

Teaching and Practicing Critical Games Studies

a friendly workshop

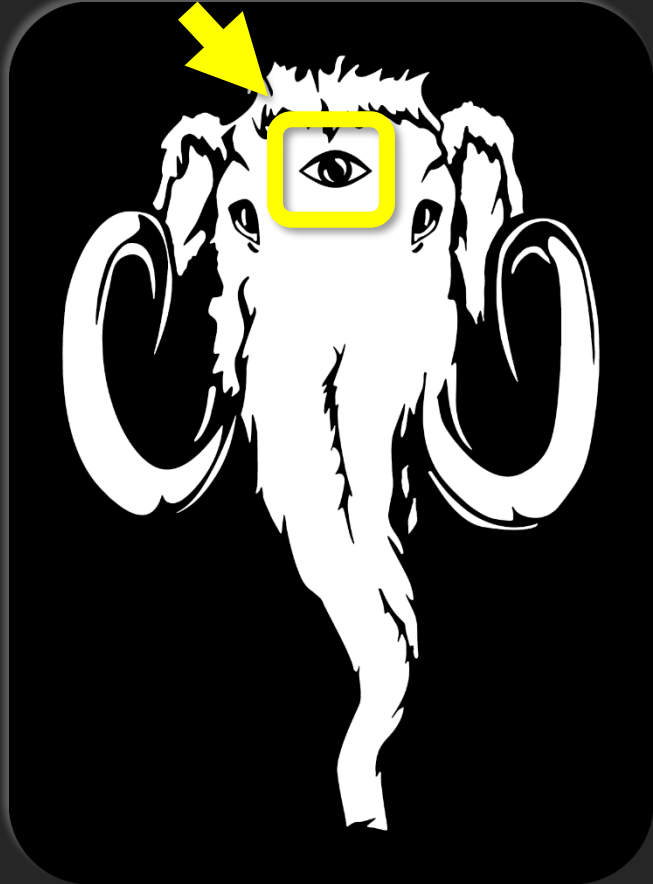
Tim Handley

tim.handley@mindfulmammoth.com



Wait. Who is this guy?

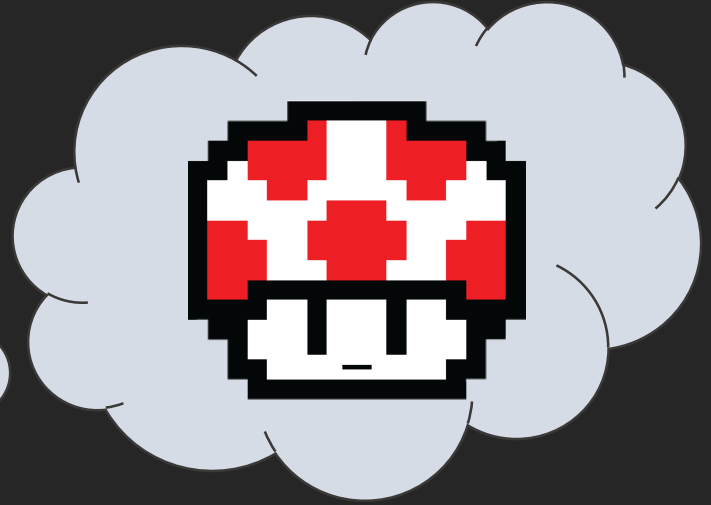




**Enough about me.
Who are you?**



CGS: The Class



The Plan

- **A Challenging Thesis**
- **Critical Studies**
- **Colorful Context**
- **Rhetoric**
- **Helpful Lenses**
- **Practicum**
- **Reflection**



A Challenging Thesis

Games can do good.



A Challenging Thesis

Games can do harm.



A Challenging Thesis

Games that we make can do harm.



A Challenging Thesis

Everything that we make can do harm.



A Challenging Thesis

Everything that we make will do harm.



A Challenging Thesis

Everything that we make will do good ...

... and harm.



Critical Studies

Two questions:



Critical Studies

Two questions:

- **What does this mean?**
- **What does this matter?**



Critical Studies

Two questions:

- **What does this mean?**
- **What does this matter?**

"this" = games



Colorful Context



Colorful Context



Colorful Context



"You hunt a big lizard over one of several open-ish world maps, kill it, turn it into a pair of studded jorts and a giant bone hammer, and then use them to kill a bigger lizard. In this fashion, you work your way up the food chain ... "

"It's exceptionally beautiful and enormously deep – and it's silly amounts of fun, so long as you don't think too hard about what it's saying about the relationship between humans and nature"

"Iceborne is an essential expansion for a game that is paradoxically both enormous and niche. I'd recommend it to everyone – even if only because it's likely to convert a few of you to veganism."

- Nic Reuben, Rock Paper Shotgun ([link](#))



Critical Studies

What does this mean?

What does this matter?

Useful discomfort

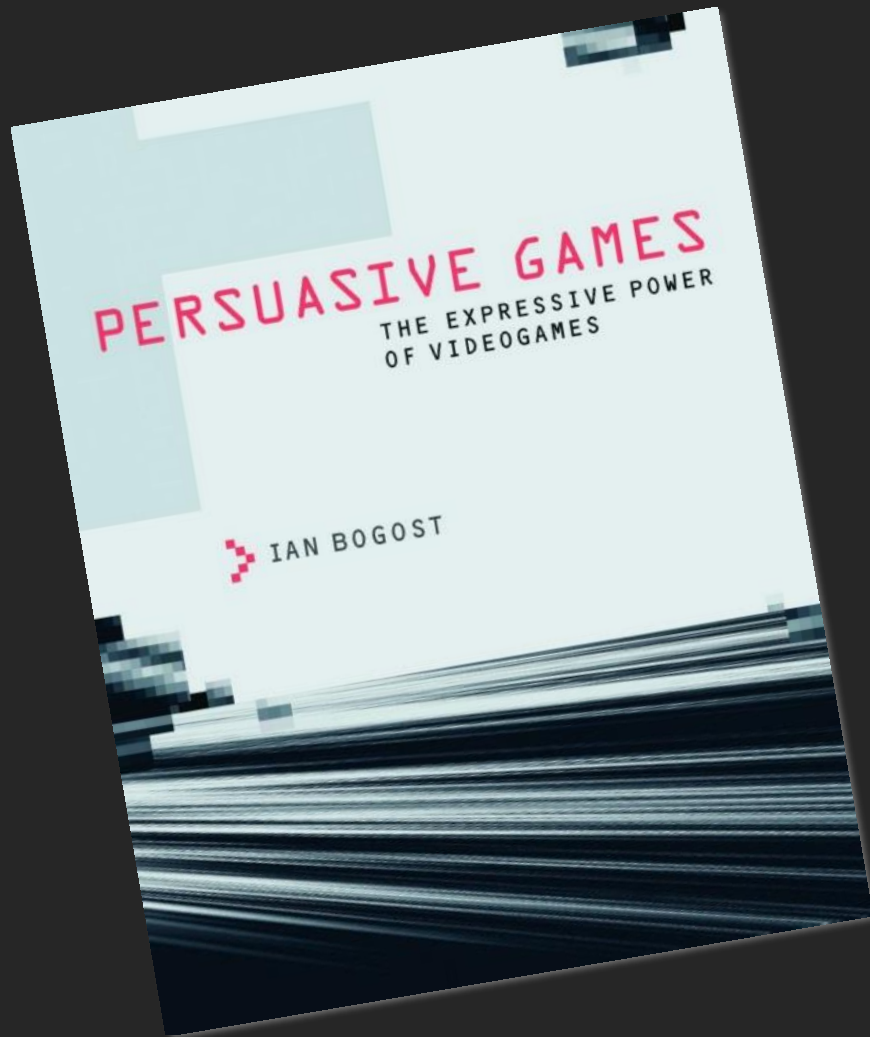


Rhetoric

OK. So. Rhetoric.



Rhetoric



Ian Bogost

Rhetoric

**The art of persuasion and expression
(in whatever medium)**



Rhetoric: Spoken Words



Clinton: *"Do you favor ... abolishing the affirmative action program that produced Colin Powell? Yes or no. Yes or no!"*

Abigail Thernstrom:
"I do not think that it is racial preferences that made Colin Powell."



Rhetoric: Written Words

A-472730

OFFICIAL 2016 DEMOCRATIC PARTY SURVEY

DNC MEMBERSHIP #: 339009101025 SURVEY TRACKING SCANLINE
REGISTRATION #: PM01161VVE2AA
339009101025 PM01161VVE2AA

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN BY:
FEBRUARY 26, 2016

SURVEY INSTRUCTIONS:

- Portions of this survey contain computer-generated information, including your name and address. Please review this information carefully, and note any omissions or changes in the margins near each entry.
- Please answer each question to the best of your knowledge or ability. To ensure statistical accuracy, please do not skip any questions in the survey.
- To assist in the tabulation of your survey, please print all of your responses in black or blue ink if possible.
- Be sure to complete your DNC contribution form.
- Please return your completed survey, along with your contribution, in the envelope provided.

SECTION I: PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Name: _____
2. Address: _____
3. City: _____
4. Gender: _____
5. Telephone No.: _____
6. Email Address: _____

SECTION II: POLICY PRIORITIES

- Do you support President Obama taking action on issues that Republicans refuse to bring to a vote, such as immigration?
 Yes No Not sure
- Please rank the following Democratic economic priorities in order of importance. (1 = most important)
___ Make it possible for more American workers to earn sick days and family leave
___ Find gender discrimination in pay and ensure women receive equal pay
___ Close tax loopholes and simplify the tax code so corporations and the ultrawealthy will pay their fair shares
- Do you support Democratic initiatives to reduce carbon pollution and take other urgent action to combat climate change?
 Yes No Not sure
- Do you support President Obama's proposed plan to provide a community college education to any American who is willing to work for it?
 Yes No Not sure
- Which potential actions by congressional Republicans must concern you? (please choose up to three)
 Dismantling the Affordable Care Act
 Restricting women's reproductive rights
 Rolling back equal marriage rights
 Forcing a government shutdown
 Blocking President Obama's judicial appointments
 Opposing a minimum wage increase
 Obstructing immigration reform

SECTION III: THE 2016 ELECTIONS

- How important is it to regain Democratic majorities in Congress and put another Democrat in the Oval Office in 2016?
 Very important
 Somewhat important
 Not very important
 Not important at all
 Not sure
- Which group of GOP backers do you think will have the biggest impact on the 2016 elections? (please choose one)
 Right-wing billionaires, such as the Koch brothers and Sheldon Adelson
 Ruthless political operatives, such as Karl Rove
 Extreme far-right organizations, such as the Tea Party Nation and the Club for Growth
 Conservative media outlets
- How should the DNC react when Republicans and their special-interest backers target Democrats with lies and personal attacks? (please choose one)
 Hit back fast and hard with the truth, and hold the GOP's feet to the fire
 Wait until the dust settles, and then offer a low-key response
 Completely ignore lies and mudslinging
 Not sure
- Which Democratic candidate do you support to be our Party's 2016 presidential nominee?
(please specify) _____
- Which Republican presidential hopeful do you believe would be the hardest to defeat in 2016?
(please specify) _____

Survey Continues →



Rhetoric: Written Words

4-0279

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___ End gender discrimination in pay and ensure women receive equal pay
___ Close tax loopholes and simplify the tax code
___ Corporations and the ultra-wealthy will pay fair shares
- 3) Do you support Democratic initiatives to combat carbon pollution and take other urgent action to combat climate change?
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 Rolling back government shutdowns
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 Blocking President Obama's judicial appointments
 Opposing a minimum wage increase
 Obstructing immigration reform

(please specify) _____

Survey Continues →

2) Which group of GOP backers do you think will have the biggest impact on the 2016 elections? (please choose one)

- Right-wing billionaires, such as the Koch brothers and Sheldon Adelson
- Ruthless political operatives, such as Karl Rove
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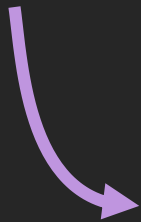


Rhetoric: Images



Rhetoric: Games

- Spoken words
- Written words
- Visual images
- *Processes*



Procedural Rhetoric

Procedural Rhetoric



Procedural Rhetoric

Two more



Procedural Rhetoric

CGS1 The Lens of Pavlov's Puppy



People, like puppies, respond to reward and punishment. To make sure that you understand what you are teaching your players - and what you are not teaching them - ask yourself these questions:

- *When does your game give rewards to your players?*
- *When does your game give punishments to your players?*
- *With these rewards and punishments, what am I training my players to do? What am I training them to not do?*
- *How do these implicit lessons compare to my goals and values?*
- *With this game, am I teaching anything that runs counter to my values? Am I not teaching something that I really ought to teach?*

**Inspired by Jesse Schell's Deck of Lenses*

Procedural Rhetoric

CGS2 The Lens of the Cognitive Corral



Sometimes you want your players to think outside the box. Sometimes, you want them to think within a box. To help you understand the consequences of the cognitive boxes you have constructed, ask yourself these questions:

- *In my game, which choices and actions are possible, and which are impossible? What sorts of events and situations are possible and what sorts are impossible?*
- *How will my limits on players' in-game choices and in-game experiences influence their solutions to in-game puzzles?*
- *How might these in-game limits influence players' developing in-game cognitive habits?*
- *How might players' in-game cognitive habits influence their real-world cognitive habits?*

*Inspired by Jesse Schell's *Deck of Lenses*



Procedural Rhetoric

CGS1

The Lens of
Pavlov's Puppy



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CGS2

The Lens of
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- How might these in-game limits influence players' developing in-game cognitive habits?
- How might players' in-game cognitive habits influence their real-world cognitive habits?

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Procedural Rhetoric



THE
**FREE
CULTURE
GAME**
a playable theory



Procedural Rhetoric



Has a clear, relevant, and playful model,

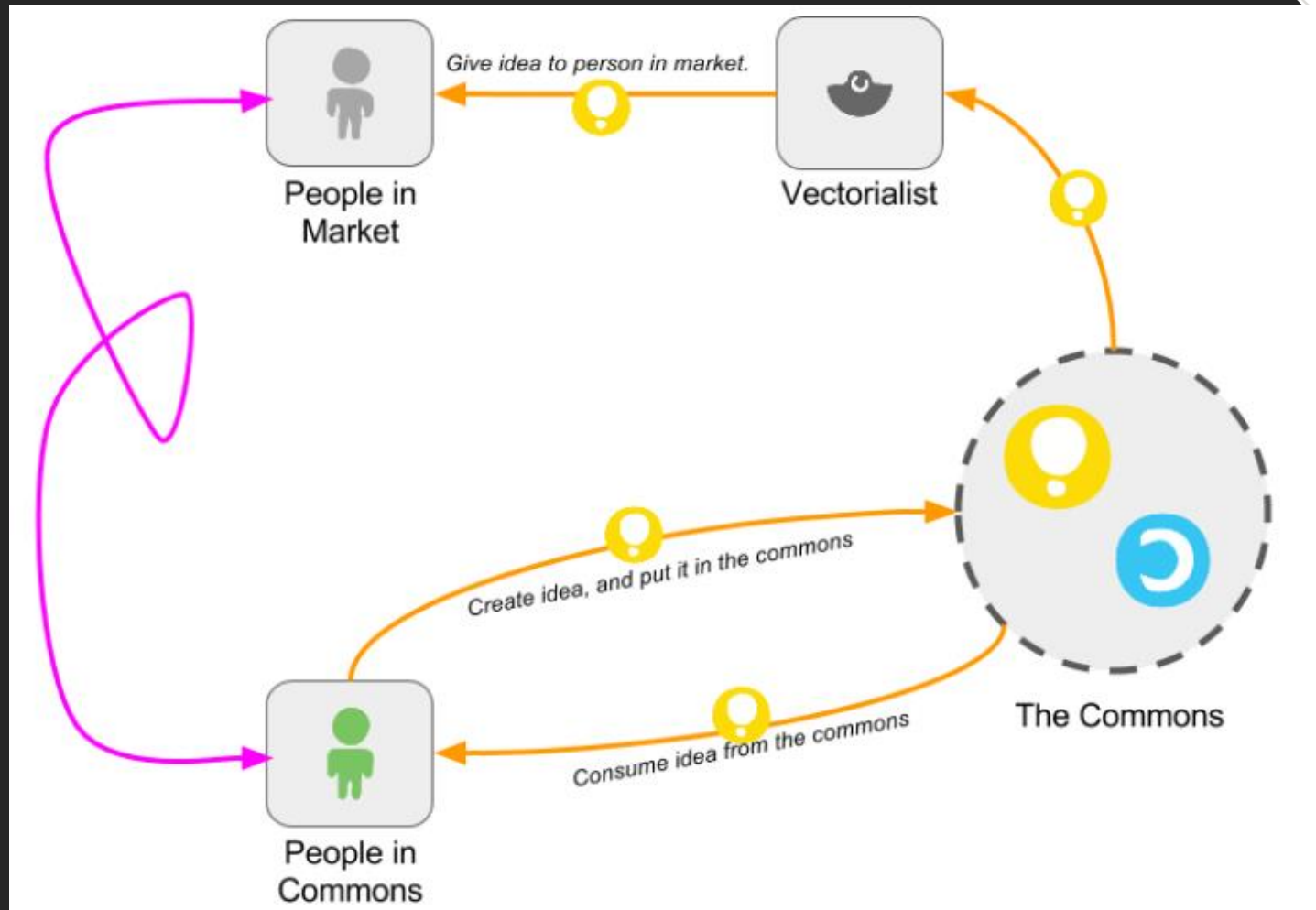
And really excellent rhetoric



Pub Ex: The Free Culture Game

LA MOLLER

THE
**FREE
CULTURE
GAME**
a playable theory



Faith Fighter



FAITH FIGHTER

Religious hate has never
been so much fun

CGS Practicum:

Find a buddy.

Pick a game.

Apply the lenses.



Reflection:

Final thoughts.



Reflection:

Final thoughts.

Final thoughts?



Keep in touch!

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tim.handley@mindfulmammoth.com

