A Citizen Of Culture: 
On art as a gamified experience

1. INTRODUCTION
The presentation, production and reflection on Art, as we now know it in the western world, has greatly changed since its beginning in the late eighteenth century. Waves of decolonization, of technological upgrades and the internationalisation of practice have led every actor and producer in the art world to rethink the way they position themselves in and interact with culture. Yet, it seems that one actor of the art world is frozen in time: the viewer. Still in their passive state, allowed into what Tony Bennett calls the exhibitionary complex only to be told “how to present themselves” (Bennett p.87), spectators and art aficionados have had only a subaltern position up until now.

It comes across as incongruous, in the era of internet 3.0, where consumers have become producers, to not rethink the role of this under-appreciated actor. But what would be the viewer of the twenty-first century? And how does this change also impact on the production of Art? To answer these questions, we’ll turn our attention to video games and gamification techniques to see how these user-centred approaches transform the status of the viewer and its place within the art world. Finally, we’ll explore how artistic production can learn from analytical games to create novel gamified experiences.

2. FROM VIEWER TO ACTOR: THE PLAYER
For the last forty years, video games, and their logic, have permeated society. What used to be seen as entertainment for misfitted individuals is nowadays incorporated in every aspect of our contemporary lives; from personal health to car insurance, and even education. Our watch gives us rewards for good nights of sleep, our internet provider gives us rebates on their services because of a new level we achieved through pre-authorized payments, and careers are not seen as a fixed goal anymore, but as a constant “update” of skills. Through this, consumers of goods have become producers of data and to be able to rethink the viewer through gamification, we inevitably need to transmute this passive position into an active one. This new role already has a name: the Player. Contrary to the viewer who absorbs knowledge through institutions, a player is someone who activates culture through its participation. By interacting with their gamified environment, they not only choose what to see and at what pace, but they play a part in judging its efficiency. During their wandering, they have the possibility to bug, freeze and even break the proposed culture, depending on the level of finishing of the work. It might appear as a nuisance for producers and creators, but this is a necessary process for an efficient final piece.

Because of it, the player gains an important role as a “DIY citizen” of Culture. As John Hartley (2010) highlighted, the introduction of these new active participants “allows everyone in the system- not just professional experts and competitive elites- to contribute to the generation of new meanings, new systems and ideas” (p.19). We could also add to this that their inclusion in the process is also a way for decluttering habits of these same experts/elites through the sharing of the player’s own experience of the work. This exchange between expertise and the exchange becomes a levelling field for both parties and “is driven by voluntarist choices and affiliations, [...] at the same time it has an activist and communitarian ethic, where ‘knowledge shared, is knowledge gained’” (Hartley p.20).

3. ARE YOU TALKING TO ME?
Introducing the player and parting ways with the viewer inevitably calls for a rethinking of art-making
and art-presenting, as that feedback loop needs to happen. The answer to such a transformation lies not in traditional gaming production, where experiences are made so as to trigger a profit, but in something called ‘serious gaming’ or ‘analytical gaming’. And before we continue, let us clarify what we intend by game, as it might feel restrictive to a certain medium. We intend as ‘game’ a set of rules that is shared with, and played by, each participating individual. For this reason, and for the purpose of this text, we’ll focus on the digital aspect of this definition.

Analytical games focus on socio-political awareness and are also used as an educational tool. Stefan Werning (2019) gives us a framework, taken from the Analytical Game Design, that bears a striking resemblance with contemporary art-making and its presentation. In it, vignettes, as opposed to complete games, that use existing media and cultural studies as its foundation are favoured, and these are presented so as to afford discussion and multiplicity in its reception. They should also be created so as to test hypotheses and challenge the player’s preconceptions (p.64).

Our players will, therefore, become highly involved in this endeavour of research and experimentation, and it seems important to understand what motivates them to participate. Players approach gaming as a way to have fun. It is a diversion to relieve stress, to enhance well-being, and even in some cases help reduce anxious and depressive feelings (Hoffman & Nadelson 2010). This safe haven away from reality is something that clears the mind, and allows for participants to live an alternate life, free of social repercussions. But this element of fun is sustained, as Chih, Sun and Hsieh (2018) have noticed, through four main sources of intrinsic motivation: challenge, curiosity, control and fantasy. The fact that players control a character or the environment they are in, that they can choose the pace to which they discover and solve tasks brings a sense of agency and empowerment. This allows for a prolonged participation, a greater immersion (Wolf 2017) and a recurring involvement in individuals. It then seems antinomical, at first glance, to bring serious social matters into a place where people are looking to forget about it, but digital games are an expressive medium. They visually represent how real and imagined systems work and invite their players to interact with those systems in a playful manner (Bogost cited in Neys 2019). And that invitation to playfulness, paired with the previous notions of safe exploration, becomes a filter for fun to transpire within the experience and create an interaction between the idea and the participant.

4. CONCLUSION
As we have seen, there is a necessary need for an update in the status of the viewer. Instead, we opted for the introduction of the player within contemporary art production and presentation. Through this shift, there is a radical change in the relation with experts and elite of the milieu as they go from a passive to an active voice, and gain an important role of test proofing experiences offered to them. To be able to attain such transition, producers and creators have to adopt more open-ended, yet research-based vignettes based on Analytical Game Design. Finally, it is also fundamental to understand how mastering intrinsic motivations in players lead to prolonged participation and a greater exchange with the art world.

3. REFERENCES