

I told you that to tell you this: Metagaming and Metacognition in the Hybrid  
Classroom

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Abstract:

This paper theorizes the use of play and gamified methods to foster metacognition, or strategies for learning and learning about learning, in online graduate instruction. In the process, it calls into question the determinism of “serious” games as being the only means of facilitating metacognition. Ultimately, by adopting metagame approaches—that is, approaches based on goals and achievements that are external to the game and/or are developed by the players themselves—metacognition can and does occur because students participate in the development of the rewards. Moreover, any metagame feature ultimately becomes a commentary so that an approach based on metagaming offers its own in-built formative feedback.

Keywords:

Games, play, metagames, metacognition, online instruction

At Old Dominion University, all of the graduate level English courses have a synchronous distance component, one that is facilitated via a web-conferencing package, with a simultaneous webchat. Not only is the video recorded, the audio is transcribed. In teaching a graduate class for the first time, I realized immediately that despite all of the technology sharing media, particularly the digital and/or interactive media like games, that are the subject of many of these classes, was going to be problematic. The goal, then, becomes one of creating a (kind of) meta-game by turning the course into a (kind of) social media game through the adoption of gamefied methods, especially in the tasks.<sup>1</sup> In the last case, regardless of the ostensible topic, the tasks focus on producing meta-cognition, or strategies for learning. This became even more important as I contemplated shifting a class to online only in the middle of a term and later creating a condensed Maymester class. The intent was to make productive use of what Hjorth (2011) cites as “the impact of advancements in the internet—from accessibility to sociability—is immeasurable in affecting not only how games are played and shared (e.g. in increasingly networked contexts such as MMOs) but also how notions of community, collaboration, identity and authorship are conceptualized and practised” (p. 48). Given that Hjorth cautions against the commodification of these processes, I was mindful of Raessens’ (2012) contention that there is actually a tendency toward rule-based play and little room for free play resulting from the ludification of social media.<sup>2</sup> The distinction becomes important given Aarseth’s (2004) definition of a game as requiring rules, a gameworld and gameplay. Said another way, free play

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<sup>1</sup>In order to avoid confusion, “class” refers to the group of students and “course” refers to the offering.

<sup>2</sup>Here it is important to define and to distinguish a few key terms. First, gamification ostensibly refers to the adaptation of methods and practices of games into other forms. However, it is often confused with what games scholars have termed “pointsification” because awarding points for something does not necessarily turn something into a game. Thus, the term ludification has been adopted by many game scholars because it reflects the grounding of the practice in an understanding of the constitutive parts of games and play, of *ludus* and *paidia*, as set out by theorists like Caillois (1961) and developed by future scholars such as Aarseth (2004) and others.

and playing with the game can both occur within the confines of a game, but the addition of too many rules, especially external ones, can stifle the creativity of free play. As the classes progress, cognitive and affective responses to play become noticeable even in the absence of games. In this way, my classes tend to develop both versions in Jensen's (2013) enumeration of "metagames." In the first instance, there are user-defined goals and outcomes, which appear in students' assignments and interactions and in their approaches to them. In the second case, there are aims and achievements that are external to the primary content. The latter appear most frequently in the elements and the parts of students' responses and interactions.

With its assigned weekly response papers and activities, which I have based on the British panel show, *Room 101*, so-called "Battle Royale" games, and from hockey, class meetings also become a sort of weekly and ongoing metagame. Here, Rolf Nohr (2015) argues that the ultimate effect of metagaming activity is to provide a commentary about games and game elements; that is, a game about games. The commentary and the interactions are the parts that matter. The online classes take advantage of the ability to text chat, across multiple platforms and devices, and to include links, videos, and files in addition to comments in order to elevate the discussion, which is ostensibly always about the catalogue copy. Said another way, my method of designing a class involves but also resists the premise of Hacker's (1998) defining study of metacognition—i.e., "knowledge of one's own knowledge processes"—in games and in simulations (p. 3). Thus, metagaming becomes a means and method of developing metacognition. As each semester proceeds, the response papers, and also the sometimes spontaneous class discussion, reveal the playfulness that a class infuses into their work. Here, discussion is not always spontaneous because students actively seek moments when they can refer to each other's work, especially by adding taglines, memes, or other references to a

comment. Posting links in the chat window becomes a competition, whether for memes and clips or for supplementary readings. The process provides commentaries, then, on games as well as on how games can teach strategies for learning, the very contingency of meta-cognition. As a metagame, in this case a game about learning itself, the classes also calls into question the prevailing scholarly position that pleasurable games must follow the popular forms of accumulation, competition, and/or conquest and that pleasurable games cannot be useful in learning situations (Klimmt, Hefner, & Vorderer, 2009; Vorderer, Hartmann, & Klimmt, 2003; Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004). Despite his admission of having “met with mixed results” in trying to teach with so-called “serious games,” Hacker’s (2016) later work emphasizes this variety of “game,” which are designed precisely to be didactic and not at all enjoyable, let alone interesting (p. 29). The insistence on serious games is based on the presumption that these are the only means of producing metacognition (Mayer, 2016). However, as I show elsewhere (Ouellette 2019), games with in-built metagame attributes can and do produce metacognition, particularly by providing commentaries on games themselves. Thus, my paper examines and theorizes the development of metacognition in and through the use of gamified methods in the hybrid classroom.

#### You can’t be serious: Games and Learning

The negotiation of the internal and the external goals provides the key intersection where game play fosters metacognition. Alas, the usual means of teaching a player about a game and its limits occurs through the invocation of some sort of novitiate.<sup>3</sup> In this case, it is the idea of play that is born or “spawned,” rather than the player. As such, this actually affords an opportunity for

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<sup>3</sup>In fact, games scholars tend refer to a player’s insertion into a game as “spawning” and it frequently takes the form of some kind of birth or re-birth. Thus, as I argue elsewhere (Ouellette 2019), learning how to play and learning strategies for learning frequently appears as an in-built function of games.

metagame exploration. Importantly, Steven Conway (2010) introduces the term “ludicity” to enumerate “the degree to which digital games allow play, ‘play’ here being defined as the possibility to act and have an effect upon the gameworld” (p. 135). Indeed, the hybrid nature of the graduate classes I teach offer more than just the ability to explore (means of) play; that is, to determine the ludicity. Recognizing this possibility, Conway adds “hyper-ludicity,” or the means by which a game bestows additional powers on the players to his typology (p. 135).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, each of the components that produced the metagaming effects stresses both the idea of *ludus*, or structural and community rules, and *paidia*, the more free flowing, or “sandbox” form of play (Caillois, 1961). Jennifer deWinter and Stephanie Vie (2015) explain that the while play, too, is determined by rules, “unlike games, the rules of play are impermanent, magically invoked within each play activity, only to dissipate at the end of play. Games, on the other hand, provide finite play. The rules are created and then recreated again and again each time that the magic circle is formed. It is within these game rules that the values of play are expressed. Games allow for disciplining; they allow for mastery; they allow for repetition. Games allow us to scale ourselves to the world” (p. 2). Both *ludus* and *paidia* appear in the metarules the classes develop, including but not limited to their civility and their frequent efforts (as the chat transcripts reveal) to insert references to things that have occurred in class—like one student’s very noisy rooster—into as many comments as possible. Since many of my courses involve play, textual play, and activism in pedagogy, the overall effect has been to create a metagame about metagames in and through the pedagogy. Thus, I situate the hybrid, synchronous online class within a framework of ludified

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<sup>4</sup>Starting with the idea of ludicity, Conway (2010) actually develops a three-fold typology of the ways ludicity does or does not occur in the course of playing a game. As indicated, moments of “hyper-ludicity” occur when the game gives the player special or additional powers, like the Pac-Man’s famous “power pellets.” In contrast, a game can impede the player, which Conway highlights as “contra-ludicity.” After all, Pac-Man had to run away from the ghosts. Finally, “hypo-ludicity” refers to the ways the game takes away agency altogether.

social media in order to show the ways in which students' engagement in and through *ludus* and *paidia* facilitate a more inclusive, more open and more generous learning environment, one in which play elevates the level of engagement and participation while providing strategies for learning. In this last regard, metacognition offers another means beyond profiteering of capitalizing, as it were, on what Hjorth (2011) identifies as "the increasing role of the player in the production and reproduction of games" (p. 48). In this way, play is more than a matter of the mere determinism of pleasure as simply fun and fun as the sole reason for playing the game.

An insistence on games as pleasurable produces a particular circularity in Hacker's position regarding metacognition in games which results in several other factors being overlooked (1998, 2016). Most important of these is what Michelle Ouellette and I (2015) call the "transludic space," which exists between and among the players as they play the game. Put simply, the transludic is a liminal space, created by players' socializations with each other and with the game. For example, players in a co-operative game must negotiate their individual styles and preferences in order to play, while also negotiating the game itself. Indeed, this is precisely the contingency of Deumert's (2014) suggestion that social media might be the new "third space," where the primary rule is to further the conversation. Developing the transludic offers means of accentuating the productive elements of the virtual space. Citing Goffman's work on interactions, Turner, Wang, and Reinsch (2020) note that "communities develop normative guidelines some of which—including situational proprieties—become cultural expectations" (78). Where Goffman (1963) highlights the (sometimes physical) barrier between the so-called "front" and "back." These still exist, with the formal, institutional structure an always already presence. Likewise, the "back" is always already available since students can send any variety of personal, direct messages to each other at any time. However, as Skerrett (2010) notes, a "third

space” occurs at the intersection of conversations and interactions between teachers and students. In her case, Skerrett finds such a space on a Facebook reading group. The key difference is that a classroom, like a game, does this in real time. Moreover, the ludicity, translucidity, and metagame features create a space for experimentation and rehearsal, one which contrasts sharply from the rules-based rigidity of serious games, which Hacker (2016) insists should proceed from an “emulation of the expert model” (p. 25). As I will argue, pleasure derives from the challenge of dealing with and manipulating the structures that constrain their access to games, and from introducing metarules depending on how they were introduced to the game, and with whom they play. Ultimately, then, the goal of the course and of the paper is to show the ways in which this kind of class can fulfill Aarseth’s (2004) assertion that the gameworld is its own reward.

The study of teaching with and through play and social media necessarily invokes and/or bridges several important debates in Game Studies. In their prescient text, *Gaming Matters*, Ruggill and McAllister (2011) argue that the overwhelming tendency when scholars consider games is to focus exclusively on “what games can be” or on “what games are” (p. 5). Little work, then, links the two perspectives and this has been the case for games, games in social media, and games in the classroom. For their part, Ruggill and McAllister (2013) later caution against using video games in the classroom because the medial function of the game itself takes over. As mentioned earlier, I have adapted existing game-based structures for my assignments and exercises, but the game is not the goal. Rather, the game is only there to produce a metagame.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, then, it is well worth noting that Ketamo (2011) recognizes the

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<sup>5</sup>To be sure, I have adapted part of the premise of the BBC comedy panel show, *Room 101*, which takes its name from the eponymous room in Orwell’s *1984*, from which no one ever returned. As on the show, participants must argue for the removal of a “canonical” item from the curriculum—forever. The challenge is that there are other choices available. Students have to be prepared to argue for an item based on the problem it addresses, not whether they like it or whether it is supposed essential. “The Eliminator” takes its name from a “battle-royale” game within the *Forza*

potential for games involving social media to become sites of learning: “According to cognitive psychology of learning, our thinking is based on conceptual representations of our experiences and complex relations between these concepts and experiences” (p. 231). At the root of this process is user generated content and the sharing of that content. However, Ketamo is interested in developing design heuristics to allow Artificial Intelligence (AI) engines to “learn” how to produce machine versions of social interactions. The goal is not pedagogy for people, but rather computer cognition for commercial communication with consumers. The prospect of the exploitation of users and their content in and through games based on and in social media leads Hjorth to highlight “online games in which the maintenance of the social in a sense of community, along with the deployment of creative and affective labour, is integral to gameplay” (p. 48). Hjorth sees the exploitation of creative and affective labour as inherently exploitative because so far it has been found only in commercial online spaces. As such, she is also more interested in settling the network vs. community debate which has dominated the study of social media games. In other words, it replicates the dichotomy Ruggill and McAllister identify within Game Studies. They argue that the answer lies in recognizing the roots of gaming in social practice. Part of the challenge arises from the contradictory, hybrid nature of gaming itself, for games are as conventionalized as they are spontaneous, as ritualized as they are organic.

While the combination of written and verbal interactions make the class meetings a pleasurable game, the process also provides several important commentaries on games themselves, particularly how games teach learning strategies, or meta-cognition, for digital

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*Horizon 4* world. Battle royale games feature lots of players trying to eliminate each other until one only is left. In the classroom version, students must “eliminate” one of their weekly readings, and for good reason. However, they then must also participate in “The Blender,” which derives from hockey coaches’ tendency to “get out the blender,” or mix up which players are playing together. Thus, the students must add a reading and explain their choices.

scenarios. Three related factors in the course's design and the class interactions—ludicity, transludicity, and the contingent metagame aspects—facilitate and foster the metacognition processes. What becomes rather quickly apparent is that as Michelle Ouellette and I (2015) argue, “it is the ineluctable combination of rules, play and affirmation that makes possible the paradoxical relationship with unpleasant emotions upon which the success or failure of the game rests” (p. 260). In other words, the success of the game is not dependent on pleasure alone. Instead, we find that success depends on a game's combination of Schiller's (2006) enumeration of three drives—normative, sensual, and play—that produces the allure of games. In particular, “play that reconciles the incumbent and contingent regulation of sensation entailed by the other, competing drives” (p. 260). The key to the play drive, then, is that it provides an essential link for media based on the interplay of social interactions and rules. Further, Michelle Ouellette and I (2015) show that this occurs in and through a “transludic space,” one that encompasses “the otherwise interstitial place that exists between the player(s) and the game” (p. 264). This is significant for the current study because they develop the role of the transludic through a reading of having played *Portal* as a team. *Portal* is a famously non-competitive game that tests players' skills at solving puzzles, and their ability to learn how to solve them, through dialogue, interaction, and cooperative rather than competitive play. Said another way, *Portal* is a social game built around metacognition. Moreover, *Portal* frequently breaks the so-called fourth wall, with the game's AI playfully coaxing and cajoling the player with hints and comments that foster the thinking about learning. Writing separately, I highlight (Ouellette 2019) the importance of metagaming aspects like breaking the fourth wall in producing metacognition. Here, the shared, transludic space, exists in and through cooperation, compromise, and communal concerns. Similarly, Ketamo (2011) notes that “users can relatively quickly and easily teach behavior to a

game character. Furthermore, it has been determined that the character's behavior or competence is relatively similar to behavior in the real world" (p. 231). This becomes important because the transludic operations call into question the deterministic position that games must involve competition to be successful. In addition, the playfulness of the sharing undercuts the proposition that only serious games can teach. Moreover, while he is attempting to find a commercializable heuristic, Ketamo allows that human interactions develop faster than any current AI engine.

Starting with the virtual and the live chat, the responses, and the discussions, students are encouraged to experiment with the elements of games and play as they learn the elements. The iterative process through which the ludicity occurs also combines with the third element, "metagaming," which Jensen (2013) argues is a "relatively unknown concept" in game studies (p. 72). In her study of social media and games, Hjorth "highlights new forms of emergent affective, emotional, creative and social labour that are being deployed by users/players as they transgress conventional consumption and production divisions through their produser agency" (p. 48). It is worth noting that "produser" is Hjorth's own neologism for the hybrid, simultaneous position of the producer-user. That said, Hjorth's model of interaction, even with its concern for the user, as opposed to Ketamo's focus on the developer, still results in a transactional model. Even though a grade is the ostensible end goal or win condition or achievement of a course, this is not the only, nor is it the most important goal of the individual class session. Ideally, the grade is a metagame achievement since it occurs outside and beyond the limits of play. Ultimately, participating in the play of the class requires the rehearsal, replication, and repetition of the conventionalized rules that developed through the users' inputs and interactions. Said another way, the class developed its own normative drive, its own mode of affirmation, and created these through their play with each other but also with the rules themselves. In this last instance, it is

worth recalling that metagame features usually proceed from the initial premise that they involve rewards that are external to the game and that these can include or develop into player-defined goals and achievements. As mentioned earlier, Nohr (2015) concludes that any metagame is always already making comment on games because the development of metagame aspects reflects the degree of ludicity and the extent of the transludicity. Players can create new goals with and for each other when the game allows for it. Rather than a comment on the game not having enough goals, rewards, or achievement, the existence of metagame features highlights the freedom—that is, the agency—of the players within the game world. Within a classroom setting, play and playfulness should not be taken as the antithesis of seriousness. Rather, metagaming within a classroom setting suggests a comfort level and a safe space. In *The Art of Failure* (2013) Jesper Juul argues that the ability to create such a space for exploration is one of the most important aspects of games, “a safe space in which failure is okay, neither painful nor the least unpleasant” (p. 4). Ultimately, the class and their interactions provide multiple means for showing the ways games can and do teach without being serious and do so without being competitive, despite the insistence of scholars such as Vorderer, Hefner, and Klimmt (2009) and Oliver, et al (2016) that these are necessary for successful games that teach. In terms of the production of metacognition it is important to recall that Hacker (2016) notes in his attempt to reconcile the failure of serious games to produce satisfactory learning outcomes with a lament that he is not alone in finding that the “research on the educational value of edutainment is greatly lacking” (p. 20). This is another way of confirming Ruggill and McAllister’s enumeration of the dueling dualisms of Game Studies determinism. Thus, the question should not be whether games and play can be used in the service of learning. A better question is the extent of the meta-cognition because it must be the essential part of any game with the ostensible aim of teaching.

At the very least, facilitating a kind of social media game has the in-built opportunity to provide Hacker's (2016) baseline requirement for the instantiation of metacognition, namely "awareness of oneself as a learner" (p. 22). As a metagame that exists in and through transludic ludicity, as it were, each class also becomes a metagame (for and) about metacognition.

#### Play along: Games for Metacognition

Developing the transludic space remains crucial, for it encompasses the space between the players and the game, as well as the space between the players and each other. Without naming it as such, Keogh (2014) recognizes the key function of the interstitial, both for design and the experience of it. As he puts it, designers "often forgo traditional [game] design's striving for immersion. Rather, as they are most commonly played in brief moments of waiting, they ask the player to pay attention to two worlds at once 'co-attentively' as they incorporate videogame play into everyday life" (p. 12-13). In this way, the space is one of collaboration, and of co-operation as much as it is one of competition. While there is clearly a competition aspect here, the effect of that is mitigated by the outcome. Although mentioned earlier, it cannot be overstated that gamification is not the mere addition of points or rewards to a given scenario. If that were the case, then the proverbial "Grandma's rule"—don't spill your milk or eat your broccoli and then you can have some ice cream—of the education psychology course at most any faculty of education would have counted long ago. Thus, Nohr (2015) makes the important distinction that gamification must be conceptualized as a process in which subjects are playfully stimulated to self-conduct by means of marginal formal and narrative parameters" (p. 205). In other words the rationale and the outcome, while related, neither switch places, nor are determined by the media or by the act of mediation. Although the focus is on developing "business factors," Paavilainen's (2010) survey of social game heuristics very clearly states

“games require heuristics of their own. In addition to usability, video game heuristics address issues concerning playability. Playability is a rather vague term which, unlike usability, does not have a standardized definition. Several authors have offered definitions for playability but none of them could be considered as a de facto standard in the academia” (p. 56). For example, one of the key elements of competition that has myriad effects and outcomes is the speed with which students type their entries into the chat, the speed with which they enter search strings and return results—for example regarding clips, examples, articles, etc—and the speed with which they reply to questions, queries and, especially, banter. The cognitive and affective dimension frequently overwhelms, as it were, the play and the competition. This follows not only from the aspects of play but also from the premise by which McLuhan (1964) argues that the “medium is the message” (p. 23). Here, as McLuhan explains, the medium is any extension of the self—here, the Webex or Google hangout *and* everything they entail—while the message is the change of scale, pace, and pattern, usually of labour. In this way, then, the content of any medium is always (already) another medium. Rather than take a stance on whether technology would have positive or negative effects, McLuhan instead argues that the experiences and the roles of participants change with technology. Thus, he concludes that games, “as popular art forms offer to all an immediate means of participation in the full life of a society, such as no single role or job can offer” (p. 210). While the neo-liberal university is clearly the content, it is possible to resist it through other media, and through metacognition, particularly through increased and active participation.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, these processes also comprise another form in and through the means

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<sup>6</sup>Here it is well worth mentioning that Turner, Wang, and Reinsch (2020) noted that when faced with the move to online instruction due to the Covid19 outbreak, some instructors instituted technical rules as a means of managing their “competitive presence,” or the ways in which they “vie for the attention of students” (pp. 90-91). Put simply, my own tendency would be to make play the rule and then to play with that rule.

of developing and/or deploying the extension, particularly as this applies to the metagaming aspects. As Jensen (2013) explains, “metagaming may be said to account for the development of explicit goals—and therefore of *ludic* games through the inscription of implicit or explicit socio-cultural values” (p. 73). As enumerated earlier, metagames are understood to encompass two broadly defined forms. First, there are games with achievements and rewards that are external to the game itself. Being the leading scorer on your basketball team or on your *World of Warcraft* guild is an external achievement. In the case of the online, gamified structure of the class, external achievements and rewards take the form of students’ implicit and explicit benefits, both realized or not, or intended or not. Here without explicitly naming either metagaming or metacognition, Paavilainen (2010) enumerates the relationship as one based on “goals, uncertain outcome, intrinsic and extrinsic fantasies and cognitive curiosity” (p.57). Fantasies, especially extrinsic ones, exist outside the game by definition. At the same time, cognitive curiosity—that is, consciousness of inquiry—is the very contingency of metacognition. Moreover, extrinsic motivation remains a crucial determinant of student success (Guthrie and Davis, 2003; Lepper, Corpus & Iyengar, 2015; Schunk, 2012). That is to say, there may be—and indeed there are—benefits of which the students are not immediately aware.

In this regard, then, it is particularly interesting to note that Cole (2010) refers to the “speed run” as a common form of the metagame. In this version of a metagame, the player attempts to go through a maze, boss level, course, etc as fast as possible. While the player seems to be playing against the game and against other player’s best times, the player’s main contest is with her/him/their self. In other words, the goal and the reward are self-actualizing, and self-improving even if this is not the stated intent. This relates precisely to the second form of metagaming, in which the rewards and/or competition occur in and through user-defined rules

and guidelines. Thus, the rewards are always (already) user-defined. However, the distinction needs to be made that the rules manipulate the game as much as they manipulate play. This stands somewhat as resistance to or an inversion of the traditional paradigm, which places the player effectively at the mercy of the game. For this reason, Perron (2003) defines the game-player as someone who actively plays with the rules and the game-world themselves (p. 232). That is, the rules and the rewards structure manipulate the player because all of the moves possible within the game are preceded and/or conditioned by the algorithm of the game. In the case of the social media game, there might not be an algorithm on the surface, yet the criteria—insistent design, collection routines, building routines and free exploration—all hold (Ruggill & McAllister, 2011). Each of these metagame tasks occurs through the interplay of ludicity and transludicity. The game insists upon playing at the very outset because of the fact that there is a grade, However, the grade is actually an external factor each week. That is, it is an insufficient reward to engage in the play and in the metaplay. As Hamari and Eranti (2011) explain, “not all players engage in the achievement-hunting meta-game and this might not regard the progression in the achievement system itself as a reward; however, unlocking an achievement takes the player closer to the (usually implicit) winning condition of an achievement system-unlocking the maximum amount of badges” (p. 11). While there are not necessarily badges to collect, the contradictory tension of the rules-reward structure holds insofar as players—in this case students—are motivated, almost insistently, to share and to communicate, to collaborate, and to co-operate with each other; that is to operate almost entirely and exclusively within and through the transludic environment and also to plan for and to do so. In essence, the sharing begets sharing so that the only defense, as it were, is more offense. Said another way, players become motivated to share and to engage because of the simultaneity of the intrinsic and the extrinsic

reward. Strategies for learning, then, arise as both a want and a need so that metacognition always already occurs. Hacker's later (2016) restatement of his approach to games and learning identifies just such a scenario. Here, the process involves "a person's ability (a) to identify the task on which one is currently working, (b) to check on current progress of that work, (c) to evaluate that progress, and (d) to predict whether the expected outcome will be attained" (p. 21). Playing the game becomes the purpose for playing the game, and the reason, and the outcome.

As mentioned before, the key to understanding McLuhan is to understand the ways in which the content of one medium is always another medium. Here, it is the dissemination, the collection, the exploration *and* the insistence that everyone do so within the online gamified medium. In addition, one of the key consequences of this formulation is recognizing the change; ie, the message—of scale, of pace, of labour, and of interactions. Thus, the multi-modal scenario enhances first the speed—here, it is with tongue firmly planted in cheek and with all sense of irony that I acknowledge that the course takes/took on many and several aspects of the ubiquitous speed run, particularly in tracking the chat comments, the posted links, dropped files, etc.—and, these do not even include the "back channel" conversations on other social media of which I am aware but by choice not a party. At the same time, though, it becomes clear that the enhancement and the scale of discovery and collection routines also become enhancements in multiple and simultaneous ways, particularly in terms of participation. Such is the cyclical nature McLuhan ascribes to the content of a medium. Quite simply, when I was a graduate student, the classroom was a come-as-you-are affair. You brought notes, a source text or two, a writing implement and your wits. It was also an orderly affair. In the course of every evening of the online class, we collected several pages worth of communal notes. Indeed, placing these into a PDF and then into a Google Docs folder became customary. It was simultaneously a motivation,

a reward and an achievement. This is a reminder that, as Jensen (2013) notes, “other forms of meta-gaming exist [. . .] and each of these forms has the potential to transform a *paidaic* game into a *ludic* game” (p. 73). In other words, even as it appears to be a multi-modal free-for-all, the game becomes one with very clear cut rules, rewards, and boundaries. The first and last of these are the most significant because as much as there is a necessary enhancement, when pushed to its extremes, the class retrieves and replicates fundamental rules around the collection, dissemination, and discovery of material and insists on them per the four usual aspects of games. However, these are the hallmarks of scholarly practice so that one maps onto the other. No longer is the classroom a come-as-you-are event.

Here, it is worth noting that Paavilainen’s (2010) heuristic, albeit one aimed at commercializing games, offers a means of considering the processes in play. He finds that successful games are built on “Physicality, Spontaneity and Inherent Sociability,” but for the purpose of social media games he adds, “Narrativity and Asynchronicity” (p. 10). In this case, “physicality” refers to the phaetic gestures like virtual “high fives” and “likes,” as well as sharing and sending materials. Spontaneity refers to the speed of actions, including clicks but also accessibility. Sociability occurs through the attachments developed by and among players. As much as these have analogues and practices in the class and the games, Paavilainen reserves special status for narrativity and asynchronicity. In the former case, narrativity can be “found in the stylized [...] rhetoric which is apparent in many social games. Rather than just presenting the explicit gameplay results to the player, these [...] are broadcasted through the player’s news feed and add depth” (p. 61). Within a social media setting, narrativity features in the story of the experience as well as in the seriality of the meetings. Maeder and Wentz (2014) note that “seriality as a key feature of web-based forms has largely been neglected and under theorized”

(p. 129). Moreover Maeder and Wentz argue that because it is based on “serial processuality, on coupling, doubling, repetition, replication and more,” seriality offers a means of bridging the gap between narrative or more algorithmic operations in social media theorizing (p. 130). Indeed, this becomes apparent in practice because of the ways asynchronicity occurs and functions. As much as the recording, the transcript, and the chat offer chances to pick up and return, it is the back channel and the motivation that stand out. The former represents a paratext, the later reveals the effects of the metatext, so that rationale becomes outcome. The metagame produces metacognition and vice versa.

The transludic space occasioned and facilitated by the web environment and a routine based on gamified practice immediately enhances and changes the scale of discovery and exploration, as well. While the insistence and the collection are obvious, this last pair of elements derives from the recognition that the online environment and its gamification allows for what can only be described as hyper-ludic moments. As mentioned earlier, Steven Conway (2010) defines ludicity as “the degree to which digital games allow play, ‘play’ here being defined as the possibility to act and have an effect upon the gameworld” (p. 135). Said another way, ludicity comprises the extent to which players are able to play with—that is to manipulate and to interact with—a given game and its apparatus. Thus, sometimes the very first exercise I ask of the class is to decide which of several models of evaluation—both formative and summative—they would prefer. Moreover, in assigning this task, I leave the room. It is entirely their decision. In this way, they have the appearance of being able to play with and to manipulate the system but the reward structure and the rules have already been set. It could be argued that the only play, then, is metaplay. This becomes important given the model that was implemented, which involved rotating crews supplying responses to the readings and topics assigned. These became the source

first of competition and second of play as the students took the opportunity to refer back and forth to each other's work and to engage in, to avoid, or to comment on the competition that evolved with respect to the length, the breadth, the multi-modality and the humour of each succeeding response. In Conway's formulation, then, "the implementation of hyper-ludic features can broaden a game's learning curve as the use and implications of these features must be fully understood in order to achieve [the goal]" (p. 136). In traditional games these take the form of a power-up, a level-up, or an add-on that enhances a player's ability to play and to engage with the game. As mentioned earlier, Pac-Man's power pellet is a very famous example. That said, it becomes clear that hyper-ludicity also offers a means for both scaffolding and metacognition because players learn the pattern and strategies for capitalizing on opportunities. The other key in this regard is that such in-game enhancements also have limits. Pac-Man can only eat ghosts for a short time. However, the environment, particularly through the gamified features, becomes one filled with hyper-ludicity. Indeed, it was built on that premise and deployed around it. This becomes more important given the effect on the presence of transludic function. In fact, the intent was to establish a hyper-ludic version of the transludic space so that the primary and the ongoing development involved collaboration and co-operation over and above any elements of competition. Indeed, the effect was to establish and to collect metarules and/or metagame features that would incorporate the competitive moments and thereby render them as ludic moments that were subverted and/or transformed into paidaic ones. Put simply, the rules based play occasions free play. Thus, the reward and/or the pleasure occurs in and through the challenge itself.

This is more than just another restatement of the medium is the message, learning for learning's sake, etc. Of the four basic elements of games, the first one to be listed is almost

always related to the insistent function. This is the essential part of the “gamework” Ruggill, McAllister, and Menchaca (2004) derive so that scholars have “a way to theorize computer games as cultural artifacts, artifacts that motivate work as much as—and sometimes even more than—play” (p. 299). Indeed, they recognize that as much as games might entail play, this play is highly contingent because players actively “decode the ‘frameworks of knowledge’ created by developers [. . .] but in fact encode these frameworks (or parts of them at least), shaping game worlds and their meanings according to strategy, taste, style of play [. . .] Gamers actively help create the narrative, thematic, and ideological structures that determine the artifactual experience. In so doing, gamers also reproduce or consent to ideologies embedded within games themselves. This, too, is a kind of work” (p. 301). Quite clearly, then, the labour is one of the key results, if not a reward, of the change of scale and pace fostered the digital environment. Simply put, students can—and the emphasis has to be on the potential—do more work. However, the question remains as to the nature, the content, the outcome and, of course, the rigour of that work. As Raessens (2012) argues, the key development of the gamification of social media, the one that allows the claim to be made, is the combination of the free play with narrative and identity since “identities are constructed in a playful way. Creating and maintaining communities form the core of these sites, which offer users the possibility to playfully express who they think they are and, more importantly, how they can be seen as more attractive in the eyes of fellow users” (p. 8). In fact, Raessens distinguishes between gamification, which he recognizes is deployed loosely and inaccurately, and what he calls “ludification,” to indicate the ways in which rules and play merge. The distinction occurs because “it is the rules that constitute game worlds, one could conclude that this process of ludic identity construction can only take place within the formats developed” (p. 8). The ability to construct an identity in and through community

interactions offers not only a narrative but a meta-gaming experience. Similarly, the role of communities in identity formation is one of the conclusions Hjorth (p. 42) draws regarding the potential for social media games. While she emphasizes exploitative labour practices, Hjorth nevertheless acknowledges “the practices of imaging communities reflect forms of intimacy, labour and creativity, which provide ways for configuring, and intervening in, a nation’s and a region’s ‘imagined community’” (p. 58). In cataloguing the elements of successful social (media) games, Paavilainen (2010) highlights responses that correspond to the heuristic. These include “In the case of imagining communities, each community shares, stores and saves their media in diverse ways, reflecting localized [. . .] rituals and practices” (p. 58). This is how the communal narrative develops and with it, strategies for furthering identities constructed in and through participation in it.

#### Play On: Conclusions

In this last regard, as much as it has been well-documented that metagames involve rewards, quests, activities and achievements *outside* the game’s logic of *ludus* and *paidia*, the full consequences of metagame activities remain under-examined and under-explored. This is the case in Game Studies as a whole, let alone within the specific study of games or gamified methods as teaching tools. In particular, the meta-game activity provides a means of evaluating the game activity. As Nohr (2015) explains, an evaluation occurs because the metagame provides a commentary on the very essence of the always already social aspect of playing a game:

an isolated subject finds itself in a situation that demands coping with a series of tasks that become more and more complex and difficult. The reward for an accomplished task is yet another task. The motivation for accomplishing more and more tasks derives from the questionable promise that in the end, something awaits that will make dealing with

the tasks seem reasonable in retrospective [. . .] While working on the tasks, this very promise of a meaningful ending and the pleasure of iteration provide the subject's motivation to just keep going. (p. 199)

It is not without irony that I offer that Nohr's summation might also be an apt description of the graduate school experience. Every compliment is a test of sorts. The reward for succeeding is always another, more difficult task. The goal is to get better at the game as it becomes more demanding. Indeed, the social media game provides its own evaluation—both formative and summative—from its very inception. The insistent call and response forms the very contingency of the hyper-ludic platform. Hyper-ludicity importantly offers a means of navigating the potential pitfalls of the “determinism of devices” which Galloway, Thacker, and Wark (2014) identify as an overwhelmingly and all too common mistake in approaching digital (as opposed to new) media and digital games. This occurs because media are understood as synonymous with devices so that “devices, technological apparatuses of mediation such as the phone, the file, or the printing press. And yet such technological devices are imbued with the irresistible force of their own determinacy. Media either determine a given social, cultural, or political dimension, or media are themselves determined by the social, cultural, or political” (p.7).<sup>7</sup> This is a reminder that, as McLuhan argues “the ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium” (p. 23). Taken this way, the content of the medium is metacognition. It need not be overt or explicit, or “serious” (Hacker, 1998, 2016 ).

Moreover, the overly-determined and yet uncritically held assumption is that gamification is the same as pointsification. In this regard, I find myself in rare, if not singular

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<sup>7</sup> One of the analogies that holds is having a baby in the classroom. No matter the lesson, the style, the mode, the instructor, etc. the subject becomes (about the baby). Here it is worth recalling Ruggill and McAllister's (2013) earlier cited argument against game consoles in the classroom.

agreement with Ian Bogost, in his assertion that so-called gamification is flatly “Bullshit.” Quite simply, there is no need to add a points system because one already exists and the calculus is quite clear, particularly as it relates to the achievement system and the inherent competition. Grad school should be, and is, competitive enough without adding an overly contrived parasitic and external system for the mere sake of fashion, fancy or fad. Games can also be co-operative. They need not be competitive and there is no need to keep score. What does inhere, then, is a revised, remediated system based on the intersection of *ludus* and *paidia*; that is, at the intersection of rules based play and free play. Such a system provides its own means of *creating* rewards and achievements and, as a consequence, serves as its own scoring system regardless of the “win” condition. A metagame is still a game, but with the added benefit that it is produced in and through the cognitive and affective responses of the participants. They create it because they want to, because they are self-motivated to do so. It is not imposed by an external system. The structure already exists for a third and/or transludic space. What remains is to recognize it as such and to foster its development through playful means. Ultimately, the reward is having played. This last is the heart of Aarseth’s (2004) germinal axiom that the gameworld is its own reward. In other words, the material-semiotic system provides its own logic, its own rationale, and its own outcome. This is the reason for playing, and play is its own reward. Fun is just a bonus.

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