

The Fifth Annual Game Design Think Tank

Project Horseshoe 2010



Group Report: Using Games as a Delivery Vehicle for Political and Cultural Messages

Participants: A.K.A. "*Spinfluence - How to Make Games and Influence People* "

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Brief statement of the problem(s) on which the group worked:

Movies and TV have, for a long time and consciously, embedded cultural and political messages in their products. Games have rarely done so, except for some heavy-handed and ineffective examples, or in some cases unintentionally delivering messages such as the infallibility of the military. However, games are poised to deliver messages as well as – perhaps more effectively than – these older media.

Executive Summary:

We brainstormed a set of guiding principles and a set of tools/techniques for successfully delivering political and cultural messages in games. We also identified several game ideas, and fleshed out the details of one of those designs, a Facebook-based game called "Bedford Falls".

Expanded problem statement:

We have just been through a disastrous election – regardless of any particular political ideology – because (again) so many of the voters who voted against candidates did so while ignorant of facts, and due to this lack of information (and in many cases *misinformation*), often voted against their own interests.

The members of this workgroup hope to use games to open people's mind to broader cultural perspectives, and also to simply create a more informed electorate.

There have been many games made with this goal, but generally with the message very overt and heavy-handed. The games presumably make the game creators and the players feel good about having done something helpful, but are generally played too briefly and/or by too few people to have much of an impact. They just aren't good enough *as games* to deliver their messages widely and deeply.

Other media have unabashedly used their media to deliver cultural and political messages in their products. Examples include *The West Wing* (ongoing wrestling with political messages), *Will and Grace* (a gay protagonist treated as a matter-of-fact "normal" character), *Star Trek* (occasional episodes that were messages about then-current events such as the Vietnam War), *M*A*S*H*, and *Brokeback Mountain*. Games, because of how long they remain in a player's life and how much mindshare they can occupy between play sessions, have the potential to be an even more effective delivery mechanism for such messages. But, to date, they have not been effectively used that way, and many of the lessons taught by games are negative and inadvertent ... such as the many FPS games that teach that teach that it's okay

to mindlessly kill off members of other cultures.

Thus, our goal is to develop and dispense a toolbox of techniques for delivering this type of political content within games. In some cases, these might be projects that explicitly start with such a political or cultural goal; in other cases, designers already working on non-political projects can subversively insert some positive messages into games they are working on.

One important consideration is the distinction between an interactive messaging game as *manipulation* or *discourse*. One motivation behind this study was to counteract deliberate (disgusting) manipulation, which can be done with a product that exposes manipulation techniques, either through parody of manipulation or discourse about it (which itself can be direct or indirect) Or, an interactive political message product could actually use *and improve on* the classic techniques of manipulation from traditional media to promote messaging - but then, would that be winning or losing the game!

(Disclaimer: We acknowledge that the workgroup has a mutual progressive bias, but this bias has no bearing on the techniques and devices we are exploring for imbedded game messaging.)

Expanded solution description:

We want to use well-crafted and fun games, in familiar genres, to “lure” players in and (once hooked), begin repeatedly delivering progressive messages and issues.

For example, 150 years ago, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”, which enlightened millions about the issue of slavery and was arguably the greatest single example of a creative work that changes people’s minds about an issue. However, the book merely used the same popularly literary form of the day, a sentimental novel, except that the protagonist was an escaped slave; thus, its success *lay in its familiarity to its target audience*.

Thus, the most effective games at delivering positive political messages will not be games like “Darfur is Dying” or “Oiligarchy”, which are obviously “message” games and are also produced with low budgets and low production values, so players don’t stick around the game for very much time. Instead, they will be games which at first glance are much like the popular games of today... FPS games sold through the retail channel, hidden object games sold through the casual downloadable market, or social games or Facebook... and which only gradually and subtly reveal their political and cultural content.

Best Practices - Golden Rules

A list of the best practices for incorporating political messaging into games:

- Don’t be preachy. The content should be covert rather than overt. You don’t want to “preach to the choir”, you want to reach people with opposing viewpoints. If the game is overly about the political message or messages, the unconverted (those with an opposing point of view) will have an immediate “allergic reaction” to the game and not give it a chance.
- The game should reach the widest possible audience ... a casual game will have a wider potential addressable market.
- But ... we also want the game to command a lot of the player’s mindshare ... a hardcore game is more likely to do that.
- If the game teaches through player choice, make sure that the players really have agency in those choices. If they are Hobson’s Choices – if there’s only one correct choice to advance or success – the choice will be meaningless and non-impactful.

- As old media do, tie visual and audio feedback to player action to emotionally reinforce the game's messages.
- Use strengths of the genre. For example, FPS games are great at putting you into another character's shoes. Facebook games let you tap into your network of friends and are long-form games which are constantly refreshed with new content.

Business Models

Most games in the political realm to date have been commissioned efforts by an agency with an "axe to grind" or a very specific message to promote. As such, they are typically free-to-play with no revenue model. Therefore, the games are typically of low to moderate budget, which makes them pack messaging heavily, even awkwardly, into the narrative, and they have no ongoing revenue model to refresh content.

Compare this to popular films and television shows that convey overt and covert political messaging. Not only are they crafted to be commercial by appealing to a large audience that does not necessarily expect messaging, they can be critically acclaimed enough to the point of winning an Academy Award.

The ideal Spinfluence game will therefore appeal to a broad enough audience to be received as entertainment first, thereby underwriting development and gaining broad distribution, yet will carry the message that is in fact the goal of the effort.

Yet, commercial publishers are loathe to take a political stand on an issue; their charter starts and ends with entertainment. In reference to exploring a for-profit business relationship with a not-for-profit business, one major publisher CEO was quoted (OK paraphrased) as saying "If our shareholders even heard a rumor we were speaking with [education agency XYZ], our stock prices would take a hit." So, funding, or bootstrap funding, for a major endeavor into a game in this realm likely needs to come from resource-laden politically-motivated for-profit companies. And, the designs need to balance public acceptance and price point with the development budget.

Game Ideas & Examples

Example 1: "Bedford Falls" – Social Network Game

In "Bedford Falls", a social network game, you are creating a small-town-USA village. Think "Social City" but with a closer, more intimate view.

You play a newly-arrived resident, fleeing the city for the peace and paradise of small-town life, building a house and grounds. It looks just like many other Facebook games. But as you begin to get and solve quests, you begin to realize that the town is very corrupt and you need to become involved in order to improve things. Thus, you are building your town not through a mayor-like role or a god-like role, but through your actions as citizen-activist.

Your house and your town have various metrics to show how you are doing: your home value, the town's budget deficit or surplus, an overall measure of the town's happiness, etc.

A quest might involve "grinding" by going door-to-door to collect signature or drop off leaflets, or asking your friends for help. ("You need 5 friends to send you Completed Petitions.") Quests are optional; you can ignore or even delete quests you aren't interested in completing.

Examples of issues that can be raised through these quests:

- A Muslim family moves onto the block. Do you make them feel welcome, ignore them, or try to get

them evicted?

- Should pot be legalized? If so, prison costs will go down and tax revenues will rise.
- Cut funding for education? If so, property values will drop.
- The town's hospital is in danger of going out of business.
- Illegal immigrants are working in town.
- Invest in a stem cell lab in town?
- Build a mosque in town.
- The prison is out of cells; build a new prison.

Quests all have an impact on the town's metrics. If you complete a quest and discover that you are unhappy about the resulting changes, you can work to "repeal" the quest.

Quests can be timed, in order to simulate the time pressure of a campaign season. For example, you have 24 hours; the more you grind on the quest, the better the chance of the issue you are working for passing. If you grind a lot, you'll pass easily; less grind and you'll just squeak by at 52%; too little grinding and you'll lose with a heartbreaking 47%.

You are encouraged to ask advice from other friends who are playing the game, about whether to do certain quests and what their impacts are. Our hope is that this will inspire lots of discussion among players about this issues associated with each quest.

Political messages can also be brought into the game via mechanics like achievements, task mastery, and collections.

The game is monetized through traditional free-to-play methods (buying enlargements to the geography, buying virtual decorations like a pond in the park), selling advertising, offering premium subscriptions, and polling the players on various issues and then selling composite opinion data of the player base (or demographic sub-groups of the player base) to pollsters.

Example 2: "Drag.net" – Episodic Story-Based Game

"This is the city ... Washington, D.C. Within its boundaries you'll find 1 President, 100 Senators, 435 Congressmen, countless aides, and forty thousand lobbyists who try to get all of them to toe the line. Sometimes they step over that line. When they do, it's my job to see that they don't get away with it. My name is Thursday ... Investigator Joe Thursday."

Dragnet is a game distributed in episodic chapters, like the *Sam and Max* or *Wallace and Gromit* games from Telltale Games. A new chapter is released approximate every two months, and you can download it for a credit card purchase of roughly ten dollars. Also, each year, a set of episodes is packaged up and sold through the traditional retail channel.

In *Drag.net*, you play a Justice Department investigator who investigates white-collar crime and particularly corruption in government. In each episode, you investigate a different crime, many of which will be based on historical corruption cases.

The gameplay is casual graphic adventure style, like the Professor Layton games on the DS or the most recent Ravenhurst hidden object games from Bigfish. Moving from location to location means changing a static bitmap graphic, which can then be explored for clues and takeable objects.

Locations can also include characters, with simple dialog trees. Character dialogs are heavily influenced by prior discovery of clues and objects.

Each case illustrates a different principle:

*There's a revolving door between government and industry ... Speedy Cashinn is an EPA regulator writing environmental laws, and then "retires" from government and immediately get a very high-paying job working for the polluter he was supposedly writing regulations to rein in.

* We're buying gold-plated weapons systems that don't work ... Major Dynamics is having cost overrun after cost overrun on it's long-delayed B-99 "Tippytoe" Stealth Bomber, while hiding the fact that the latest production planes are unable to even achieve takeoff.

* We're fighting unnecessary wars ... Scooter-Pie Fibby, chief of staff to Vice-President Dick Waddy, appears to have faked evidence that the dictator of iPodistan has a weapons development program, when in fact no such program exists.

The level of light touch vs. heavy handedness can be accomplished solely through the extent of the writing.

In classic Dragnet style, each episode ends with a cutscene showing the perpetrator(s) being booked, with a voice-over announcing the results of the trial and sentencing.

Example 3: "Catch 20/20: The Hindsight War" – War Simulation First Person Shooter

Rated: M

"Catch 20/20" is a Single Player First Person Shooter. It has an open world mission structure borrowing from GTA and Fallout games, to accommodate absurd, nonsensical and non-sequitur events. The player is presented with a target-rich environment in which various plotlines are advanced by the player acting as a "wrecking ball". The game uses the trappings and cliches of "standard issue" military shooter to break the player out of the comfort zone and deploy a message about war and wargames alike.

"Catch 20/20" is a M.A.S.H.-Up of Joseph Heller's Catch-22. The player is a soldier in the US Army, deployed in one of the familiar Hollywood versions of Central Asia elective war. His name is "John Dubya" - the strong, silent type, John Wayne, Bush, John Doe. The player has no voice, and his NPC peers make jokes about him being traumatized, and his tongue being injured. His digital personnel file, which he can access, does not conclusively resolve this, and the information in it seems to randomly change.

The primary narrative device is that of "infrequent revulsion". In Mike Nichol's cinematic adaptation of Joseph Heller's novel, a series of flashbacks from Yossarian's perspective regarding a wounded crew member, Snowden, leads to a single quick series of shocking visuals as the protagonist - and the viewer - realizes that Snowden has been eviscerated by shrapnel and debris. In the movie, Snowden's guts spill out of his open ribcage towards the viewer, a moment of graphic gore avoided in "gung-ho" war movies. In games just as in movies, "repulsive moments" will have to be used sparingly to retain the recipient. In games in particular, constant exposure to gore simply leads to de-sensitization.

Nichols also uses Heller's depiction of the impact of war in the closing chapters for a montage of "ambient storytelling": Yossarian by-passes several set pieces of brutality, degradation, rape, murder, without any actual "interaction" on his part. These vignettes set the template for the in-game "ambient" and "forensic" storytelling.

Both elements of "Catch-22" map to classic FPS game mechanics. In addition, "Catch 20/20" follows movie and book - as well as post-Vietnam entertainment products such as "M.A.S.H.", and movies such as Kubrick's "Path of Glory", Aldrich's "Attack", and Coppola's "Apocalypse Now" - to use satire, insanity and

absurdity as a counterweight to carnage and gore. As the revulsion pushes the player away, the sheer ridiculousness of the events keeps him guessing and strings him along.

In most mass-market FPS, more or less contrived narratives are provided to re-affirm to the player that his avatar is participating in a "just" or "good" war, and that progress is made. In some cases, setbacks, reversals, or - even nuclear - moments of tragedy are added. However, at its core, mass-market FPS do not question the need for war, or its purpose. In "Catch 20/20", the war makes no sense on its own terms, although its impact, waste, and the profits it generates are exemplified in the game. The game does not attempt to make a coherent critique of war, it simply strips it of its pathos, and its pretenses. It does so in an entertaining manner as to not lose the player as it repeatedly shows the ugliness and pointlessness of re-taking "Hamburger Hill".

To encourage the player to pay attention to the ambient events, the game offers the player the option to file after-action reports via an in-game laptop and terminal complete with US Army standard issue forms and report templates, which offer their own nonsensical frame - using multiple choice forms to avoid the need for a keyboard or a parser. In particular, the player can report war crimes and other incidents. Doing so will appear to cause adversarial consequences for the player, however, players that do not file report experience the same missions. Players can also legally and illegally access other files, memos, reports that provide glimpses of the war at large, its failure, and the politics that keep it going nonetheless.

In addition to forensic "aftermath" events and ambient vignettes exemplifying the gruesome reality of war, the game also offers a large number of SNAFU gameplay. For example, the player and his sidekicks will experience - mostly ineffective - friendly fire regularly. Predator drones and AC-130 will attack the player as well as opponents, or indiscriminately level uninhabited buildings out of range. Main Battle Tanks will drive straight through a convoy the player is participating in. When tasked with obtaining a new pair of boots, the warehouse contains 500 left boots and no right ones. Random grenade attacks from insurgents blow up the post's outhouses and puncture a sewage tank that emptied the septic tank, leading to swarms of flies in the base. Players experience gas alarms through narrow and fogged gas masks.

Another core mechanic of the game is "Milgram-37". The player will, with varying but often escalating frequency, be given nonsensical or illegal orders over radio or from NPCs. Experience with other games attempting to put players in a situation where to refuse the game's direction have found that, overwhelmingly, player "just follow orders". In "Catch 20/20", player experience does not substantially change whether or not they participate in atrocities, aside from entries in a personnel jacket that the player will soon no longer take seriously, especially as it will acquire medical diagnoses of PTSD, shell shock, and sickness.

The player is surrounded by soldiers that, by and large, do not interact with him meaningfully. The player keeps being transferred. The player never dies, he simply blacks out. As the game progresses, the gaps between intervals become larger. There is less and less attempt of an overall narrative to connect the individual missions and experiences. No explanation is given.

The population he encounters does not speak English. The player is issued a PDA on which he can select certain phrases. The PDA will produce gibberish, which in turn elicits gibberish from the bystanders, which leads to nonsensical "translations". The player might accidentally or intentionally incite riots, cause panic, and can always end a conversation by firing his gun into the air, into empty vehicles, walls, or into civilians. If NPC soldiers are nearby, they will join the "firefight". In some cases, actual insurgents might be attracted to the shooting.

The game uses "u-cap" capture of facial expressions, state-of-the-art facial animation and voice acting to create visceral and shocking experiences of slow, agonizing, painful death in NPCs. Mass market shooters might feature "gibs" and other exaggerated gore as part of brief death sequences, but never confront the player with prolonged death animations. In the sterile war "games", especially when T-rated, opponents drop dead in an instant. In "Catch-20/20", the economy of video game killing is occasionally, and increasingly frequently, interrupted by surprisingly and brutally realistic "deaths". Game developers have,

in the past, found the emotional impact to be dramatic - and responded by removing the content. In "Catch 20/20", NPC deaths escalate to incidents of "prolonged repulsion". The game recognizes when the player shoots injured opponents to kill them, and responds with scripted events.

In borrowing a "posture" mechanic from the FPS game "Kingpin", the player can choose to raise, lower, and aim his gun with or without Ironsights, which changes civilian and insurgent NPC responses. The player can always use his weapon or his empty hand for melee attacks, punching officers, NPCs, soldiers, civilians and insurgents alike. The responses are different - punching an officer gets the player's unit placed in the line of fire, punching other soldiers can result in player knockout. The player will be placed on prisoner escort, prison duty, and support interrogations. The player can participate in torture beatings, or can attempt to stop ongoing torture by attack interrogators. The recurring theme is that just as the Army does not care about the crimes committed, the bureaucracy also does not particularly concern itself with the player's misdeeds.

The game also features a simple "head" mechanics: In interacting with an NPC close, the player can use POV control for simple gestures, shaking his head left-right or nodding up-down - e.g. in response to receiving orders or questions from officers.

The game features arcade machines and consoles with simple classic shooter/war games in the mess hall. On insurgent attacks, during a fire in one of the ammo bunkers, and when one of the other soldiers commits suicide, the staccato gunshots from the arcade machines mix with the battle outside. TV and radio commentary can be heard throughout the post, the barracks, the vehicles - e.g. following a battle, there is mention of 35 civilians and "insurgents" dead resulting from airstrikes the player called in, and an NPC soldier comments: "Hey, that's us! We are on the news!"

Player guidance is provided by voices in players head, reciting regulations, evoking boot camp, drill sergeants yelling at the player. Initially, this is guidance and tutorial, but as the player progresses it mutates into commentary, turns more and more incoherent, in juxtaposition comical, ultimately nuts.

The game features an "open mike" input channel with minimal speech processing. The player can yell at the game, curse or talk. The civilian and insurgent NPCs will respond without understanding, angry or fearful, or laughing, their responses equally not understandable. Other soldiers will ignore the player, or yell back, telling him to shut up.

The game borrows a "sunshade" mechanics from the game "Haze": The player can choose to put on, or take down, sunglasses. The colored glasses change his perception of the game - without the glasses, the carnage is more drastic, the deaths and wounds more gory, and the gunshots sound less powerful. If the player uses his sunshades, his sight is improved, his actions and movements are aided to be more "heroic", and enemies drop economically and without any apparent pain when shot - the sunshades tone down the screams and the blood to the level commonly found in shooters.

Also from "Haze" is taken the concept of performance drugs - the player can obtain prescriptions and obtain drugs from the post's pharmacy. The drugs also increase player performance through aim assist, contrast post-process to visually mark enemies and distinguish them from civilians. However, as the game progresses, the effects of the drug reverse, and withdrawal also affects the player. These effects bleed into the "sunshade" mechanic as well. The player might shoot insurgents only to find them civilians, he might aim at an enemy and hit a bystander, he might fire once but his gun will empty its entire clip, wildly off by recoil.

The Catch: The game has no end. The missions keep going and going, in random variations. The player never dies. Like war, the game never ends, it just gets worse - a jumble of flashbacks and episodes cutting in and out, sometimes with minor differences, more and more opposition, more craziness. Evoking the context narrative of "Assassin's Creed", the player is actually a drug-overdosed PTSD patient - or a captive of insurgents that keep him on Heroin and Opium - or terminally ill from an infection - or suffering a nervous breakdown - or tortured by his own side, or their native "allies" for an actual or made-up transgression, or a case of mistaken identity - the game never clarifies. The player either re-lives memories, or is playing games as part of a rehabilitation treatment at a Veteran's Hospital, or both - as the

game events get increasingly dream-like, nightmarish, and repetitive, the player is challenged to "opt out".

"Yossarian had decided to live forever, or die in the attempt." Repeatedly.

Example 4: "The Strategist" – Turn Based Strategy Game

*"Well of course, we don't expect the initiative to *win*, but it certainly will get the people out and voting won't it, sir?"*

Some games may attempt to place the player in the role of the manipulator, in this example, patterning responsibilities, decisions, and tactics after political strategists such as Karl Rove, Mary Matalin, and James Carville. By seeing things from that perspective, players will gain a better understanding of how they themselves can be manipulated.

Strategist is a turn-based simulation game where the player acts as a political strategist and campaign manager trying to get their candidate elected in the United States. The player begins the game on a small local level, but will gradually work their way up to presidential primaries and then full-fledged presidential campaigns.

Each level of the game involves the player trying to get a candidate elected to a given office. These levels have a pre-election season setup phase, the campaign itself, and then Election Day. In the first two phases, each turn will represent anywhere from one week to one month. On Election Day, each turn represents one hour.

Most of the games interactions will take place in the office of the strategist. This will include observing a map of the voting districts, analyzing poll sheets, allocating funds, and briefing the candidate.

One turn of the game will include:

- The player is allocated an amount of funds at the beginning of the season, and will continue to get funds at a regular rate. This rate will depend partially on overall popularity within the likely donator portion of the voting district.
- Observing polls to see how well your candidate and various issues are currently faring.
- Analyzing polls to figure out what issues certain groups of people care about.
- Player is given a report of all actions that were completed this turn.
- Player occasionally must deal with random events where they must make a decision/public statement.
- In the pre-election phase, the strategist can lobby those with higher political power to push for certain measures to be brought up next election, and can meet with potential other candidates to win their support or pressure them to not campaign.
- In the campaign phase, the strategist can create 'information campaigns' where the strategist selects specific issues to call attention to, and then selects an area of the map to circulate the information (flyers, television ads, radio), or may attempt an internet campaign.
- Advising the candidate (where to make a public appearance, what running mate to select, etc)
- The player may also meet with the candidate to brief them on potential phrases to drop into conversation during public appearances.
- During this, the player must determine how much the campaign spends each week, and on what potential areas are investigation (uncovering information on political rivals and handling information about your candidate), advertising (pushing information and misinformation to the public), lobbying (gaining political benefits from higher ups), polling (influences the accuracy and coverage of your polls), diverted funds (providing resources to 'unofficial' groups)
- Ending the turn

On election day, actions like polling and information campaigns are accelerated, and can also include specific actions like transportation of potential voters to the poll and other 'get out the vote' information. At

the end of that day, the player is presented with the results of the election and the success or failure of their candidate. Success will allow the player to move on to the next level (accompanied by a celebratory cinematic of their candidate's victory speech). Failure will allow the player to rewind time to attempt different strategies or maneuvers during the campaign.

Specific topics to be addressed include:

- Getting a proposal on the ballot that won't win, but will encourage people willing to vote for your candidate to come out
- Spreading blatant misinformation through unofficial channels ("the opposing candidate had a baby out of wedlock!")
- Push polls (polls intended to spread misinformation, "Would your opinion on the opposing candidate be changed if you knew they were a draft dodger?")
- Endorsements from non-campaign people, political action committees, and subordinates. Having people say things that you want people to hear about your candidate, but don't want them to say themselves ("This candidate will bring back a non-secular age of government!") The farther away from the candidate, the more out there the potential statement.
- Supporting a third party on the ballot to split the votes for the opponent
- Disenfranchising voters (having intimidating people at places where voter registration was checked)
- Bussing homeless people in to vote for you in exchange for food
- Micro targeting, directing very specific information to very specific groups of people

One important thing to note is that by and large, the actions that the player takes are largely legal. While dramatic actions like setting fire to your opponent's headquarters, sabotaging/hacking voting machines, and even assassinations can be exciting and dramatic, they don't do as much for informing the player about how an election can be manipulated. Actions like those just mentioned are so dramatic as to be potentially dismissed as unrealistic and may cause the other subtler points of the game to be ignored or similarly dismissed. The goal of this game is still to be fun, but also to show how an election can be cleverly manipulated and controlled all while still acting within the confines of the law. There is a decent amount of underhanded but completely legal techniques that can be used. By providing the player access to them, and by even showing why they're legal (referencing actual law where applicable) the player can gain an intimate understanding of the intricacies of an election.

While the initial scope of the games follows one candidate from local to presidential elections, the game could also include different candidates with different political views, foibles, and scandals to show a player how different parts of the population can be manipulated. The different candidates could also be included in expansion packs (STRATEGIST: GREEN PARTY).

Example 5: "WHISTLE BLOWER" – Casual Time Management Game

One might, for example, imagine a single player casual, time management game called *Whistle Blower* modeled after some of the more successful whistle blower films of the last few decades (*Serpico*, *Silkwood*, *The Insider*, *Erin Brokovich*)

In *Whistle Blower* the player plays a single mom Sheila Silkowich who is struggling to keep it together for her family. When Sheila gets a surprisingly high paying job as an office assistant working for a large Energy company (EnRob) she starts with a great attitude, but as she is slowly exposed to the insider's view of corruption, she begins to learn of the high price and loyalty that the company demands of their highly paid employees.

With each level, players control Sheila, moving her through series of an organizational time management challenges, offering extra points for efficiency, color matching, and repeat-action chaining bonuses. As players move through tasks, organize the office space, file and refile papers, prep carnivore luncheons, order extra caffeinated coffees and super-breath onion and garlic bagels, send multi colored international faxes, type memos, and do other visual tasks that spoof corporate culture, they unlock and encounter

corporate archetypes at each newly introduced station - each character - Tina the Typist, Fionnula the Faxer, Caryn the Caffeinator -- each corporate citizen - has a piece of a secret. If Erin can successfully navigate her way up the corporate ladder she will, one by one, collect all the pieces of the diabolical puzzle. After ten levels of success Erin will have all ten pieces of the puzzle -- the secret the corporation's management are trying to keep under wraps -- now it's up to the player -- does she hold the execs for ransom and ask for a big payout, or does she blow the whistle and go to the newspaper and the police.

If player chooses to go for the money, she gets it, and gets to remodel her home, send her kids to better schools, drive a better truck and generally decorate her world --but watch out, she now lives in fear and will have to take the family on the lam escaping from the hit men who have been sent after her -- eventually she will need to spend her money, sell the house and create a new identity.

If she blows the whistle, she receives the grateful appreciation of her community, and moves out of the town to a new job in a new corporation.

In either case, she starts a new job at a new corporation for ten levels -- this time it is a pharmaceutical company: Prostate & Gambler.

With each set of levels, the cliffhanger leaves the player hungry for more -- to see the bad guys pursued and punished...but with each whistle blowing, players notice that the wrongdoers are not actually going to jail, the police aren't following up, the courts aren't pursuing, the press isn't reporting...as players keep on playing they can buy the expansion packs - each new set of ten levels allows Sheila to find herself with new jobs within new forms of corporations -- media, music, tobacco, a church or synagogue or other religious institution, even the bureaucracy of government - the police, the courts, lobbying groups, congress? ! who knows, even The White House itself? Hey if it gets big enough, maybe we'll do an expansion pack focused on the corruption in the video gaming industry?

Example 6: "You Got Duped!" – Traditional Game Show

Sometimes humor is the best way to get a message across to an audience, both in delivery and in subject matter. "You Got Duped!" is a traditional game show with unfortunately funny-but-true political information, a cross between the interactive game "You Don't Know Jack" and "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me", National Public Radio's weekly news-themed quiz show. You Got Duped! can be played as a single player game, multi-player game, and online as a Facebook game in both synchronous and asynchronous formats, with leader boards, contests, and all the trappings. (Who cares if the audience 'cheats' by looking up answers – if they do, the goal of creating the game in the first place has been accomplished!)

"You Got Duped!" features multiple question formats for single player, multi-player, or multi-player online play, each with timed & untimed versions, different point schemas, and so on

- Prior to being elected, which US President had never traveled to a foreign country outside North America: George Washington, Millard Fillmore, Jimmy Carter, G.W. Bush
- Senator Henry Hyde, chair of the impeachment committee against President Bill Clinton for lying about his affair with Monica Lewinsky, had what in common with Clinton? A) He attended the same college. B) He also had, and lied about having, an extra-marital affair. C) They share the same sign of the zodiac.
- Match the quote to the appropriate US President: "More and more of our imports are coming from abroad." "African-Americans watch the same news at night that ordinary Americans do." "Trees cause more pollution than automobiles." G.W. Bush, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton
- Which of these news stories is not true? (Providing three single-paragraph, completely absurd stories, only one of which is not true – usually the most sane sounding of each.)
- Lord knows the political realm has given the world ample material to turn into comedic game show questions!

But besides showing the fallibility of our political leaders, the content educates the audience; after each

question is answered, the context and framing issue of the question is provided as well.

The initial game can focus on hard to believe political facts over the last few decades with topical data packs based on gaffes and unbelievable outcomes in the past month or even week.

Appendix A

Executive Summary of Ian Bogost's Book "Persuasive Games" (2007)

In discussing games as medium carrying political messages, and the development of games as political action, Ian Bogost's 2007 book "Persuasive Games" is an essential reference. Bogost begins with the definition of the concept of "procedural rhetoric" (Introduction and first chapter), then uses it in a review of games - as procedural arguments - in the context of politics (chapters 2-4), advertising (5-7), and learning/training (8-10).

Bogost's definition (page 3): "Procedural rhetoric is the practice of persuading through processes in general and computational processes in particular. Procedural rhetoric is useful for the programmer and the user, the game designer and the player. Procedural rhetoric is a technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created." He continues: "Procedures in this sense... structure behavior; we tend to 'see' a process only when we challenge it."

The author derives his definition of "procedural" from J. Murray's "Hamlet on the Holodeck", i.e. the computer's "defining ability to execute a series of rules". *Procedurality* refers to the core practice of software authorship. To write procedurally, one authors code that enforces rules to generate some kind of representation, rather than authoring the representation itself. Murray: The computer "was designed... to embody complex, contingent behaviors. To be a computer scientist is to think in terms of algorithms and heuristics, that is, to be constantly identifying the exact or general rules of behavior that describe any process..." Bogost continues: "Computers run processes that invoke interpretations of processes in the material world... Computation is representation. The computer magnifies the ability to create representations of processes. The type of procedures that interest me here are those that present or comment on processes inherent to the human experience." (page 5). Further: "Procedural representation explains processes 'with other processes'... a form of symbolic expression that uses processes rather than language." (True in the abstract, in reality, it uses processes to arrange symbols - the narrative matters.) "Procedural representation itself requires... a medium that actually enacts processes rather than merely describe them.... Human actors can enact process; we do so all the time.... Non=digital board and card games offer further examples of human-enacted processes; the people playing the game [also] execute its rules.... Because procedurality is intrinsic and fundamental to computers, [... they] are particularly suited to procedural expression." (page 9). Bogost refers to Murray's advocacy for procedural authorship, i.e. "writing the rules by which the text appears as well as writing the texts themselves". He briefly touches (page 11) on the concept of procedural programming (the primary means of authoring procedural arguments, i.e. computer games). From page 15 onwards, Bogost reviews the historical evolution of the concept of "rhetorics" and its ties to persuasion - following Aristotle in defining rhetoric philosophically as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion", and beyond (post-structuralist) as 'effective expression', including symbolic and nonverbal communication. Kenneth Burke: "Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And wherever there is 'meaning', there is 'persuasion'" (p. 21).

Bogost acknowledges that the established concepts of visual rhetoric are at work in video games that deploy still and moving images, but claims that these cannot address the rhetorical function of procedural representation. "Image is subordinate to process" (p. 25). "'Procedural rhetoric' is the practice of using processes persuasively... Procedural rhetoric is a general name for the practice of authoring arguments through process... [It] entails persuasion - to change opinion or action [and] expression - to convey ideas effectively. [It] is a sub-domain of procedural authorship; its arguments [are made] through the authorship of rules of behavior, the construction of dynamic models. In [hardware] computation, those rules are authored in code, through the practice of programming." (p. 28).

In our own discussion of simulation as a means to "make a case", we brought up the aspects of truthfulness and rebuttal. In a key section (p. 37), Bogost attempts to rebut an objection Sherry Turkle raised in regards to SimCity: "many computational systems do not allow the user to raise *procedural* objections". Bogost claims that rhetorical claims always 'exclude' opposing positions, and hence one cannot expect procedural rhetorics to allow modification of [the facsimiles of] the processes employed. Bogost also claims that "procedural representations often do allow the user to mount procedural objections through configurations of the system itself". He further argues that subsequent discourse on the artifact and its limitations may take place through responses in the same medium - rebuttal artifacts - as well as other media - discussion, analysis, a view that ties into his reference to Crawford's definition of interactivity as a "conversation: a cyclic process in which two actors alternately listen, think, and speak".

Further regarding interactivity, Bogost quotes Murray (p. 42) as arguing that simple manipulation of a computational system "is not sufficient cause for agency... Procedural environments are appealing to us... because we can induce [rule-generated] behavior.. the primary representational property of the computer is the codified rendering of responsive behaviors. This is what is most often meant when we say that computers are *interactive*. We mean they [present] an environment that is both procedural and participatory.". In Bogost's view, procedural rhetorics does not require interactivity. He adopts Salen/Zimmerman's definition of "play" as (in analogy to a steering wheel) "the free space of movement within a more rigid structure". Following a discussion of Sid Meier's claim that gameplay is "a series of interesting choices", Bogost suggests that "vividness comes not from immersion, but from abstraction" and continues (p. 46) "Meaning in video games is constructed not through a re-creation of the world, but through selectively modeling appropriate elements of that world. Procedural representation models only some subset of a source system... to draw attention to that portion as the subject representation... the relevance of [selective] interaction in the context of the representational [rhetorical?] goals of the system is paramount."

Bogost concludes the first chapter with a review of several more examples. In addition to "The McDonald's Video game", "Girlpower Retouch", "Freaky Flakes", "The Grocery Game", GTA3, Bogost now points forward to "The Howard Dean for Iowa Game", "Tactical Iraq", "Cray World", "Tax Invader", "Congo Jones", "Tax Avoiders", "The Landlord's Game" (precursor to "Monopoly"). Among various aspects of the topic and the upcoming chapters, he discusses (p. 62) whether or not firsthand knowledge of software engineering in general, and the actual code of a given "procedural argument" specifically, are required for analysis: "If computational procedural expression is crafted through code, then what is the role of code [access] in the practice and analysis of procedural rhetoric? [.. It] might seem impossible to analyze and discuss [software and video games] without digging into the code itself." Bogost defends the possibility of "black-box" analysis and reception, granting that "...a procedural rhetorician should strive to understand the affordances of the materials from which a procedural argument is formed.... For computational critics, it means understanding the affordances of hardware, software frameworks, and programming languages." In another reference to Turkle's critique of SimCity, who proposed that "Opening the box" would allow players to see how the simulation runs, providing better ability to critique. In Bogost's view, the "problem with this objection is that the player *can* see how the simulation runs: this is, in no trivial way, what it means to play the game". He also mentions - and dismisses - "policy knobs" as a means to alter simulation rules. "Rather than addressing [the problem of understanding the making and interacting with arguments as processes] from the bottom up through code literacy, we need to address it from the top down through procedural literacy" (p. 63, also chapter 9). "This means playing a video game... with an eye toward identifying and interpreting the rules that drive that system" and "One notion worth keeping is that of dissemination, the irreversible movement of the text away from the act of authorship." Bogost quotes Frasca: "Simulation authors do not represent a particular event, but a set of potential events [...the] goal of the player would be to analyze, contest and revise the models rules according to his personal ideas and beliefs."

Three sections with multiple chapters consider approaches to and examples of procedural rhetorics in three domains: politics, advertising, and education. Among the political games discussed are "America's Army", "A Force More Powerful", Josh On's "Antiwargame", as well as unwinnable political games such as

"New York Defender" and "Kabul Kaboom". Bogost elaborates on Frasca's Newsgaming.com and its inaugural "September 12" game (in which missiles against terrorists increase the number of targets faster than they can be destroyed). Other titles mentioned in chapter 2: "Madrid", "Save the Whales", "Socks the Cat Rocks The Hill", "President Elect", "Power Politics", "Frontrunner", "The Political Machine", "Staffers Challenge", "Howard Dean for Iowa Game", "Bush vs. Kerry Boxing", "White House Joust", "Dafur is Dying".

Chapter 3 begins with a discussion of ideological frames (Lakoff and Johnson), briefly touching on games such as , p"Balance of Power" (Crawford 1985), "Crisis in the Kremlin" (1991), Wright's "Sim Earth" (1990) and Crawford's 1990 "Balance of the Planet", as well as Josh Oda: "Bushgame: The Anti-Bush Online Adventure" (2004). His discussion of "Vigilance 1.0" (installation game, in which the player judges events - and NPC's - on a 4x4 tile surveillance screen) in excerpt: "The player must constantly scan..., pointing out infractions by clicking on offenders.... With every offender that passes by unnoticed, the more depraved society becomes.... The player's vigilance quickly devolves into its own perversion, that of unfettered surveillance.... By forcing the player to see the consequences... as comprehensive regulation, the game 'challenges' the ideological frame it initially represents.... The player makes mistaken identifications that... cast doubt: 'Who am I to judge these people?' ... The game casts oversight in a role perhaps no less perverse than moral depravity. [The game] encourages players to calculate one offense in terms of another: five litterbugs for every prostitute.... Moral accounting implies the need for reciprocation and retribution.

Chapter 4 adds the examples of "Velvet-Strike", "Waco Resurrection". "9-11 Survivor". He also refers to "Kuma War"'s re-enactment of the US liquidation of Saddam Hussein's sons - first of a number of "documentary missions", and "JFK Reloaded", a "docu-game" in which the players impersonates Lee Harvey Oswald, re-enacting the Warren Commission report. With respect to procedural rhetoric in Digital Democracy, Bogost presents his own "Howard Dean for Iowa" and "Take Back Illinois".

Further examples and counter-examples of procedural rhetorics are drawn from the domain of advertising (Chapter 5: Advertising Logic, Chapter 6: Licensing and Product Placement, Chapter 7: Advergaming - Simulations of Goods and Services). The remaining text discusses serious games (Chapter 8 to 10) covering learning, procedural literacy, ethics, values and aspirations, and games as part of training (exercises) including exergaming. Bogost concludes (in chapter 11, Purposes of Persuasion, p. 340): "As creators and players of video games, we must be conscious of the procedural claims we make, why we make them, and what kind of social fabric we hope to cultivate through the processes we unleash on the world... video games are not expressions of the machine. They are expressions of being human."

References:

Persuasive Games

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