CHAPTER 5

Playing Games with Our Lives: What Critical Pedagogy Can Teach Us About the Ethics of Games in the Writing Classroom

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The use of games, games theory, "serious games," and the foregrounding of play and fun have been positioned as radical challenges to theories of learning and teaching in general and the teaching of writing in particular, but do they constitute a radical pedagogy? Do (or should) game-based and ludic writing pedagogies share a core set of ethical or ideological beliefs? If, as Jane McGonigal (2011) famously argued, games can "Make Us Better" and "Change the World," do game-based pedagogies agree how to define "better" or what the direction of that "change" should be?

First, a question and an anecdotal example: the question, of course, is just what we mean by "game" or "game-based pedagogy." Game studies has matured to a point where literature reviews now regularly invoke a

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R. Colby et al. (eds.), *The Ethics of Playing, Researching, and Teaching Games in the Writing Classroom*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-63311-0_5

canon of theorists (e.g., Huizinga, Caillois, Bateson, Csikszentmihalyi, among others) to indicate a range of possibilities for considering concepts of game and play, just as composition studies by the 1980s had formed a canon of process theory to equally signify the transition of a revolutionary moment into an enduring intellectual movement. For my own purposes, I still find Alice Robison's (2008) definition both precise and capacious enough for considering gaming in/as the writing classroom: "games are designed, interactive, rule-based and achievement-bound systems that reflect and inspire rich literacy and learning practices" (p. 361).

Part of the capaciousness I admire in Robison's (2008) definition is that it allows for considering both games as subjects of instructional practice and instructional practice as games, which brings me to my anecdotal example from the pre (or really, nascent) digital world of the mid-1970s, when "video gaming" meant the release of *Pong* to the home market, and the roleplaying tabletop game, *Dungeons & Dragons*, was equally brand new. Meanwhile, in my high school social studies class, a group of our teachers involved us in what I now realize was a pedagogical experiment: learning through participatory gaming. This experiment was part of an explosion of interest in and commodification of using simulated games in the classroom in the late 1960s and 1970s, as exemplified by Clark Abt's (1970) *Serious Games*. The interest in the use of these roleplaying games in the classroom has continued to this day, where it is most famously associated with Mark C. Carnes's "Reacting to the Past" project at Barnard College.

Rather than the more conventional (at the time) classroom experience of textbook reading, film watching, worksheets, and lectures, we were organized into teams that moved through a variety of experiential games: farming, the Constitutional convention, playing the stock market, the debates over slavery and abolition. In each unit, we were tasked with solving various problems (Robison's [2008], "achievement-bound systems"): keeping a farm afloat in spite of the vagaries of weather and the commodities markets, managing a stock portfolio, forging a new nation, avoiding or starting a civil war. Our teachers acted as our Dungeon Masters, introducing each round with a new set of calamities and opportunities (a sudden drought, a market collapse, a political crisis over the expansion of slave labor).

These achievement-bound systems involved a mix of assimilation and critical questioning: we had to play the stock market game (there was no opting out of the market, and the market equally defined the farming

game) and we had to (or were supposed to) stick to our appointed roles: representative to the convention, abolitionist orator. Yet over and over instances of challenging the premises kept arising, especially in the Constitutional convention game, and not always (or even mostly) for what might be considered intellectually and rhetorically polite reasons. Boredom, a desire for attention, our vexed adolescent relationship to teacherly/parental approval—all figured in the subversive mix I count as "challenging the premises."

Instead of undermining the experiment, however, our toggling between trying to solve a problem within the defined procedures of the game and challenging the premises of these procedures and definitions of these problems (our not always taking these games "seriously") only made them all the more "realistic"—and effective—in highlighting how ego, insecurity, and social status affect and shape these "real world" games (including the game of the high school classroom). Three takeaways for me from this pre-*Oregon Trail* educational gaming experience: important career lessons (never, ever go into farming); the profound impact of the dramatized writing and speaking practices we engaged in that essentially constituted the games, especially an appreciation for the power of pathos and ethos; and finally, how this one class remains easily my most memorable (official) pedagogical experience of high school, one I am still thinking through 45 years later, certainly one definition of what Robison (2008) means by "rich literacy and learning practices."

In this chapter, I examine this dialectic between playing the game as following the rules and breaking the rules as playing the game by layering the revolutionary Brazilian educational activist Paulo Freire's (1990) model of problem-posing pedagogy onto the "rule-based and achievement-bound" problem-solving procedural model of gaming to explore the ethical challenges and highlight the radical possibilities of game-based pedagogy—specifically, issues of agency and manipulation that McGonigal warned about: "I don't think anybody should make games to try to motivate somebody to do something they don't want to do. If the game is not about a goal you're intrinsically motivated by, it won't work" (quoted in Feiler 2012, para. 12).

What it means to "motivate somebody to do something they don't want to do" elicits a more fundamental question: what exactly did we as students "want" to do in our high school social studies class? One answer is that the question never really came up. Although history was and remains an enduring and profitable subject in nonfiction publishing

and visual media, the learning objectives for our high school social studies class—then as now—involved little or no student input (and the situation is little different for most college classes and curricula). Instead, I suspect part of the teacherly motivation for our class experiment followed the logic of an entry in *National Geographic*'s Education Blog aimed at K-12 teachers with the bracingly honest title, "5 Ways to Trick Students into Learning with Pokemón [sic] Go" (Modafferi 2016). While the methods listed in the article suggest a gaming approach to learning, in truth the pedagogy mostly follows a model of using *Pokémon Go* as the center of more traditional kinds of assignments. For example:

> Stretch students' mapping skills.
>
> - Using Google Maps alongside the Pokémon Go app, view the area around your school. Ask students to draw a map with the walking route they'd like to take to visit the most nearby Poké Stops.
>   - Add some math practice by giving students a time limit for the length of the walk. If it takes 20 minutes to walk one mile, how many miles can their route be?

There is nothing particularly "game-like" about this assignment, and in terms of what students want, there may be some motivation in a classroom activity that can be used to plan a *Pokémon Go* excursion, but nothing about this lesson plan gets at *why Pokémon Go* is so compelling an augmented reality game that students apparently don't need to be "tricked" into wanting to play. Instead, the author, quite sensibly in an article meant to provide some useful options for elementary educators, uses the language of learning deracinated and unmotivated "mapping skills" as both goal and motivation for this assignment.

For many writing teachers, the critical pedagogy of Freire (1990) provided the most resonant metaphor for a model of learning defined as the acquisition of abstracted "mapping skills" (or "writing skills"), one that combined cognitive theory with a critique of the larger economic and ideological forces that shape education (and of course the gaming industry): the banking model of education. At the college level, of course, composition theory and pedagogy have moved well beyond the days of a late 1960s first-year composition syllabus I discovered doing research in the 1980s that designated an entire week to "The Semicolon" (an example, perhaps, of "stretching punctuation skills").

Still, even the carefully crafted and progressive "Principles for the Post-secondary Teaching of Writing" drafted by the CCCC (1989; revised 2013 and 2015) and NCTE's "Standards for the English Language Arts" (1996; reaffirmed 2012) reflect an ongoing rhetorical game of developing educational outcomes that speak to multiple institutional and political constituencies. Similarly, many of us involved in developing and gaining institutional acceptance of learning outcomes for local college writing programs also found ourselves walking the same tightrope between the politically "neutral" and the potentially subversive, as in the careful mix of skills-building and canny use of parallelism displayed by the CCCC writers in an outcome like the "development of productive writing practices and habits of mind that are critical for success in different contexts, including academic, workplace, and community settings" (CCCC). Just what is the relationship between "writing practices and habits of mind" that are "critical for success" and writing practices and habits of mind" that students want? "Success" as defined by whom and in what terms?

In framing these ethical questions of how gaming pedagogy intersects with questions of motivation, learning outcomes, and helping students "do what they want to do," revisiting the pre-digital roots of critical pedagogy can help define a political and ethical basis for gaming pedagogy as an intervention in the persistent institutional and political pressures to commodify writing skills and effective communication as faux-neutral versions of "problem solving." In this version of the "learning equals acquisition of skills" model, the writing situation can become one version of a rhetorical game (whether the classroom explicitly uses game-based pedagogy or not): a set of challenges within a constraining context of "designed, interactive, rule-based and achievement-bound systems," the object being successful persuasion and influence, with the ethical question of "persuasion to do what?" bracketed as no more essential to effective writing than the question of "but should we even want to capture the king?" is to chess, or why we want to capture all of these wild Pokémon to begin with.

In asking us to revisit Freire's (1990) own model of problem-posing (rather than problem-solving) pedagogy, I want to posit more than a question about how a pre-digital understanding of pedagogical ethics can inform the conversation engaging the ethics of serious gaming. In good dialectical problem-posing fashion, I also want to ask how game studies can provide a new perspective on critical pedagogy by considering

dialogic, problem-posing pedagogy as itself a different kind of revolutionary rhetorical game, one rooted in ethos and political commitment. In this way, I want to put into conversation the ethical questions of coercion that McGonigal (Feiler 2012) references with Freire's (1990) older warning about the ongoing threat of manipulation in a class stratified society: "Through manipulation, the dominant elites can lead the people into an unauthentic type of 'organization,' and can thus avoid the threatening alternative: the true organization of the emerged and emerging people" (p. 145).

The similarly contested cultural status of both "games" and "rhetoric"—"empty rhetoric" as a form of mere "game playing"—can play (both literally and figuratively) into ongoing debates about the ends, ethics, and even identification of what we mean by "gaming pedagogy." On the one hand, understanding the Freirean (1990) dialogic model of problem-posing as a kind of revolutionary game can tie into developing a critical awareness of the constructedness—and thus the availability for reconstruction—of social reality. This version of "playing with reality" links with longstanding concepts within radical and critical pedagogy such as code meshing and even the process of "inventing the university" (Bartholomae 1985). The metaphor of discursive activity as "code meshing" is especially rich in connecting language play with game play, and with a critical analysis of the politics of game engines, whether those used to build video games or social institutions.

On the other hand, the excitement and hope piqued by the radical possibilities of gaming pedagogy have resulted in roiling debates about not only how to define just what we mean by "gaming pedagogy" but, *pace* McGonigal, how to differentiate and define "good" uses of games versus "bad." One result is the classic academic game of defining terms (and by referring to this activity as a "game," I mean not to trivialize it; the fact that I feel compelled to include this disclaimer even in an essay about gaming indicates my own concern with definitions and implications). "Serious games?" "Gamification?" In their introduction to *The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications*, Steffen P. Walz and Sebastian Deterding (2014) observe that "these language disputes … (sometimes intentionally) conflate descriptive and political, normative levels … they generalize and position 'good' = well designed = ethical *serious games* or *gameful design* against 'bad' = poorly designed = unethical *exploitationware* or *gamification*" (pp. 6–7, emphases theirs).

My particular goal here is less to separate "descriptive" and "normative" levels (although that is a useful enterprise) but to emphasize the ethical impulse that drives the conflation Walz and Deterding refer to. If the distinction between "what the player wants to do" and "what someone else wants the player to do" defines one axis of this debate (the "doing something they don't want to do" and "manipulation" that McGonigal (Feiler 2011) and Freire (1990) refer to), the other might be the pleasure and pain axis, or "play" versus "work" (distinctions that also threaten to conflate the descriptive and the normative). The question is not only what did I want to do in my high school social studies class, but whether I had fun in that class (spoiler, dear reader: I did), and whether the students being (playfully) "tricked" into developing their "mapping skills" through *Pokémon Go* will derive pleasure from the experience.

This second axis also brings us back to the question of learning outcomes and objectives from a different angle. In the NCTE/IRA Standards for Language Arts, reference to any kind of pleasure appears in only one word (in parentheses) within standard number 12: "Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, *enjoyment*, persuasion, and the exchange of information)" (emphasis mine). It is in relation to these two axes that I want to reconsider Robison's (2008) definition of games as "rule-based and achievement-bound systems" in relation to the Freirean (1990) distinction between "problem posing" and the seemingly more politically neutral ideas of "problem solving" and skills acquisition. One way of understanding the rhetorical dance involved in crafting learning outcomes for writing classes—and by extension defining the ethical context in which gaming pedagogy plays—is to consider that claims for the "seriousness" of gaming pedagogy echo longstanding justifications for the "seriousness" of writing instruction, and in so doing how they both negotiate a Freirean opposition between games built on "learning-as-knowing" (the banking approach) and "learning-as-learning" models, the latter indicating the potential for writing and/as gaming to, in the words of Thomas J. Yannuzzi and Bryan G. Behrenshausen (2010), "allow more critical reflection upon the self one chooses to become and the social worlds he/she participates in constructing" (p. 87).

In *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Language and Learning*, James Paul Gee (2004) makes explicit this connection between seeing games as trivial and seeing learning as the acquisition of abstract skills,

and conversely (and correctly, in his view) of taking games seriously and therefore seeing learning as transformative and critical:

> Passive learning—rather than active, critical learning—will not lead to much power and empowerment in the contemporary world, however much it may suit one for a low-level service job. Mastering literacy or math as a set of routinized procedures without being able to use these procedures proactively within activities that one understands and for the accomplishment of one's own goals will not lead to learners who can learn quickly and well as they face new semiotic domains, as they will throughout their lives. (p. 69)

Gee (2014) has explicitly acknowledged his debt to Freire (1990) in his evolution away from his own early instrumentalist view of literacy in "Language and Literacy: Reading Paulo Freire Empirically," an essay that validates Freire's (1990) radical pedagogy in terms of contemporary developments in cognitive psychology. At the conclusion, Gee (2014) affirms the implication that the goal of "active, critical learning" leading to "power and empowerment" is inherently political and hence ethical as well: "And, in choosing my political position, I am both 'reading the world' and, for better or worse, transforming it. That, too, long ago, I took to be Freire's point" (p. 72).

"In problem-posing education, men develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire 1990, pp. 70–71, emphasis his). Freire's now canonical invocation that to read and write the world is to change it implies that what we take to be reality is itself a social construct, maintained and enforced through power, persuasion, and manipulation. An equivalent corollary in game studies theory may be the distinction between "learning to play the game"—developing the technical, rhetorical, and discursive skills to be a successful player without necessarily challenging or critiquing the rules of the game—and seeing any game as precisely that: a game, meaning a contingent and historically evolving collection of social negotiations. Playing the game from this perspective involves the choice between playing *with* or *against* the game. Playing against the game necessitates confronting the procedural logics that constitute the game, and, just as important, confronting the ethical

implications of those procedural logics, including and maybe especially what it means to "succeed" at the game.

Of course, much actual game play involves both sides of this binary, whether challenging the authority of the umpire, the longstanding practice of adapting the board game *Monopoly* according to local rules and practices, or the inevitable rowdiness that accompanied the social studies learning game from my high school experience. In fact, these last two examples share much in common, as both *Monopoly* and, say, our playing the stock market game rest on the "achievement bound" system of market capitalism. In both games, players are confronted with the prospect of bankruptcy and poverty, whether their own or their fellow players', often resulting in socialism on the fly, as the "richer" players transfer wealth to the poorer out of a complex mix of sympathy and the simple desire to keep the game going.

In redefining "serious" games as "persuasive games," Ian Bogost (2007) places the ethics of gaming front and center and questions the technocratic descriptors that find their way into game studies theory—such as the aforementioned "procedural logics." Instead, he exposes the seemingly neutrality of "procedural logics" by recasting them as "procedural *rhetorics*." As with Gee (2004), Bogost's (2007) ultimate goals recall Freire (1990): "I argue that videogames' usefulness comes not from a capacity to transfer social or workplace skills, but rather from their capacity to give consumers and workers a means to critique business, social, and moral principles" (p. x). Yannuzzi and Behrenshausen (2010) likewise see a Freirean potential for understanding the potential of gaming as radical critique

> as "sites of fun," video games present an opportunity for the playful negotiation of their logics. Here exists exploration, reiteration, arbitration, and deprecation as players probe rules, test boundaries. To play video games is to toy with codes, to structurate. (p. 88)

The phrase "to toy with codes" brings in the radical potential of fun and play in gaming theory as forms of ideological critique with what can seem the more austere approach of classical radical pedagogy in ways that recall Bakhtin's (1984) idea of the "carnivalesque." In less grand theoretical terms, "sites of fun" describes the anarchic impulse literally at play in our high school learning game. As we learned the "rules" of the stock market game, we simultaneously recognized them as just that: the

rules of a game, contingent rather than absolute. In popular terms, this is the strategy of Bart Simpson, the class clown whose "misbehavior," or refusal to play the game according to the rules, offers a radical challenge to the rules of the "serious game" of formal education. More theoretically, this liminal space defines what Mark Taylor (2001) calls "the edge of chaos," or "the interplay between order and chaos at work in dissipative structures" (p. 121).

The notion of games as "dissipative structures" captures what is most inherently subversive and transformational in gaming. But if Bart Simpson is one form of this kind of anarchic game player, then so too might be Donald Trump, whose own transactional world view lays bare the unavoidable ethics of all "game playing," including technocratic "problem solving" models of gaming. One of the cornerstones of Trumpian rhetoric is an appeal to its own specific kind of "fun," as in the provocative improvisations of his rallies. However well-meaning the intentions, however anodyne the learning outcomes, the ethics of "5 Ways to Trick Students Into Learning with Pokemón Go" are inherently transactional as well, even if not quite Trumpian. Still, the idea of "tricking students" (voters?) is assumed to be ethically justified and even beyond discussion, since the worthiness of the goals is taken to be self-evident.

The larger point here, however, is not really about trickery: it is the recognition that the self-evident is anything but, and Trumpian rhetoric, with its disdain for "rule-based systems," has itself brought into focus the "edge of chaos," the radical contingency of all democratic practice as serious political game as well as the underlying bugs in the specific game engine of the electoral college. In fact, one of the remarkable aspects of Trumpian rhetoric is that it combines constant disruption with a dearth of persuasive efficacy. While the "rule-based systems" of conventional politics are subjected to attack and even contempt, public opinions about the president have remained—at least through mid-2019—historically consistent, complicating the whole question of just who is tricking whom in this game.

In *Gamer Theory*, McKenzie Wark (2007) recognizes this potentially "dark side" to utopian models that posit gaming and fun as forms radical critique, arguing that gaming and play have already been co-opted as new foundational elements of late capitalism:

> Play no longer functions as a foil for a critical theory. The utopian dream of liberating play from the game, of a pure play beyond the game, merely

> opened the way for the extension of gamespace into every aspect of everyday life. While the counter-culture wanted worlds of play outside the game, the military entertainment complex countered in turn by expanding the game to the whole world, containing play forever within it. (para. 016)

Linking the exploitation of gaming as means of military and corporate training brings us back to McGonigal's (Feiler 2012) ethic of not trying "to motivate somebody to do something they don't want to do," and Freire's (1990) warnings about "manipulation" within social organizations, forms of social gaming that work to hide their very existence as games. As I suggested above, the "extension of gamespace into every aspect of everyday life" even anticipates the fragmenting political discourse post-2016, as social media, forms of discourse that emerged as kinds of rhetorical games, have upended older gamespace models predicated on distinctions between the serious and trivial, formal and informal.

Still, even Wark's final position stops short of complete despair: "The game might not be utopia, but it might be the only thing left with which to play against gamespace" (para. 024). Or just as Freire's (1990) older model did not posit Utopia outside of social organization but instead invoked the idea of a "true" organization, Wark's attenuated ("might be the only thing left") vision can be reinterpreted not as a search for a world of play outside the gamespace but the creation of utopian gamespaces, "utopian" in the political sense of anticipating/working toward a "better" world, a world by definition none of us have ever lived in before (hence, a literal "u-topia").

These utopian gamespaces include both those games that fit McGonigal's (2011) vision of using the power of gaming as problem-solving to address real world problems at the social (as in the 2007 game *World Without Oil*) or personal (the *Superbetter* project) levels. But we can also think of the utopian in terms of what Frederick Jameson (2005) calls the "utopian wish," or "a utopian impulse detectable in daily life and its practices" (p. 1). This "wish" or "impulse" can oscillate between the conscious and unconscious, complicating the question of "what we want to do," or "what we should want to do," as in my high school self's simultaneous attraction to the McGonigalesque (2011) utopianism of our learning games and anarchic "impulse" to disrupt the rules. This "wish" or "impulse" can exist at the crossroads of the "what I want to do/what

someone or something wants me to do" and the fun/work axes. It might be another word for "play."

For example, in my own prior work (Alberti 2013) I examined Facebook (in what I would now call its formative stages) as a form of rhetorical gaming, one less focused on "winning" than on the pleasures of rhetorical play, an understanding of writing and rhetoric with potentially radical implications for the traditional "problem solving," goal-directed writing classroom. But Facebook has been turned into another kind of game as well, the game of harvesting and selling user data through gamification. My earlier analysis of Facebook started with the observation that students wanted to "play" Facebook, an observation that connects the idea of gameplay as a means of commanding attention with gaming as compulsive behavior, as in both the *Candy Crush Saga*-style games that advertise themselves on the basis of their addictiveness and in the search for "addictive" educational game strategies that can "trick" students into learning.

Problem solving lies at the heart of both the gaming and utopian impulses; we can see Freirean (1990) pedagogy as a meta version of gaming by taking problem-posing as the questioning of questions, of what the "real" problem to be solved—or that we want solved—might be. For example, the very real problem of declining college enrollments has led to models of gaming-based pedagogy as technocratic problem-solving involving the use of badges and other intermittent "rewards" as a means of promoting student engagement and persistence by allowing students to acquire multiple forms of credentialing as they proceed through a curriculum (see Fain (2016) for a fair overview of the use of badges and other alternative credentials in higher education).

To be sure, the use of badges in higher education is a complex phenomenon, complex in its various motives and its relation to the question of student/player autonomy at the heart of the ethics of gaming. The utopian program and utopian wish are easy to discern—so is a theory of learning as compulsive behavior triggered by these badges and other intermittent "rewards," a form of capitalism as game, as in the stock market game I played in high school. And, of course, the use of education as coercion is not new; it lies at the heart of the Freirean (1990) critique.

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and the other evolving and emerging forms of social media are clearly as much persuasive rhetorical games—and energized by various manifestations of the utopian wish—as any older forms of sanctioned political and economic discourse. In fact, students

now increasingly see the creation and maintenance of an online identity as critical, if not more so, than a well-crafted resumé. Part of the turbulent and ever-shifting landscape of social media stems not just from the "inevitable" progress of technological innovation but from the desire Wark (2007) describes to find a new online rhetorical space of fun and play, now that Facebook and Twitter function as mandatory components of a "web presence." Thus, Facebook and Twitter become coercive games, "tricking" us into play by becoming unavoidable components of the serious games of work and politics. It has become a commonplace that younger players now see Facebook as a space for their parents and grandparents; in Wark's terms, the gamespace has encroached into the former playspace of Facebook, its former players fleeing to Snapchat and then Instagram, with the gamespace in hot pursuit (and, in the case of Instagram, corporate capture by Facebook, Inc.).

All of these examples finally point us to the what may be the heart of Freirean (1990) problem-posing: its radical specificity. While *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* often operates at the level of macro social theory—"[i]n this historical phase, manipulation becomes a fundamental instrument for the preservation of domination"—the strategy of problem-posing insists on the importance of starting with the lived experiences of the learners/players, of exploring the problems and contradictions they see in negotiating the procedural rhetorics of the specific gamespaces, macro and especially micro, in which they find themselves constituted as players: "The task of the dialogical teacher … working on the thematic universe revealed by their investigation is to 're-present' that universe to the people from who he first perceived it—and 're-present' it not as a lecture, but as a problem" (p. 101).

And the study of rhetoric itself is always particular, always located at the nexus between general strategy and the specificity, the Kairos, of any particular rhetorical situation, as Bogost (2007) affirms in his own investigation of gaming rhetoric: "rhetorical positions are always particular positions; one does not argue or express in the abstract" (p. 241). The "gamespace" posited by Wark (2007) is not different than Freire's (1990) "thematic universe"; the social organization of Facebook is as real as the social organization of the criminal justice system. I am arguing that we can view Freirean problem-posing as its own type of game, one founded on the premise that all games—whether Facebook or the system for funding a college education—can be interrogated in the form of the procedural

rhetorics that constitute them. Problem posing is the game of interrogating games. Like other forms of artistic experience, "[v]ideogames do not just offer situated meaning and embodied experiences of real and imagined worlds and relationships; they offer meaning and experiences of *particular* relationships" (Bogost 2007, p. 241, emphasis his). This experience of a particular relationship is a *real* experience, and these particular relationships can form the basis of problem-posing as gameplay.

For example, Yannuzzi and Behrenshausen (2010) follow Freire in arguing that "[p]ractitioners of critical pedagogy might therefore ask how to foster recognition of the ways in which subjects are both constituted and positioned in spaces governed by the digital logics of contemporary informatic systems" (p. 88). Similarly, in her overview and analysis of how and at what levels of procedural awareness college writing teachers use gameplay in their classes, Rebekah Shultz Colby (2017) affirms that "the mechanics and procedures the players enact to play out the game story not only make players identify with a certain subjectivity, but the game mechanics and procedures make players enact and, thus, embody these subjectivities as well, forcing players to live through them" (p. 64). In the case of social media like Facebook and Twitter, those subjects are constituted and positioned in terms of likes and hits, of the endless pursuit of attention and approbation, of insisting that these constitute (or more accurately, *should* constitute) the ultimate endgame of all rhetorical play, whether we "like" it or not.

Now, this contradiction, this "problem" at the heart of how we are constituted by dominant social media, will come as no surprise to most of us (and certainly not to anyone who has seen the 2016 "Nosedive" episode of *Black Mirror*), but the naming of the problem, of the crack in the procedural rhetoric of Facebook, is only the first step. The next stages in the game—the strategies for addressing, exploring, confronting this contradiction—range, as in all games, from the tactical to the global. There is the strategy of leaving social media, of going dark online, which is certainly a valid choice, even though it's telling that this choice already carries with it a felt imperative to justify such a decision to others, let alone the perceived potential damage to one's career prospects. But is leaving Facebook really "leaving the game?" The larger game of data mining includes and extends beyond Facebook to games that don't seem like games—or rather, as with the credit score industry, games that consciously repress their status as games, in spite of using gaming terminology such as "score." Such games demand our play whether we want to or not; indeed,

many of us are playing without even knowing it, as famously exemplified when Cambridge Analytica used demographic data from 50 million Facebook users to create voter profiles for sale to political organizations, including the Russian government (Confessore 2018). The social logics of the rhetorical games of social media both derive from older media structures of ratings and attracting eyeballs and, more and more, inform our understanding of political and social discourse.

The game of Facebook, for example, can be compared to the game of public opinion polling, or more specifically the game of public opinion polling analysis and big data, the realm of FiveThirtyEight.org, RealClearPolitics.com, and other poll aggregation sites. Here the game becomes more complicated: the choices are not between "believing" or "not believing" polls: this game is played at the level of meta-analysis, of interrogating what forms of information and thus social knowledge are constituted by polls. We can even subsume all of these games under the game of voting; as Thoreau (1993) put it almost 170 years ago, "All voting is a sort of gaming, like checkers or backgammon, with a slight moral tinge to it, a playing with right and wrong, with moral questions; and betting naturally accompanies it" (p. 5). For Thoreau, the gaming metaphor is an accusation, but I argue that the "slight moral tinge," as he dismissively called it, is exactly the point of critical pedagogy as game.

"In problem-posing education, men develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire 1990. pp. 70–71). The outdated gender references notwithstanding, Freire's description of the power of problem posing from 50 years ago has even more resonance for an online reality that constantly reinforces its status as always "in process, in transformation." Or as Yanuzzi and Behrenshausen (2010) argue, "the binarisation of everyday life by systems of control indicates the need for pedagogies that cultivate awareness of ways in which self and other are constituted, managed, and negotiated in technological and social systems whose logic is becoming increasingly gamic" (p. 95).

Combining a Freirean critique of gaming pedagogy with a gaming approach to problem-posing, we can open a space for writing teachers and pedagogical theorists to approach gaming, fun, and play not merely as means to various educational ends, not as a way to "trick" students into learning, but as ends themselves rooted in the fundamental ethical and political questions of what it means to make a better world and to

play games with our lives. This combination is at the same time the recognition of a return, a return to an understanding of pedagogy as game and play. Looking back, I can read my experience with a learning game in my 1970s high school classroom less as an encounter with a radically new way of teaching than with a teaching practice that opened up the inherent gamefulness of culture, politics, and learning, whether that was a part of the official learning outcomes or not. Recognizing the notion of the "gameful world" as a/the radical Freirean insight creates a playspace where students can leverage their own experience and expertise in gameplay and game procedurality into an awareness of "how their interactions with part of the system or model affect their interactions with the whole of the simulation" (Shultz Colby, p. 63). In this way, game and play become the ground for the ultimate ethical question of what it means to do something we want to do.

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