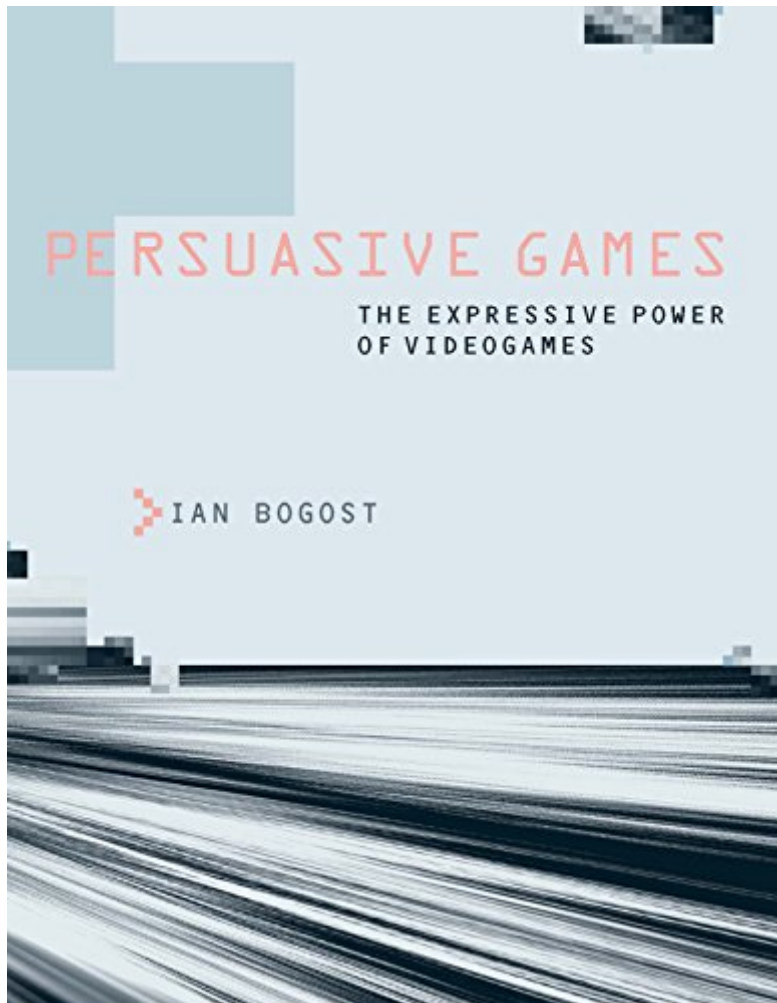




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Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power Of Videogames (MIT Press)



Synopsis

Videogames are an expressive medium, and a persuasive medium; they represent how real and imagined systems work, and they invite players to interact with those systems and form judgments about them. In this innovative analysis, Ian Bogost examines the way videogames mount arguments and influence players. Drawing on the 2,500-year history of rhetoric, the study of persuasive expression, Bogost analyzes rhetoric's unique function in software in general and videogames in particular. The field of media studies already analyzes visual rhetoric, the art of using imagery and visual representation persuasively. Bogost argues that videogames, thanks to their basic representational mode of procedurality (rule-based representations and interactions), open a new domain for persuasion; they realize a new form of rhetoric. Bogost calls this new form "procedural rhetoric," a type of rhetoric tied to the core affordances of computers: running processes and executing rule-based symbolic manipulation. He argues further that videogames have a unique persuasive power that goes beyond other forms of computational persuasion. Not only can videogames support existing social and cultural positions, but they can also disrupt and change these positions themselves, leading to potentially significant long-term social change. Bogost looks at three areas in which videogame persuasion has already taken form and shows considerable potential: politics, advertising, and learning.

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Customer Reviews

At the heart this book is how phenomena can be expressed, with a bias, though the simulation of said phenomena. Designed processes contain an idea about how their real life counterparts work. These assumptions (conscious or not) carry an implicit point of view analogous to traditional rhetoric. Bogost successfully situates this procedural rhetoric in a historical context that elucidates the nuances of how games and other media make arguments about the way the world works. The content is invaluable if you're interested in critically assessing or deconstructing games and other designed interactions. Most of his examples were enlightening, particularly the ones concerning his game *Dean for Iowa*, which unintentionally painted political action as a process of human-wealth accumulation removed from any form of actual ideology. Less helpful was his characterization of the infamous escape game as a game that "operationalizes the sensations its services seek to countermand" and how it proceduralizes the "anxiety of office work". I'm far from convinced that any procedural argument here has anything more to do with mountain biking than it does with Klondike bars. This argument struck me as so odd that I'm convinced I misunderstood something. Personally I found Bogost most interesting when providing details that contextualize his arguments; historical perspectives on rhetoric, educational philosophy, advertising, and even references to old school non-traditional physical input devices that I had never heard of (Joyboard anyone?). On the other hand, I feel like I'm still struggling to get a complete grasp on his concept of a "unit operation", based on the "count as one" concept of Alain Badiou (who I'm less than acquainted with).

This book rules. If you've ever thought to yourself (or screamed on the internet) about how videogames are as important or should be respected as much as other forms of art (painting, literature, film, etc.), then you should read this book. By describing and analyzing many examples of what he calls "persuasive games", Bogost clearly describes how games have already been used for expressive purposes by a variety of people. To me, one of the most interesting parts of this book is its implicit call for, or at least emphasis on, a cognitive or rational approach toward expressive game design (and possibly art making in general). Bogost describes games as procedural representations of how the world, or some part of it, works (which, of course, are in themselves processes). Because videogames run on computers and the very nature of computation requires explicit and

exact specification, when representing with systems it can be said that one is creating a complete "theory" of what is being represented. The canonical example of a game representing an ideological position through its processes is SimCity. SimCity presents a world that takes for granted that various forms of governmental planning produce very specific results (which are literally hardcoded into the system). Players are placed in a role where zoning, etc. is unavoidable and naturalized. To be successful at the game, players must understand and then enact the rules of the system. Depending on the player's criticality, or how successful the game's procedural rhetoric is (a very important term explored in depth in this book), he or she may accept the solutions to the problems into his or her worldview.

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