GAMES, PLAY AND PLAYFULNESS: LUDIC TURN IN CULTURE AND SOCIETY?

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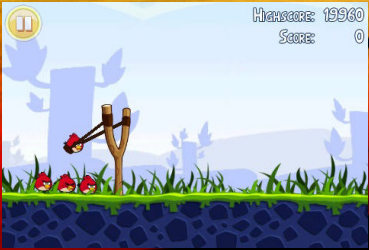# GAMES: EVERYWHERE?

- There are more opportunities for play today than ever – at least for digital play?

INCREASING RANGE OF GAMES AND PLAY

- The MobyGames.com database lists now c. 96 000 different games
- New ones appearing daily
- There are 168 different platforms listed
- App Stores for mobile games & applications are showing strongest growth
- In Finland, 99 % of people are game players, 88 % are active players
- 74 % play digital games, 53 % are active digital game players
- Average digital game player age is 37 years
- Particularly mobile game playing is on the rise
- (Source: Mäyrä & Ermi, *Player Barometer 2013*)

MORE TO PLAY THAN GAMES?

- Digital games: hybrid phenomenon, play mechanics & digital media/computation

- Analytically: representational 'shell', plus gameplay 'core'

- Not only games are played

- Toys, also learning and work can be approached with playful mindset

- There is also non-playful play, in games, and forced play in workplace

shell:
the representational
aspects of game

core:
gameplay

An Introduction to
Game Studies
Games in Culture
Frans Mäyrä
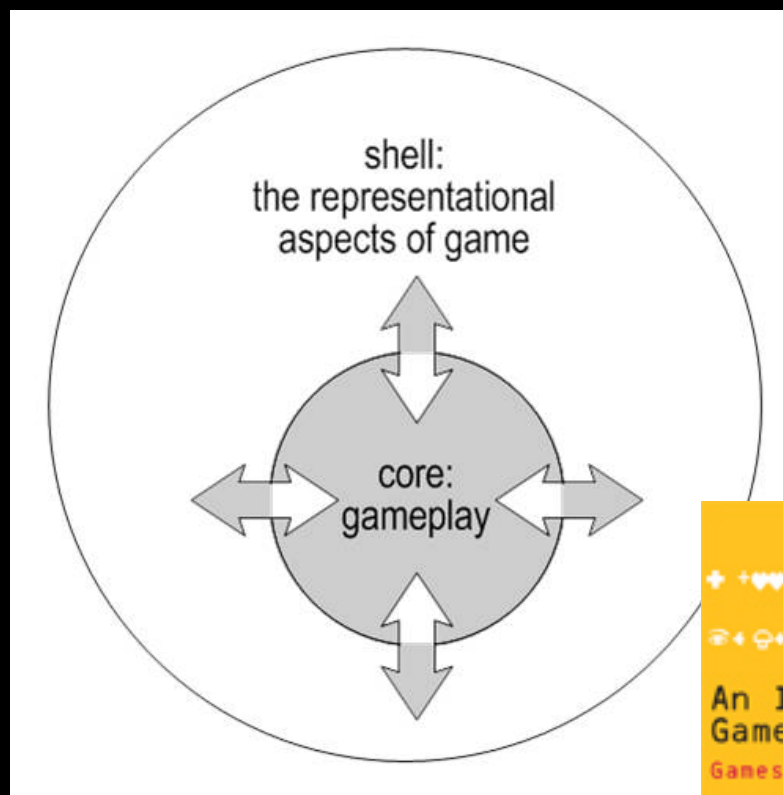
ACTIVITY, MINDSET, PLAYTHING

- Play: ludic, non-instrumental activity (cf. Huizinga "free, outside ordinary life"; Caillois: *paidia* as free play, *ludus* as formal play)

- Playful mindset: experiencing activities as intrinsically rewarding (cf. Csikszentmihalyi 1975), paratelic and excitement/challenge seeking (cf. Apter 2007), putting emphasis on fun, spontaneity, freedom, willingness to experiment, pretend, and create

- Playthings: games, toys and play environments embody rules or designed affordances that are designed to facilitate and encourage play activity and/or playful mindset

PLAY AT WORK

- As creative, playful element becomes central in work, work and play start to mix
- Poets, artists and creative professionals of all kinds can (should?) play at work
- Pleasure drawn from innovation, and the intense dedication of scholar or scientist to her work can have its roots in the benefits of play activities and playful attitude
- Stepping outside of routine, it is often possible to enter play at least temporarily in work contexts
- Evolutionary theories of play emphasize how it facilitates adaptive variability: curiosity and playful explorations expand our capabilities

EXPANDING PLAY?

- Is the scope of play and games expanding?
- Domains of children's play and entertainment/leisure game exist alongside e.g. serious games, pervasive and transmedial games, and playful design of applications, services, products and environments
- Are we entering the "Ludic Age", or a new phase in the late-modern "Ludification of Culture"?

(Image source: Deterding et al. 2011.)
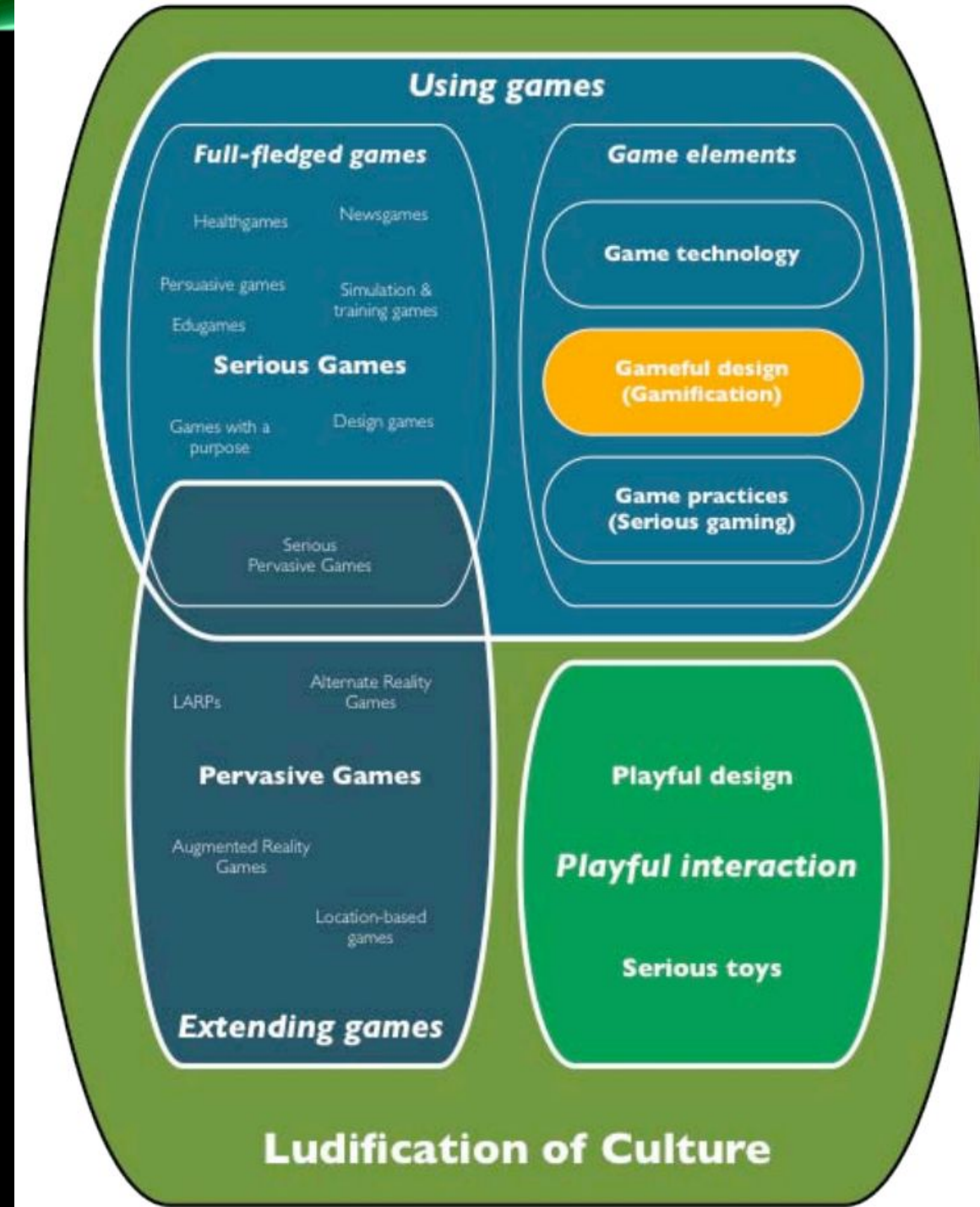
LUDIFICATION OF CULTURE

- Growth of game industry, or ludic art movements (e.g. Situationists) only one aspect
- Media culture both interfaces with game cultures, and develops game, or play-like media forms (reality television, transmedial storytelling, audience participation etc.)
- Digital media is inherently playful? Its interactive, multimedia and connective capabilities invite activity and trial-and-error attitude
- Huizinga (1938) acknowledged "play impulse" at the heart of all true culture, but also warned about the decay of playful culture
- *Gamification* (application of game-like/gameful elements) particularly ambiguous: both aim to improve, motivate and make everyday reality more fun - but also to manipulate, tempt and cheat for commercial or other profit

PERVASIVE GAMES AND PLAY

- Intermingling of factual and fictional, play and serious, is nothing new

- Social constructivist thought emphasises the role of shared conceptions in the production of "reality" (e.g. Berger & Luckmann 1966)

- It could be argued that the proliferation of media, information and communication will promote complex contexts, where same activity becomes situated in several, possibly conflicting frames of reference

- Analyses of pervasive games suggest that the social, spatial and temporal expansion of play potentially both benefits and confuses both participants and observers (Montola 2005; 2012; Stenros, Montola & Mäyrä 2007; Montola, Stenros & Waern 2009)
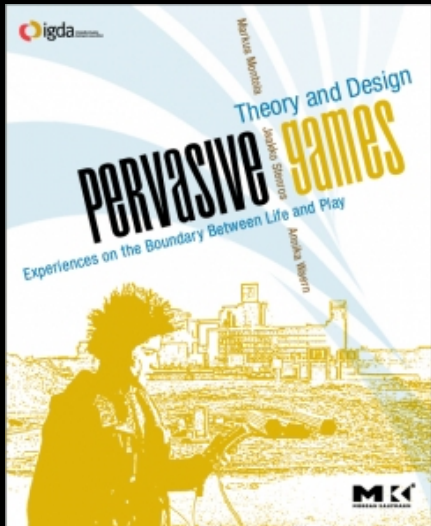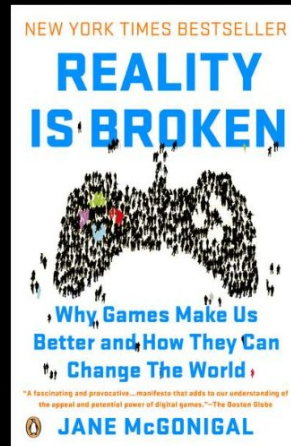
PLAY TO FIX REALITY

- As games rely on intrinsic motivation and playful pleasure in overcoming challenges, game play may promote transfer of problem-solving skills

- Cf. 'social knowledge construction' in *World of Warcraft* (Steinkuehler & Duncan 2008)

- Jane McGonigal (2011) has argued for networked players' potential to engage in collective action

- More skill in design of play and games needed, 'ludic literacy'

LUDIC AGE

- In *The Gameful World* (2015), Eric Zimmerman claims that 21st century will be defined by games:
    - Culture no longer dominated by written word or image; we live in "a world of systems" and in Ludic Century, information has been put in play
    - It is not enough to be systems-literate person (analytically), one must also be capable of playing with them, being creative and thinking like a designer
    - Games require active participation, invite everyone to be a game designer
- Optimism: the playful spirit of initiative, collaboration and problem-solving will lead us to require and design better, more informative, transparent and fair systems for our society

THE GAMEFUL WORLD

Approaches,
Issues,
Applications

edited by **Steffen P. Walz and Sebastian Deterding**
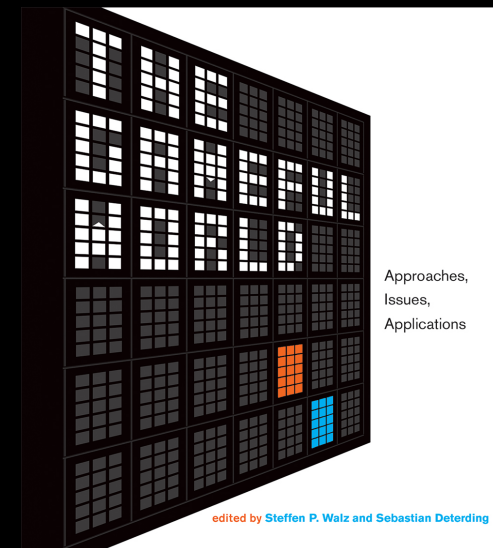
MANY LUDIC LITERACIES

- As games and play become accentuated in culture and society, ludic literacies proliferate:
  - functional game literacy (being able to play games)
  - critical game literacy (being able to evaluate games as cultural products)
  - creative ludic literacy (being able to playfully engage, adapt and change systems and situations)
- There are dual dimensions, both in games/gameplay and gamification/ludification of culture and society:
  - critical appropriation of existing games for optimal/creative play practices
  - engagement in modification, re-design and original game design practices
  - critical appropriation of gamification for optimal/creative non-entertainment purposes
  - engagement in gamification and ludification of institutions, services - of communities and cultures

NOT ONLY FAIR PLAY?

- Not all play is positive, collaborative and constructive
- Dark play: disruptive, harmful and dangerous play is also common
- Modelling system in 'gameful' manner can mean many things: collaborative, competitive, social, solitary, casual or intensely immersive
- Play experiences that produce enjoyment and motivation in one, can turn off or terrify others
- 'Ludo-literate design' is based on identifying the main goals, translating them into playful challenges, rules and feedback in a game frame
- But it is also based on understanding of social and cultural frames, and recognition and respect for individual differences

MANY LUDIC FUTURES

- Cultivating ludic literacy promotes analytical and experiential awareness of available alternatives

- Pervasive play can take the form of team sports – or solitary, focused effort

- The culture of gamification suits some: simple and clear metrics, plus clear rewards

- Alternatively, culture of ludification is open for designs that emphasise free and creative play

- What kind of game our future society (and cultural institutions) will be based on?
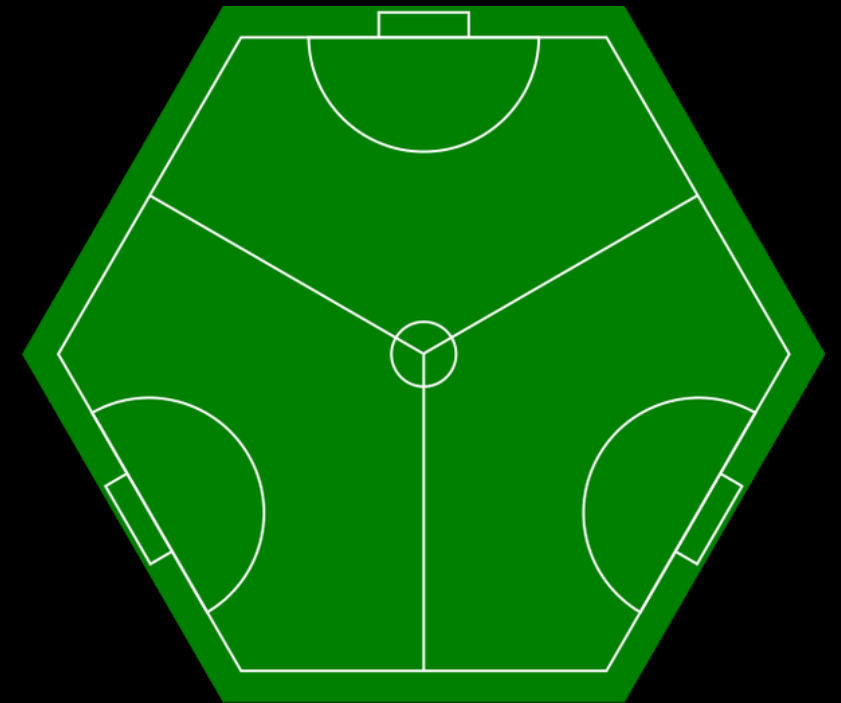
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