

# Play as Pedagogy: Wargaming with the US Military

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# The Politics of Play: Wargaming with the US Military



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90 hours of interview data generated at key CPXs and trainers and educators at National Defense University, Naval War College, Army War College, CNA, VSGI, MORS, Long Term Strategy Group, RAND, Grogard Simulations, Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, Air Force Research Laboratory, Joint Multinational Simulation Center, TRADOC, Joint Interagency Task Force, Fires Battle Lab, and more.

Book to be published 2019-20



# Overview

- Wargaming Execution
  - Phase in which 'lessons are internalised and thought experiments take place' (MOD Wargaming Handbook)
  - Comments draw upon experience of execution at key CPXs and fieldwork interviews
  - Intended to feed back into future design and development discussions
- Three key issues:
  - Using play as a pedagogical tool
  - Immersion and the question of player agency
  - Critical thinking and 'dialectical play'

# Kant: The Primacy of Reason over Play

Play frivolous and in opposition to reason

Hinderance to learning

‘The explicit goal of the first *Critique [of Pure Reason]* is to replace the ‘mere play’ of the imagination and thought... with the seriousness of scientific investigation’ (Spariosu, *Dionysus Reborn*, 1989).

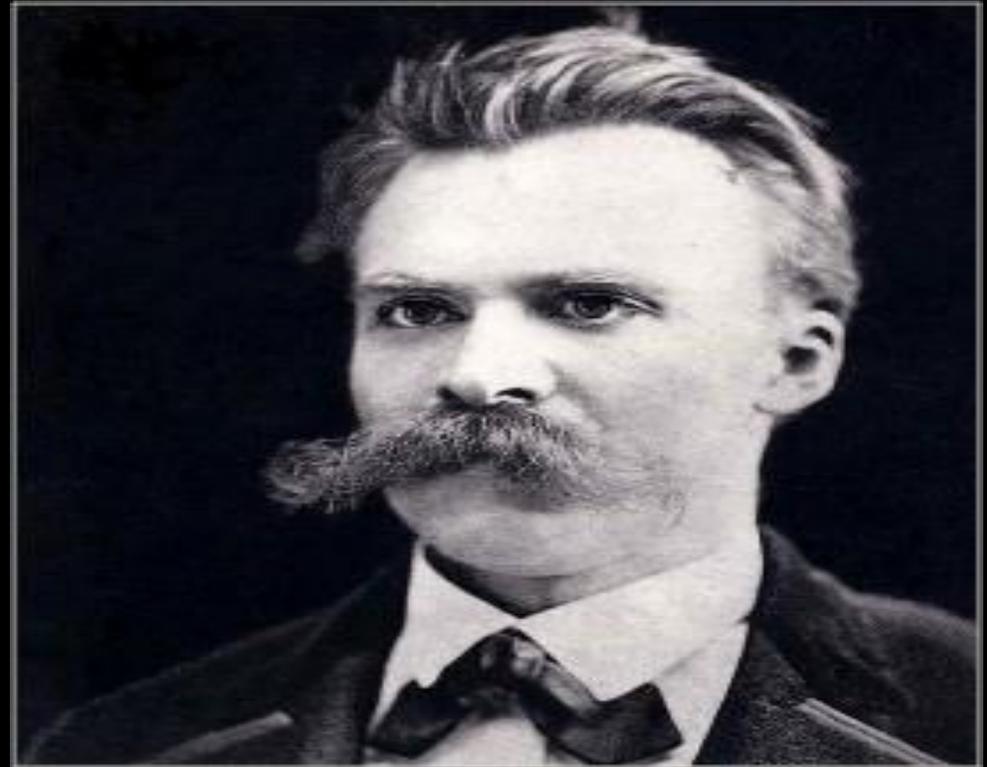


# Nietzsche: The Primacy of Play over Reason

Subordinates reason to aesthetics

Play is a dance between creativity and nihilism

'The maturity of man [sic] - that means, to have reacquired the seriousness that one had as a child at play' (*Beyond Good and Evil*).



# Gadamer: The Power of Play

'All playing is a being-played... The attraction of a game, the fascination it exerts, consists precisely in the fact that the game masters the players... The real subject of the game... is not the player but instead the game itself. What holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps him there is the game itself' (*Truth and Method*).



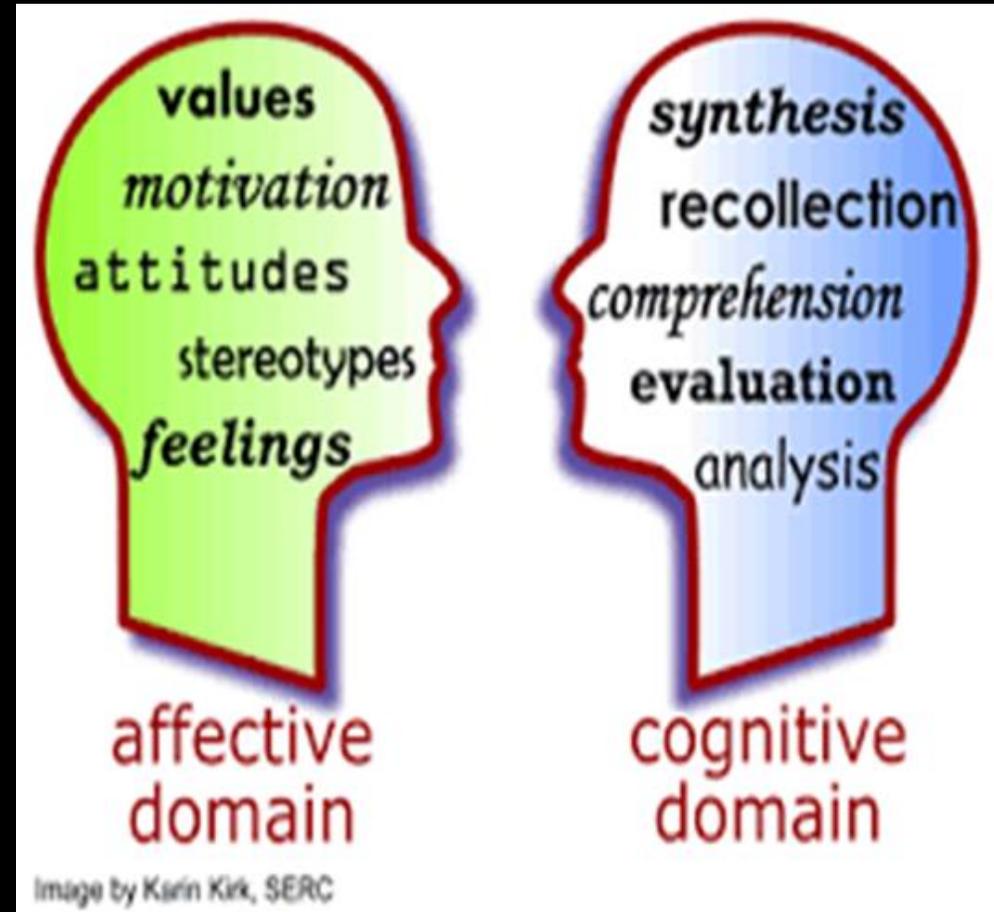
# Play as Pedagogy

- Primarily occurs through the medium of the game
  - Key distinction
    - Play - an exploratory human capacity or ability
    - Game - a system or structure which apprehends and directs play
    - In the case of using games as teaching tools, we are harnessing play for particular pedagogical ends
      - Game always designed/selected for specific purpose/aim/objective
      - True whether teaching in civilian or military context

# How does pedagogical wargaming work?

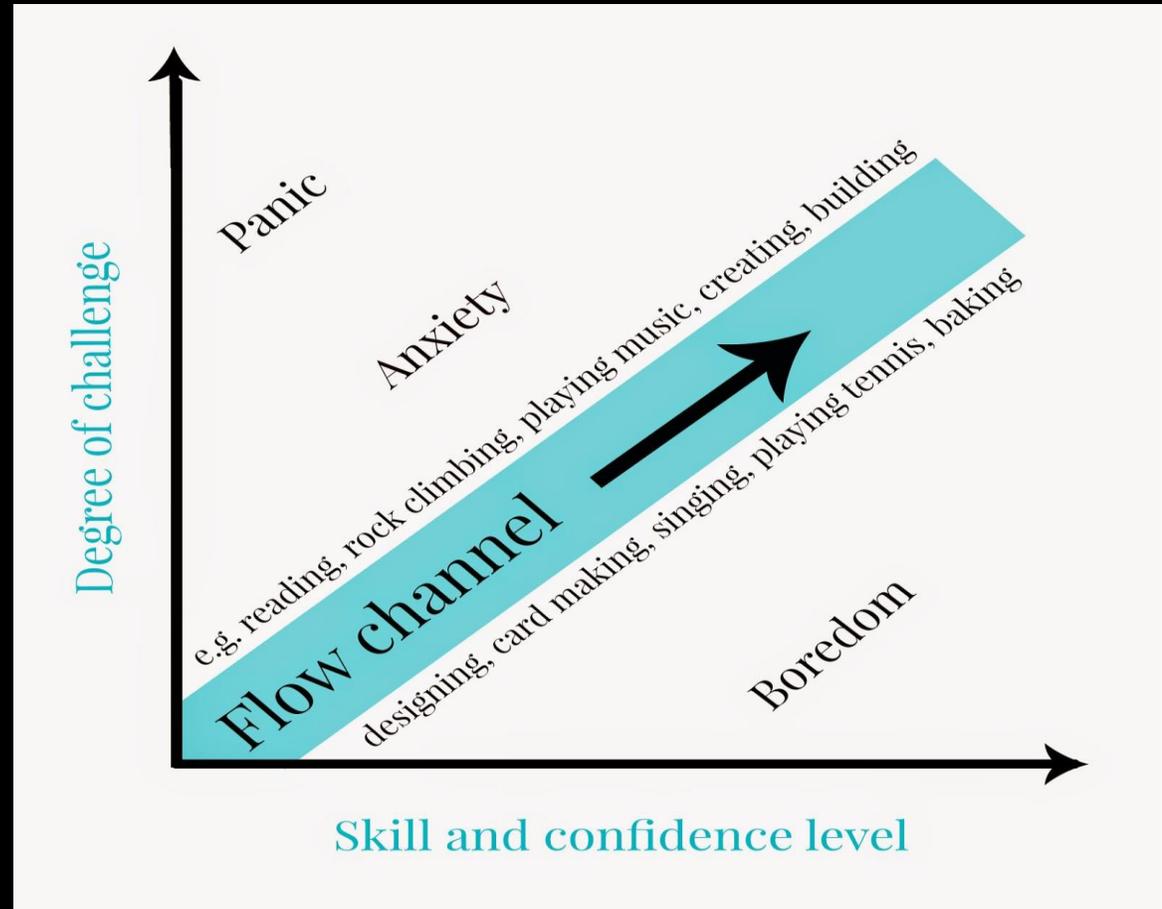
Bloom's 'Taxonomy of Learning Domains'

'Wargaming is a cost-effective means to provide experience-based learning with emphasis on cognitive and, increasingly, affective training domains.' (Roman and Brown, 'Games – Just How Serious Are They?', 2008)



# Csikszentmihalyi: Flow

‘Flow is an optimal state of consciousness, a peak state where we both feel and perform our best. We become so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you’re using your skills to the utmost.’



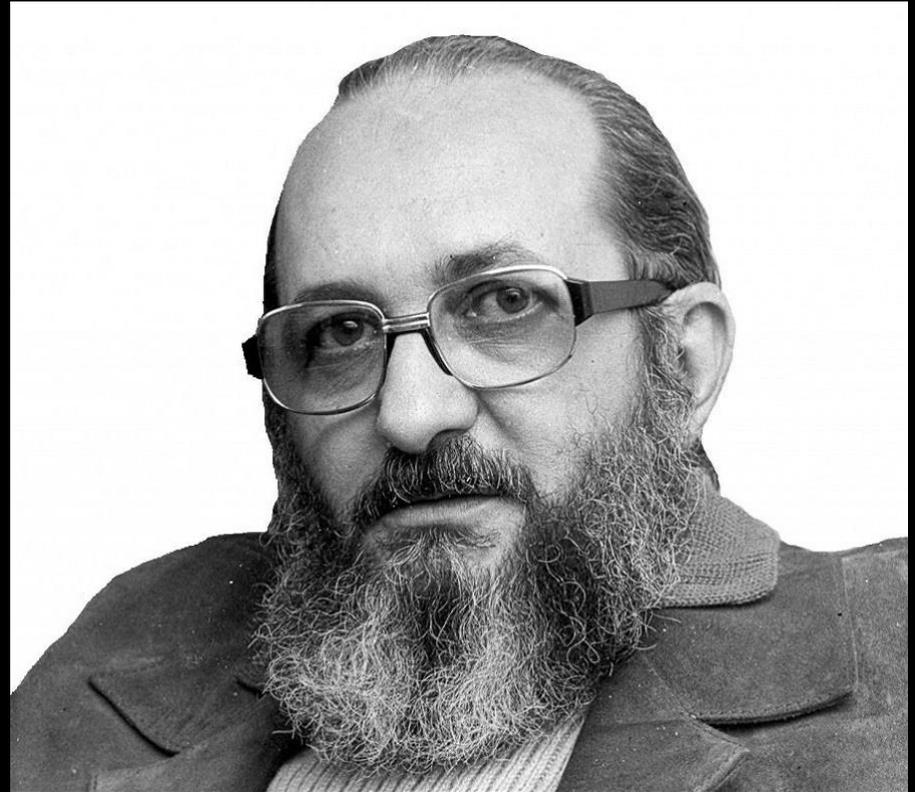
# Immersion vs Agency

- Key imperative
  - Extending and deepening immersion
  - More immersion = better results in terms of learning objectives
  - ‘Competence before cognition’
- But this transgresses key pedagogical principle
  - ‘Co-intentional learning’
    - ‘Teachers and students..., co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators’ (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*)

# Freire: Immersion as a non-reflexive state

‘Animals do not consider the world; they are immersed in it’ (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*).

- Immersion circumvents reflexivity
- The player becomes the *object* of the game, rather than its subject
- Echoes of Gadamer... the game plays the player



# So, what does this mean for execution?

- What matters is not so much *what* we play but rather *how* we play
  - Understand and respect the power of games to harness play
  - Player/learner agency matters – especially if cognitive domain affected
  - Even if game closed, rigid, deterministic can engage critically
  - How to teach *how* to think, not *what* to think
  - If idea is to address complexity, move from narrow to broad understanding of ‘critical thinking’
  - Beyond hotwash/AAR to regularly punctuating immersion with reflexivity
    - ‘Dialectical play’ ensures players are subject not object of game