

There is much more for scholars in this field to learn about not only how children develop an understanding of mental states, but also how this understanding is used (or misused) in the general course of cognitive and social development. This book is a good place to start.

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Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames

Ian Bogost

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The rich history of games, whether for adults or children, shows that they have been used for much more than just entertainment. One of my favorite online resources to demonstrate this, Cornell University Library's "Pastimes and Paradigms: Games We Play," is filled with images and descriptions of board and card games that were used for education, ethical indoctrination, political campaigns, and brand promotion. Indeed, *Monopoly* has its roots in a Single Taxer's propaganda tool called *The Landlord's Game*.

Ian Bogost mentions this in *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*, as he looks at historical game tropes within the realm of video games. Indeed, Bogost has made a career of not only teaching game design at Georgia Institute of Technology and critiquing persuasive games but of creating them, too. His company, also called Persuasive

Games, made a splash during the 2004 presidential campaign when candidate Howard Dean's Dean for America commissioned the firm to make the *Dean for Iowa* Web game that taught the basics of caucusing to Dean supporters. Six years and twenty-two games later, Bogost's company has built games—as described on the Web site—for “advertisers, public policy makers, corporate trainers, educators, news organizations—as well as ordinary people.”

Bogost's book seems to have two main goals. The first is to make an argument for what Bogost describes as “procedural rhetoric.” He first establishes the history and interpretation of the two words separately and then states that in procedural rhetoric “arguments are made not through the construction of words or images, but through the authorship of rules of behavior, the construction of dynamic models” (p. 29). A persuasive game doesn't merely treat you like a rat in a Skinner box, conditioning your behavior; it uses its procedural rhetoric to convince you of its argument by providing you with an illuminating experience.

Bogost contrasts the term *persuasive games* with that of *serious games*, which he feels excludes games without gravitas and high moral purpose. An advertising game that successfully sells you a product is just as valid and persuasive as an educational game that teaches you something. Likewise, he distances his concept from *captology*, which B. J. Fogg of Stanford University defines on the Captology Web site as “the study of computers as persuasive technologies. This includes the design, research, and analysis of interactive computing products created for the purpose of changing people's attitudes or behaviors.”

Bogost finds captology in practice focused more on behaviors and less on changing attitudes or understandings.

Having established his philosophy, Bogost moves on to cite and evaluate persuasive games in three main fields—politics, advertising, and education. He chooses these areas of focus because they are his areas of activity within the field. While some of the examples he cites in each arena are his own, he provides a wealth of information and examples in the field far beyond his own work.

For example, Bogost kicks off the politics section of the book with a section called “War and Peace,” which looks at *America’s Army*, *A Force More Powerful*, and *Antiwargame*, three games with extremely diverse backgrounds and histories.

America’s Army was created by the American military as a recruiting tool, coming very close to making real both Arlo Guthrie’s jokes about video games at President Jimmy Carter’s reinstatement of the draft and the theme of *The Last Starfighter*, a 1984 sci-fi film about a disaffected youth who becomes a space fighter pilot for an alien federation. Developed with cutting-edge (for the time) professional tools, the game was released by the army for free on its games Web site in 2002. The game was so successful, it has been continually upgraded, spun off commercial versions, and is still going strong. Today it offers a Build Your Squad contest with the grand prize of a Soldier for a Day Experience for the winner and a companion. The winner’s day includes parachute training and a jump, weapons training, and a soupçon of basic training.

The game was designed and developed to provide a realistic experience by

eliminating items like endless ammo from more commercial entertainment games and enforcing the U.S. military’s Rules of Engagement and its Code of Honor. Violating these rules (even by swearing, let alone fragging your superiors) puts the player in Leavenworth prison. Too many brig visits result in character death and the need to create a new one. The game also promotes the other side as a “villain” whose reason for going to war is the “black side” of a black and white argument, part of army ideology that maintains a simple them-against-us world view and a universal code or truth.

Bogost comments on the persuasive themes around which the game is designed. “On the one hand, as a U.S. Army recruiting tool, the game creates a representation of army life that draws interested youth into recruiting offices. On the other hand, as a manifestation of the ideology that propels the U.S. Army, the game encourages players to consider the logic of duty, honor, and singular global truth as a desirable worldview” (p. 79).

A Force More Powerful was developed with the opposite philosophy in mind by a nonprofit organization. It is a game in which the player mounts a pacifistic overthrow of a repressive regime. The game takes its name—*A Force More Powerful*—from a three-hour documentary on passive resistance and its use in the movement that eventually overthrew Serbia’s Slobodan Milosevic as documented in the 2002 PBS *Bringing Down a Dictator*. The organizers of the movement used the experience of one of the student leaders of Otpor (who, in turn, said they followed strategies outlined in Gene Sharp’s *From Dictatorship to Democracy*) as part of the game’s design. Unlike the 3D-graphic,

kinetic, team-based experience found in *America's Army*, *A Force More Powerful* offers a 2D, turn-based, methodical-strategy approach to gameplay.

Bogost's critique of *A Force More Powerful* is that, even more so than *America's Army*, it tries to steer a geopolitical experience away from the larger influences of time, culture, and location that drive these movements, which are often tied to Western ideals of democracy and capitalism that do not always apply to a target society. He writes, "Just as America's Army mounts a procedural rhetoric of commutativity for armed conflict, *A Force More Powerful* mounts one for unarmed conflict. *A Force More Powerful* underscores the fact that regime change is not a disinterested process. Rather regime change comes about through external forces, and it always implies that the external forces perceive the existing regime to be an illegitimate one" (p. 80).

Antiwargame is an independent persuasive game made by a single artist, Josh On. The player is assigned the role of the U.S. President with resources of blue people (civilian) and green personnel (military). A player controls his or her budget by balancing spending on the military and business, on one hand, and social programs and foreign aid on the other. Military personnel, used as National Guardsmen in the states, are sent abroad to an unnamed, oil-producing country. Players are rated by big business and the media, and they can be assassinated if they spend too much on social programs, or they can be overrun by protesters if they spend too little. Troops sent abroad are quickly demotivated and returned to their blue color.

"Together, the game's rules create a

systemic claim about the logic of the war on terrorism, namely that the purported reasons for war—security and freedom—are false. Unlike other pacifist arguments, the *Antiwargame's* opposition to war is not based on anti-violence; rather it opposes war by claiming that a broken logic drives post-9/11 conflicts" (p. 84).

Bogost's book provides a new lens—procedural rhetoric—to use in the analysis of games and an excellent survey of the history of games of this ilk, many of which are currently available. It is an excellent introduction and reference for the corner of the playground marked for video games.

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Give and Go: Basketball as a Cultural Practice

Thomas Mc Laughlin

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Every couple of months, it seems, I have a colleague, graduate student, or journalist approach me for advice on writing up something ethnographic or sociological about their weekly pickup basketball game. An avid, if physically challenged, Thursday-night player myself, I find this desire to help others (if not oneself) understand why running up and down a court with nine other people trying to throw a leather ball through a steel hoop is so compelling and full of meaning rather heartwarming. Yet I am typically cautious to the point of discouraging in dealing with such in-