Theoretical Discussion on Gamification

This is an extension of the <u>article on gamification.</u>

As we could see in the mentioned article, gamification is a very polemic topic. I would like to quickly highlight some of the most discussed theoretical themes in the field.

Much is discussed on the consequences of the gamification of everything, e.g., a gamified life (which would also include *[serious games]*). Considering that social reality (culture) exists due to shared agreements among members of a community (see <u>The Construction of Social Reality</u> by John Searle), like in a game, which is also based on shared agreements among players about the rules of the game, we may conclude "*gamify the culture is just to reveal its core structure. So is gamification just an explicitation of the ludic origin of culture?*"[1]

In this case, a gamified life would be nothing new. The big deal would then be the truth revealed: the realization of what Deleuze calls *the society of control.* The same line of thought was applied by McGonigal when she has defined gamification as "a *broad cultural phenomenon that can criticize consumerism by promoting it*" (2011).

This understanding of 'reality' must however be guidedand promoted now, while its mirror is emerging as still something graspable, otherwise it may be too late and people may live in a game within the game, where they may choose to play what we nowadays call game. It is the same logic that follows the film *<u>Inception</u>* (Nolan, 2010).

Mosca stresses that "*game as an activity depends on comprehension and awareness*", drawing attention upon the critical point that if the individual does not realize he/she is taking part in a game *(like the protagonist of the film, <u>The Game </u>[Fincher, 1997)]*[2], it becomes then difficult to argue that in fact he/she is playing. In this logic, reality could be lost, at least as we know it.

Whitson reminds us, that in the case of gamification, the rules of the game are kept hidden from us. This fact reveals a piece of our unawareness and incomprehension towards the phenomena. Furthermore we are oftendiscouraged to realize that we are actually playing, as in loyalty programs for instance.

Having this in mind, we shall reflect on what has become a classic statement in the game world: *"there is no way to beat the house", which means* that the game always favours its creator.*According to Consalvo, "the gamified socialization is profitable for the gamificator only if it is organized in such a way as not to let the user exit from the game."*[3]And two ways of locking the player in the game are not letting him/her know that he/she is playing, or through addiction.

However, it could also favour both, as in the case of participatory surveillance, which was highlighted in the article above. Let us consider that in order to control someone, the person must be unaware that he/she is being controlled, it is even best if the person believes that what he/she is doing, is for his/her own sake. It is a tricky topic for reflection indeed. See below some further passages on the topic, from the article of Ivan Mosca[4]on the topic:

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[1]Mosca, Ivan. +10! <u>Gamification and deGamification.</u>
[2]Op. cit.
[3]Op. cit.
[4]Op. cit

"It is clear that a social reality with game (the most important of secular liminoid activities) as functional activity is far more repressive than a social reality in which the game is a free space."

"In addition, if game becomes social reality, then its playfulness is also lost. Therefore, the risk of gamification is not only to destroy the real culture, but also to destroy the game as a parallel, fictitious and separated space. Disaster!"

"Gamification is the latest enticement of the modern landlord to profit from its citizen's livelihood. Game mechanics are implemented, supplying an enslaving substitute for the demise of meaning. Social media companies host the modern tavern, the sandbox, the walled garden, where its users play and produce value."[5]

"The purpose of pointsification is to increase user engagement, loyalty, rhetoric awe, and time spent by using software. The secret intention is not to entertain but to gain money from players, or alternatively to educate them. Education and income are two very different areas, even antithetical, but they share the same property: the new goal orientation of an old autotelic activity. The most shared external goal of games is victory. So pointsification is based on the gratification received by a competitive environment, which provides identity and social status through rewards."

Mosca sums up:

1. *Every gamification of X is a degamification of Y.*
2. *Current gamification is a pointsification and not a radical gamification of culture, which is itself*
   foundedon game.
3. *Radical gamification is not a good deal, because it deletes liminoid spaces.*
4. *Pointsification is not necessarily related to games; student honors are points, but not games.*
5. *Pointisification is not a good deal, either for the video game industry or for values of our society.*

[5] Man, P. (2011). Playing the real life: The ludification of social ties in social media.Media. p.11.