Persuasion is a ubiquitous feature of life. We encounter it when we consider the menu at a fast-food restaurant, when we shop for new running shoes, and when we log onto Facebook. We’re offered suggestions on appropriate conduct when we use the furniture in public spaces, when we visit public restrooms, and when we make comments online. We’re given guidance on what to believe and how to make our value judgments when we go to art galleries, when we peruse TripAdvisor, and perhaps especially when we act in game worlds.

When games such as chess and its German Kriegsspiel descendants first appeared, they were used as training vehicles to educate their players on the complexities and tactics of warfare. To this day, they remain persuasive in their design, connecting to clear real-world referents. What is perhaps less obvious about games is that persuasion is always a core part of their design. All game systems, rule sets, and mechanics invite us to act in particular ways – whether this concerns how we line up goals in foosball, how we lumber around in Noby Noby Boy, or how we approach our drawings in Draw Something. Games and persuasion share a special relationship: they present persuasive appeals in their design, and we bring them to life through the act of playing.

With regards to theories on persuasive games, two perspectives have dominated research to date, those of B.J. Fogg and Ian Bogost. Fogg (2003) defines a persuasive technology tool as “an interactive product designed to change attitudes or behaviours or both by making desired outcomes easier to achieve” and adopts the position that persuasion must be intended by the designer. Bogost (2007), in contrast, defines persuasive games as “videogames that mount procedural rhetorics effectively,” not requiring intentionality on behalf of the designer, but only positing that for a game to be persuasive, its system should embody a rhetorical position.

What the literature has been lacking until this point are practical examinations and reflections on what happens when persuasive games are deployed. Case Studies on the Effects of Persuasive Games does just this. It draws together a diverse collection of cases of persuasive games tackling social change of different types, including civil servant training, healthcare, and education. It sheds light on game
designs that successfully trigger persuasion, including pervasive games that foster cross-cultural empathy, quest-based games that invite their players to be the people they want to be, and mobile games that convince even those not playing them to reduce their power consumption. It also gives us insight into games that ultimately fail to support persuasion as well as why – for example, why RPGs set in environments such as Second Life and based on existing fiction are apparently a poor medium for conveying persuasive messages. Cases like these enable us to bring the aforementioned theoretical frames to life, and give us data with which to critique them.

Importantly, many of the cases to be found in this book foreground the experiences of players – how they played, what they played, why they played, and what happened afterwards. For a design practice to mature, it is crucial to reflect on the experiences of those we have designed for in light of our expectations. Other disciplines have been exploring this facet of design for some time – including architecture by way of design patterns communicating collective wisdom about building traditions, and experience design by way of its embrace of “third wave” perspectives that focus on phenomenological experience. Design practices that neglect to share and reflect on how their products are experienced by audiences will always be inherently limited.

One message that stands out in this volume is that games can and are successfully being used to persuasive effect even if they were not intentionally designed to do so. In “Emergently-Persuasive Games,” Neil Dansey discusses how in SF0, ostensibly a game about interpreting and completing ambiguous and metaphorical quests both online and offline, players use the quests as an impetus to take on life challenges and partake in social interactions they would have otherwise lacked the personal motivation for. In “Football Manager as a Persuasive Game for Social Identity Formation,” Linda Kaye explores how through Football Manager players develop a sense of group affiliation with other Football Manager players, laying the grounds for new friendships, as well as strengthening existing ones. This is unlikely to have been a design objective of Football Manager’s designers, and yet turns out to be one of the game’s effects.

Another striking message that comes through is that players are at the heart of persuasion and games. Some players are specifically drawn by the allure of persuasion and life change, as in the case of SF0. Other players, if the conditions are right, will serve as persuasive proxies for communicating persuasive messages. In “Communicating the Obvious,” Matthias Svahn and Annika Waern analyse how their game Agents Against Power Waste was able to convince entire families to reduce their power consumption, even though it was only the children of these families who were signed up as players of the game.
Maybe best of all, in drawing together and juxtaposing diverse examples of persuasive games in use, *Case Studies on the Effects of Persuasive Games* presents implications and open questions for the design of persuasive games. One of these is that player communities in both single and multiplayer games can serve an important yet often overlooked role in persuasion, forming support networks that can and do support change. Another is that some players are clearly seeking out persuasion in games, regardless of a designer’s intent. Perhaps this means we can sometimes be subtler in how we design persuasion for these players as we know they are already receptive, in the way that a game like *Unmanned* quietly promotes its anti-drone message through its presentation of drone attacks as banal events, unworthy, even, of undivided attention. Alternatively, we could also be more extreme in our approaches, perhaps taking a leaf from the world of Nordic LARP, which foregrounds emotional involvement, failing over winning, and immersion to the point of dreaming in character – again, because we know the audience is receptive.

This book exemplifies that there isn’t a right way to design a persuasive game; rather, there are many possible right ways, depending on players and context. In fact, reflecting on both Fogg’s and Bogost’s perspectives on persuasive technology and games in light of these cases, neither perspective singularly manages to pin down what is going on in the complex relationship between player, game, and persuasion. If persuasive game design is to mature as a design tradition, we must fold the real examples and experiences of players back into how we understand and conceptualise it. *Case Studies on the Societal Effects of Persuasive Games* moves us towards this.

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