free personal choice, not a preference enforced by a managerial elite, or a design mandate enforced by a culture that priorities seriousness over play, even in media designed for leisure-time consumption.

Gamification-from-below

An important point that we therefore want to reiterate is that game elements *themselves* are not the problem. They are like the brick in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) analogy, as they come with the possibility of being used for a variety of purposes. Such elements, concepts and mechanics are undoubtedly popular, as if they were not, the concept of gamification - or as it should be called, gamification-from-above - could not have grown in the way that it has. Illustrative of the popularity of games is one of the most popular online video games, *League of Legends*, which has one hundred million active players (Riot Games, 2016), a staggering volume of individuals consistently and regularly engaging with a single media item. Equally, there are instances where users themselves will develop approaches inspired by games in order to alleviate boredom, motivate themselves, or simply for fun. For example, in a study of the *Zooniverse* (a citizen science crowdsourcing platform) by Greenhill *et al.* (2016:316), they found that 'some *Zooniverse* users have invented their own games or have gamified their experience within the classification process to make it more interesting and to help motivate themselves.' It is this desire to *play*, closer to *paidia* than to *ludus*, that profoundly complicates any analysis of gamification.

Despite the substantial problems outlined so far, the success of gamification and its uptake by such a wide range of industries and demographics, in pursuit of ‘gamifying’ an equally broad range of ‘serious’ life tasks is undeniable. Why, therefore, do people want gamification? The answer is that people seek to optimize their lives, find easier ways to achieve their own goals, deal with meeting the drives of capital, and so on. As Read (2009:30) points out, neoliberalism entails an ‘effective strategy of subjectification’, in which individuals are increasingly encouraged to view themselves as ‘companies of one’, seeking more efficient ways to mobilise and improve their own ‘human capital.’ This, however, is not actually a ‘game.’ This is the co-opting of structural formal elements of games, such as the imposition of arbitrary rule-based systems, ‘scoring’, and a feedback loop between the ‘game’ and the activities of the user, into instrumental activities such as work efficiency, exercise volume, dietary preferences, and so on. We should therefore return to the meaning that one might, with no prior knowledge of the term, derive from ‘gamification’. The term could instead readily imply the transformation of something which is not a game into a game, fundamentally altering the *nature* of the activity in question, not merely the manner in which the same activity is *performed*. This is naturally distinct from trying to make something which is not a game more pleasant or enjoyable through the addition of game elements. In such a case, as in gamification-from-above, the nature of the activity does not change, and remains a non-game. In turn, through game elements the player/user’s inclination towards it increases, and thus the non-game task is (supposedly) performed more successfully. The motivation behind such interest comes not from a desire for any kind of true *playfulness*, but from a desire to be ‘better’ at doing one’s everyday tasks of work and self-management.

What, therefore, would ‘gamification’ look like if we adhere to the perhaps more intuitive understanding of the word - truly transforming a *non-game* into a *game*? We might immediately observe that such an ontological transfiguration would bring with it a particular set of politics around the subversion, undermining, and even mockery, of ‘serious’ life, through its reduction to the non-instrumentality and therefore the pointlessness, under neoliberalism, of ‘play’. Equally, there is also a clear politics of resistance here, by vitiating the capitalist drive towards the optimization and efficiency of one’s use of time. Where gamification-from-above co-opts players into neoliberal pressures by finding newer ways to encourage people to work, a potential alternative would serve the exact opposite role. This means not *improving* work through the addition of game elements, but rather *undermining* work through the addition of game elements, whose objectives are not those of the work activity.

Bogost (2011b) is correct when he argues in his critique that gamification is ‘bullshit’ and ‘exploitationware.’ It is from this point that we start to conceive of an alternative, developing Dragona’s (2014:239) notion of ‘counter-gamification.’ This is positioned as using the ‘same ground elements of play’ to ‘assist in activating mechanisms of counter-gamification, revealing the functioning of network structures and raising awareness’ (Dragona, 2014:238). The opposition of counter-gamification ‘aims to disrupt the processing and exploitation of users’ data; it calls for a gaming with the system, for a disruptive play with its rules and content while being within it.’ There are also similarities here with ‘hacking’ as a form of resistance (Dragona, 2014:239). We develop counter-gamification further by through the second part of our distinction: *gamification-from-below*. Again, drawing on the idea of ‘socialism-from-below,’ which is something that can ‘be realized only through the self-emancipation of activated masses in motion, reaching out for freedom with their own hands, mobilized ‘from below’ in a struggle to take charge of their own destiny, as actors (not merely subjects) on the stage of

history' (Draper, 1966:58). As with the attempt to introduce game like elements (for example, point scoring) into non-game environments (most importantly work), gamification-from-below goes further than just combatting gamification (as counter- implies) to introduce an impulse of game elements of actual *play* as resistance strategies to work more broadly too, not just the formal structures of *games*.

Playful resistance: Autonomism and Situationism

In recent years the popularly-dominant gamification-from-above has found nefarious uses in call centres, labour settings that are emblematic of precarious high-turnover employment (Brannan, 2015), and it is here we will begin exploring gamification-from-below as a form of Autonomist and Situationist resistance. Game elements are introduced by management within such labour contexts - which is to say, the enforced imposition of gamification-from-above upon workers. These elements are intended to intensify the labour process, convincing workers to expend extra effort and extracting even more sales and profits. Call centres include scoring and incentives to encourage workers to make sales, and whiteboards replete with sales targets and screens displaying real-time performance are consequently a common feature of call centres (Woodcock, 2017:39). Similarly, at the start of each shift, the supervisors organise 'buzz sessions', in which the supervisors try to 'find a way of capturing and replicating that buzz of life [...] on the job' (Cederström and Fleming, 2012:9). While these serve an immediate purpose - the inculcation of rules and regulations in a slightly game-like environment - they are also intended to prepare workers for the shift ahead.

Despite the dictatorial management style and constant surveillance in the call centre, in Jamie Woodcock's (2017:40) book workers would turn the extension of the 'buzz sessions' - or indeed any other opportunity for breaks - into their own type of game. This involved subverting the 'buzz session' by asking questions of the supervisors, an act that could only be maintained by ensuring that no one worker asked too many questions, and required a playful dimension as the questions skirted the line of feigning interest and sarcasm. A second example was found when the computer system ran out of active leads (the list of phone numbers to be called) during a shift. The supervisors did not always notice at first, allowing an impromptu break if workers pretended to continue calling. This required collective action, as it would only take one worker to report to the supervisor, and it became a game to extend this unintended break as long as possible. A third example, was a game that workers devised themselves. Rather than trying to meet the targets of the shift, workers would try to say ridiculous words in their calls, like 'giraffe' or 'spaghetti' (Woodcock, 2017:44). Although no score was kept for the game, those who were able to work one of these words - particularly if they were, or could be interpreted as, rude - would be celebrated by others. In each example, 'these collective acts of workers were separate from the attempted gamification of work that supervisors pushed' (Woodcock, 2017:44). The call centre provides an important example of the ways in which gamification-from-above and -from-below can, and often do, exist alongside each other. The existence of gamification-from-below does not reduce the exploitative intentions of -from-above, as the two involve very different dynamics. What is important to reiterate here is that elements of games cannot, and indeed should not, be separate from the context of social relations and power in society.

The conflictual relationships between workers and capital has been developed in a particular -from-below perspective in Italian Workerism and later Autonomism. This heterodox Marxist approach was developed through workers' inquiries, forms of co-research that sought to develop theory and organisation collaboratively with workers. The subsequent theorisations focused on the relationship between workers and capital, putting workers' struggle first and seeking to understand how capital adapts to resistance, rather than the other way round. Of particular importance is the 'refusal' of workers 'to collaborate actively in capitalist development', from the passive moments of non-compliance, to overt acts of resistance (Tronti, 1966). The refusal of work stems from the autonomy of the working class, and the attempts by capital to exert control. The workplace is therefore shaped by 'the way workers' desires exceed, challenge, and escape that control', with the struggles this creates driving 'capital forward to new horizons as it attempts to crush, or co-opt and capture, resistances, deploying new technologies, trying new organizational forms' and so on (Dyer-Witford and De Peuter, 2009:5). The connection with gamification-from-below is that the refusal can come in the form of play - subverting work, refusing to participate in the ways expected by capital. For Tronti (1966) the refusal was always present at some level, but at the point of saying 'no', the 'refusal must become political; therefore active; therefore subjective; therefore organised.' Gamification-from-below is one way for this tendency to become expressed, representing a break from the way 'play' is constructed 'in the mediated entertainment marketplace' with 'complex cultural biases' that are 'inscribed in the game' (Kline et al., 2003:21). It provides a creative outlet for resistance, bringing in a potentially collective way to refuse work.

Equally, given the fundamentally political entanglement of labour, play, and the monotonous rhythms of everyday life entangled in the gamification debates, we also propose that such actions by call centre workers are also valuably understood through Situationist theory. Scholars writing about gamification have previously fleetingly engaged with this body of political-artistic work (Raessens, 2014; Deterding, 2016). However, we believe this relatively minimal engagement is indicative of the broader intellectual traditions gamification scholars have come from: human-computer interaction and game studies are not fields that, traditionally, have been first to engage with historical political-aesthetic *movements*, although art and aesthetics *per se* have been present within game studies discourse for some time (Bittanti & Quaranta, 2006; Giddings & Kennedy, 2008; Niedenthal, 2009). We, however, are going to introduce more thoroughly the Situationists into the analysis because, alongside Autonomism, it provides an important way to think about the relationship between games and work and the two competing concepts of gamification. Specifically, the focus of Situationist theory on *play* as well as the formal mechanics of *games* is crucial to our notion of gamification-from-below. This importance is especially clear when we consider the Situationists' development of anti-work politics, their understandings of the relationship between aesthetics and political life, and the ultimately subversive qualities of *play*. This will allow us to develop their lines of thought with regards to the 'politics of play' into managerial-economic contexts that, although the precursors of these existed in their era, the Situationists could not have anticipated.

The Situationists emerged in the late fifties and sixties France (Rumbo, 2002:137). Considering themselves to be 'the most dangerous subversion there ever was' (Debord, 1989:175) and committed to a Marxist 'ruthless critique of everything existing' (Gotham & Krier, 2008:170), they sought to a way to integrate two areas of political and aesthetic theory - Marxism and Surrealism - that they saw as being essential to 'continu[ing] the project of the

inter-war avant garde' (Rasmussen, 2004:367). Situationists emphasised the importance of breaking people out of their ordinary routines and practices by drawing attention to the mechanics of everyday life, and in turn generating moments of critical reflection. By foregrounding the links across 'micropolitical struggles and larger structures of cultural domination' (Gotham & Krier, 2008:158) through 'resistance, creativity and participation', (Barnard, 2004:104), they would undermine the ubiquity of these 'codes, messages and images' (Plant, 2002:6) that once had origins in commodity production, but have since 'won their independence and usurped [production's] role in the maintenance of social relations'.

As Ball (1987:32) damningly puts it, 'The most persuasive evidence that everyday life has been homogenized is the fact that the slightest deviation sometimes reverberates far beyond its space of emergence' - in call centres, this is visible in the risk of small deviations resulting in extreme punishments up to and including terminations, simultaneously raising the stakes for resistance and boosting the importance of such resistance within these kinds of spaces as a means of unravelling the unchanging spectacle. What Plant (2002:32) calls the 'traditional organs of opposition' are ordinarily opposed to practices like 'absenteeism, unofficial strikes, 'mindless violence', shop lifting, graffited advertisements', and the like; by contrast, the Situationists believed such acts of disruption and resistance were means for consistently challenging the dominant unquestioned spectacle. They feared that 'older forms of resistance-organized labor' had themselves come to be complicit within an 'expanded hegemony' (Ball, 1987:33) and that only through the use of a 'little chaos' could 'the experiences made possible by capitalist production [...] be appropriated within a new and enabling system of social relations' (Plant, 2002:60). The Situationists combined these beliefs with a particular tradition of 'artistic agitation' that included Dadaism and, most importantly, Surrealism (Plant, 2002:1). Surrealism proposed that 'play, pleasure [and] spontaneity' are some of the foundations of true human dignity (Plant, 2002:53), and Situationist theory brought this heritage, primarily through the idea of the 'drift' or 'dérive', a 'playful yet militant engagement' (Bonnett, 2006:37; cf. Hetherington, 2013) that entailed 'playful-constructive behaviour' (Debord, 1956).

The fusion of Marxism and Surrealism led to a call for the creation of 'situations', understood here as 'moments of intense pleasure and *playfulness* ('jouissance') that would subvert, dislocate and undermine the 'normality' of the everyday and show it to be what it really was, i.e. the putrid, stale, alienated and repetitive cycle of ever the same' (Swyngedouw, 2002:157, emphasis ours) – which is to say, a form of resistance against precisely the kind of mechanised, routinized and reward-incentivised repetition imagined by traditional gamification, most clearly exemplified in the act of adding *levelling up* or an equivalent looping gamic activity to monotonous labour activities. Situations consequently 'provide a mode for new forms of working and living' (Barnard, 2004:114) by engaging people in participatory creative arts not governed by external demands that can both 'criticise and re-shape' social relations. These situations should 'extend life's boundaries' and create 'new situations of creative resistance' (Barnard, 2004:115), into which the 'ludic philosophy' of play theorist Johan Huizinga was highly influential (McDonough, 2004:215). For Situationists, 'revolution was conceived as the first freely constructed game, a collective transformation of reality in which history is seized by all its participants', in which *play* would be central to new kinds of social organisation in keeping with human wellbeing and human dignity (Plant, 2002:71) – the 'spirit of playfulness' and 'revolutionary ambition' were fundamentally interwoven (Swyngedouw, 2002:155). As Wark (2013:182) notes, such games and these forms of play created by Situationists differ fundamentally from the 'closed world of cold war strategy', of

'game theory, the modern programmable computer [and the] attempt to rationalize strategic thinking' – trends reflected on a smaller scale in the gamification of labour and one's life described in this paper. By contrast, as Vaneigem (1983:259), one of the participants in the Situationist International, put it, 'only play can deconsecrate, open up the possibilities of total freedom': the Situationists thereby advocated for a 'comic approach to life as a game which commits one to the cause of the world' (Wark, 2013:18). We here, therefore, see the central and inescapable role of *play* in Situationist thought, its ability for subversion and resistance, and therefore we can understand what a true *gamification* - the conversion of a non-game into a game - might look like.

'Situations' represent the polar opposite of the now-dominant gamification-from-above. Recall the Situationist fear that 'our real lives had been co-opted by the spectacular *media events and commodity consumption* of the modern world' (Darts, 2004:321, our emphasis), and indeed, Barnard suggests that 'the internet, video games and multi-media' will inherently do nothing to 'abate the relentless march of the spectacle' (2004:119). Although the massive diffusion of video *games* through society has in some sense served the Situationist purpose by distributing the means for play (and specifically *non-productive* play at that) more widely across the citizenry, the expansion of video games has also shown the managerial class a new and highly effective way to motivate and manage their workers. Games and play in recent decades have not resulted in the widespread revolutionary changes the Situationists hoped for, but have been co-opted into dominant managerial-political-economic systems. In the following final section we will therefore argue that despite the current global victory of gamification-from-above, the anti-work politics and gamification-from-below notions of playfulness espoused by the Situationists are not dead, and carry within them the opportunity for substantial transformation of our lives.

Discussion

In the previous two sections of this paper we have examined what we identify as two quite distinct methods for adding game systems into social and political life. We argue that the first, most commonly called 'gamification', should be redesignated as 'gamification-from-above'. This reifies work and elevates it as the most important of human activities, and the one most deserving of optimising and maximising. It does this through taking game mechanics from a setting of play and transposing them into this different and fundamentally instrumental and non-playful context. The second, building on existing work on counter-gamification and integrating Autonomism and Situationist theory, shows the very same work to be absurd and arbitrary, and transforms work (and everyday life) into a game whose mechanics are its own antithesis, rather than a game whose mechanics are complicit in the work environment that created it. *Context* is therefore everything for 'gamification', and the application of game systems to life can be used to enhance or curtail work. In doing so, two sets of polar opposite political entanglements are apparent; 'game mechanics' are consequently not neutral, and 'fun' is an emergent property dependent on context far more than on formal systemic game elements.

Gamification-from-above, as we outlined at the start of this paper, is the overwhelmingly dominant form of 'gamification', to the extent that 'gamification' refers to this *specific* method

of applying game mechanics to everyday life, thereby enacting a terminological foreclosing of alternate possibilities. Our specific contribution here is to define gamification-from-below and to distinguish it as a new formulation of specifically *Autonomist* and *Situationist* inspired play. In practice, it is a new experiment that happens across a range of workplace contexts. While divorced from the *theoretical* traditions of the Situationists, it is strongly in keeping with their *practical* activities, and their understanding that play is the stuff of life, whereas work is merely the stuff of survival (Plant, 2002:131). As Wark (2013:17) puts it, the Situationist 'project of transforming everyday life had a playful quality. Everything is at stakes, but the world is still a game' (Wark, 2013:17). We have traced here Situationist theory as an appropriate intellectual framing for these contemporary activities of anti-work resistance, even if those who carry out these acts do not necessarily articulate them as such. The newfound return of these practices is indicative of their continued relevance. While these critical approaches are rarely represented in formal politics, their understandings of the power of play to subvert working practice remain highly pressing. Debord's (and, more broadly, the Situationists') ambition was to 'create a game which has possibilities for play that are as great as chess but which conceives of play in a different manner' (Wark, 2013:177) – emancipatory and subversive, not formalised and rigid - building upon the Autonomist insistence on resistance and refusal as central to the relationship between workers and capital. Gamification-from-below is consequently an important challenge to the current orthodoxy of gamification, and one which strikes at the heart of gamification-from-above's claims to be making life truly 'playful'.

The understanding of play as a *subversion* of work, rather than a *reinforcement* of work, is therefore still alive, and the concept of gamification-from-below is urgently needed to offset the neoliberal ideological entanglements of what is currently called 'gamification'. Gamification-from-below is therefore a far more 'true' form of gamification, for it transforms the non-game (work) into a game (of resistance), rather than merely taking parts of a game and applying them to something which is the opposite of a game. Work - and its discipline by management - is not, and can never be, playful. Gamification-from-below instead adds play where play was not previously present, but does so to *challenge* the prior structure of behaviour in the context being gamified, not to enhance or support them. As Yiannis (2008:319) puts it, 'in spite of [...] formidable disciplinary mechanisms [...] today's workplace creates its own possibilities of opposition, with employees displaying a bewildering range of responses that qualify, subvert, disregard, or resist managerial calls for flexibility, commitment, and quality.' These subversions are gamification-from-below, and resist the disciplinary mechanisms (including, but not limited to gamification-from-above) of contemporary employment.

As such, we propose that just as gamification-from-above is intimately tied to both the theory and practice of management and the optimisations of workers' time (and one's personal time), gamification-from-below is a valuable contribution to the recent resurgence of scholarly debate on the concept of *anti-work* (cf. Weeks, 2011; Frayne, 2015). In this vein, gamification-from-below is a form of *active* resistance against existing forms of labour control. It appropriates activities and mocks them via their transfiguration into something comical and playful, instead of something serious and important. Such 'great delinquent play' (Ball, 1987:24) inverts existing 'moralistic invocations of labor's value' (Taylor, 2014:17), and highlights that 'politics happens when play becomes political action' (Sicart, 2014:74). Gamification-from-below, just as its Situationist predecessor was, is inherently political. Such a newfound playful project is a response to contemporary conditions of precarious employment, beset by the pressures of

metrics and constant measurement (Beer, 2016). This new mode of work is being accelerated through the use of digital platforms, which have been 'instrumental in the process of dissolving direct employment, thereby creating low-wage futures for millions of people' (Scholz, 2017:13). In this new technologically mediated context, gamification-from-below represents the potential for an essential political redefinition of 'gamification' towards a practice that supports workers, rather than the needs of capital.

Up to this point, gamification has been deployed to build Deleuze's and Guattari's proverbial courthouse of reason - but not a liberating reason that emancipates one from arbitrariness, superstition or error, but rather the rationalising reason of quantification, formalization, and standardization. Indeed, the *courthouse* metaphor is also especially appropriate, given that gamification-from-above involves the placement of extra rules, regulations, and laws atop activities and forms of social life that previously lacked them. By contrast, we propose that the concept of *gamification* is better suited to an alternative, and by throwing it playfully through the window in an Autonomist and Situationist manner, we can begin to perceive what a true gamification - a gamification-from-below - might look like, and the potentially radical politics it creates amongst the broken glass of the refusal of work.

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