

Chapter 68

The Significance of the Hermeneutics of Play for Gamification: The Limits of Virtual and Real Gamification

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ABSTRACT

Games and play are increasingly significant in everyday life. Thus, a philosophical and theoretical consideration of these concepts is needed. This article uses phenomenological hermeneutics to discuss games, play, and gamification; it also addresses the development of gamifying planes within gamification studies. It hypothesizes that the academic discussion of gamification becomes more valid, ontologically, by focusing on the phenomenon and lived experience of play and playing from a phenomenological perspective. It presents an upcoming practical intervention, an empirical research design of case study of playing a virtual game, to demonstrate how the essence of play and the integrated spheres of virtual and real worlds could be approached. Thus, it could provide valuable information that is needed in the fast-developing domain of interventions in gamification and the game-business. On the basis of this study's theoretical findings, a broader ontological notion is suggested to overcome the subjectifying notion of player and the objectifying notion of games and play.

INTRODUCTION

Games and play have an increasingly significant role in many aspects of everyday life. Virtual computer and Internet-based games are very popular leisure time activities and hobbies enjoyed by children, youth, and adults; they also often include real possibilities for developing the methods used in teaching and

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education, as well as specific work-related skills, management and leadership skills, sports skills, and so forth. It has become clear that games and play, overall, and especially computer- and Internet-based virtual games, are not merely entertainment or relaxing and enjoyable leisure time activities. Increasingly, they are a part of everyday work, learning, and personal development, and they have an impact on a variety of cognitive and embodied skills. Academic research has focused on this theme under the multidimensional concept of *gamification*. That concept has functioned well and has already become popular in academic discussions. In popular culture, gamification refers to a broad variety of practical interventions. The academic notion of gamification most often refers to the study and innovative development of gamifying practices that support and strengthen the practices of education or that enhance the effectiveness and well-being of daily work.

The concept of gamification emerged around 2010. Deterding (2011) defined it as “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts.” Gamification includes elements of gamefulness, gameful interaction, and gameful design. Gamefulness refers to a player’s lived experience, gameful interaction refers to the objects, tools, and contexts related to the experience of gamefulness, and gameful design consists of the practice of crafting a gameful experience. While the definitions and features of gamification have been criticized, the term has emerged as being related to the concepts of games (Seaborn & Fels, 2015). Gamification aims to apply features of games to real world contexts by using motivational factors (Deterding, 2011; Hamari, Koivisto, & Sarsa, 2014; Zichermann, 2011). This brings new elements to ordinary social situations, and makes them interesting, motivating, and entertaining in a different way (Seaborn & Fels, 2015; Johnson, et al., 2016). Sometimes it seems as if a game immerses its audience in the experience of playing it, and it keeps players in its bubble or in a “motivational pull” (Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006). The people around the players may experience opposite feelings, such as worry, especially in relation to the young children who are playing the game (Ferguson & Colwell, 2016; Alehdet, 2018).

In terms of its practical emphasis and focus, the specific meaning of gamification is not always clear, at least from the scientific and philosophical perspective. Thus, there is a constant need to discuss the phenomenon of gamification and its core question of what is meant by the terms game and play. What is the actual essence or nature of the game and of play, itself? In this respect, empirical studies on gamification, which often aim at developing valuable interventions to enhance human skills or social interactions, always require theoretical and philosophical thematization of the concept.

In terms of its research design, this article applies an important theoretical perspective and utilizes a practical intervention (a case study) to investigate games and play, which are now fundamentally seen as playing a mediative role between virtual reality and the real world and that are an inextricable part of everyday life, including leisure time and work. This research design was used for two reasons. First, by using a philosophically-oriented conceptual discussion it is possible to address some important aspects when addressing and applying the notion of games and play in academic research. Second, from this theoretical perspective, the article proposes one possible empirical setting through which it seems to be possible to simultaneously study the phenomenon of virtual play and games in action, and, from this basis, to study the mediative role of virtual playing, or its relationship to real exercise or hobbies. The meta-theoretical intention of this paper is to offer a critical alternative for the traditional objectifying ideas of games and the notion of play, and to critically address the common view of playing, which has been broadly perceived as a subjective activity. This will shed light on the shared view that play and playing function immersively, as if constituting a playfulness “bubble”. Using phenomenological hermeneutics, this article attempts to explicate what these phrases actually mean. It is possible to argue that the activ-

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