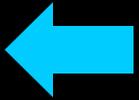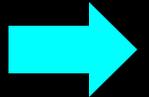# Looking Back, Looking Forward

Expressive Layers of *Braid*
Bogost's "Proceduralist Arts"

Undertale
Schrank's "Videogame Avant-garde"

Braid : 'I wish to communicate'

-Title Screen / House Rooms
-World Books
-Epilogue/Star Books
-World Flags
-Flag Messages
-Memory Puzzles

Some other elements?

1. <u>Allegorical</u>: addressing player / desire
2. <u>Art-Historical</u>: addressing game / craft
3. <u>Literal-Metaphorical</u>: parallel layers based on Tim-Princess dynamic / inquiry

Braid : 'I wish to communicate'

1. "Princess Run" : basically, primary inquiry – who is Tim, what was his mistake?
2. Reversal : realization that expectations and desires were wrong; what to do?
3. Double-down : there must be a way to "solve" the puzzle, penetrate the secret, win this game!
4. "Star Run" : obsessive inquiry, knowledge and mastery, 'success'
5. Revelation : there is no "solution," only choices and consequences; the true test is identifying mistakes and LEARNING
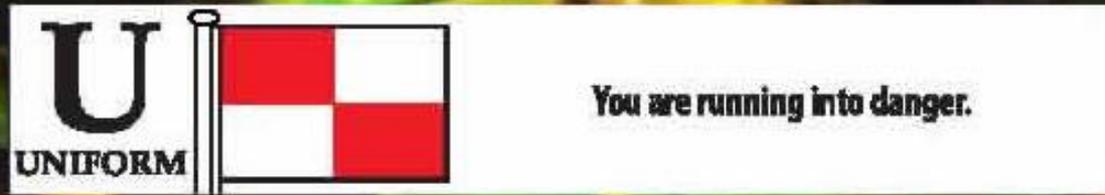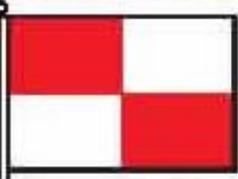
2. TIME AND FORGIVENESS
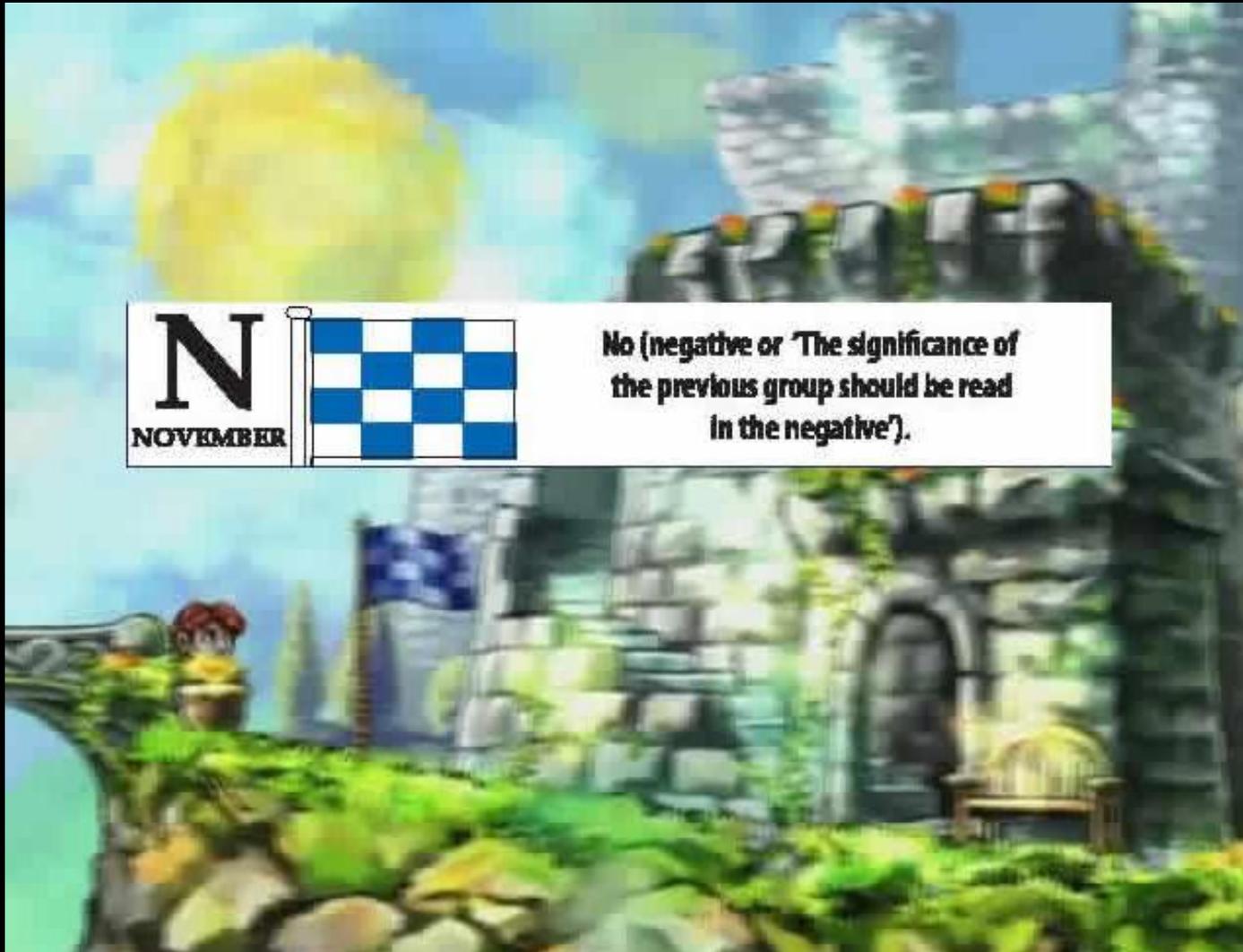
3. TIME AND MYSTERY
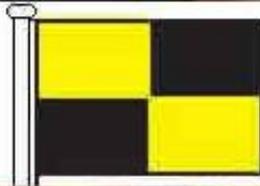
4. TIME AND PLACE

5. TIME AND DECISION

6. HESITANCE

Braid and Puzzle Thinking

Despite the commonplace understanding of a PUZZLE as having a single solution, the real significance of the idea (of puzzles) for *Braid* pertains to the mode of experience they sustain for the player, and the attitude toward thinking in gameplay they require: confusion, wonder, speculative and reflective reasoning, hypothesis formation, epiphany, etc.
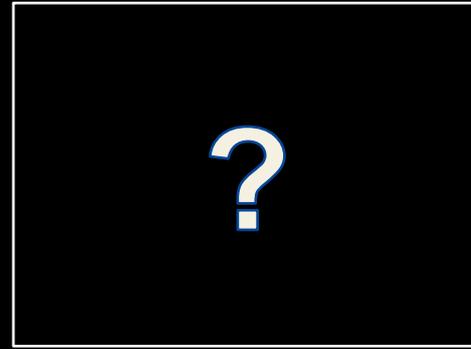
The *experiences* of solving the puzzles are more significant than the actual pragmatic solutions, and they become expressive within the larger poetic arrangement / narrative economy of the game.

THE FIRST "PUZZLE"

We are invited, BY DESIGN, to imagine the significance of the pieces, both in the diegetic world and the game as a poetic collection of interactive puzzles…

2. TIME AND FORGIVENESS
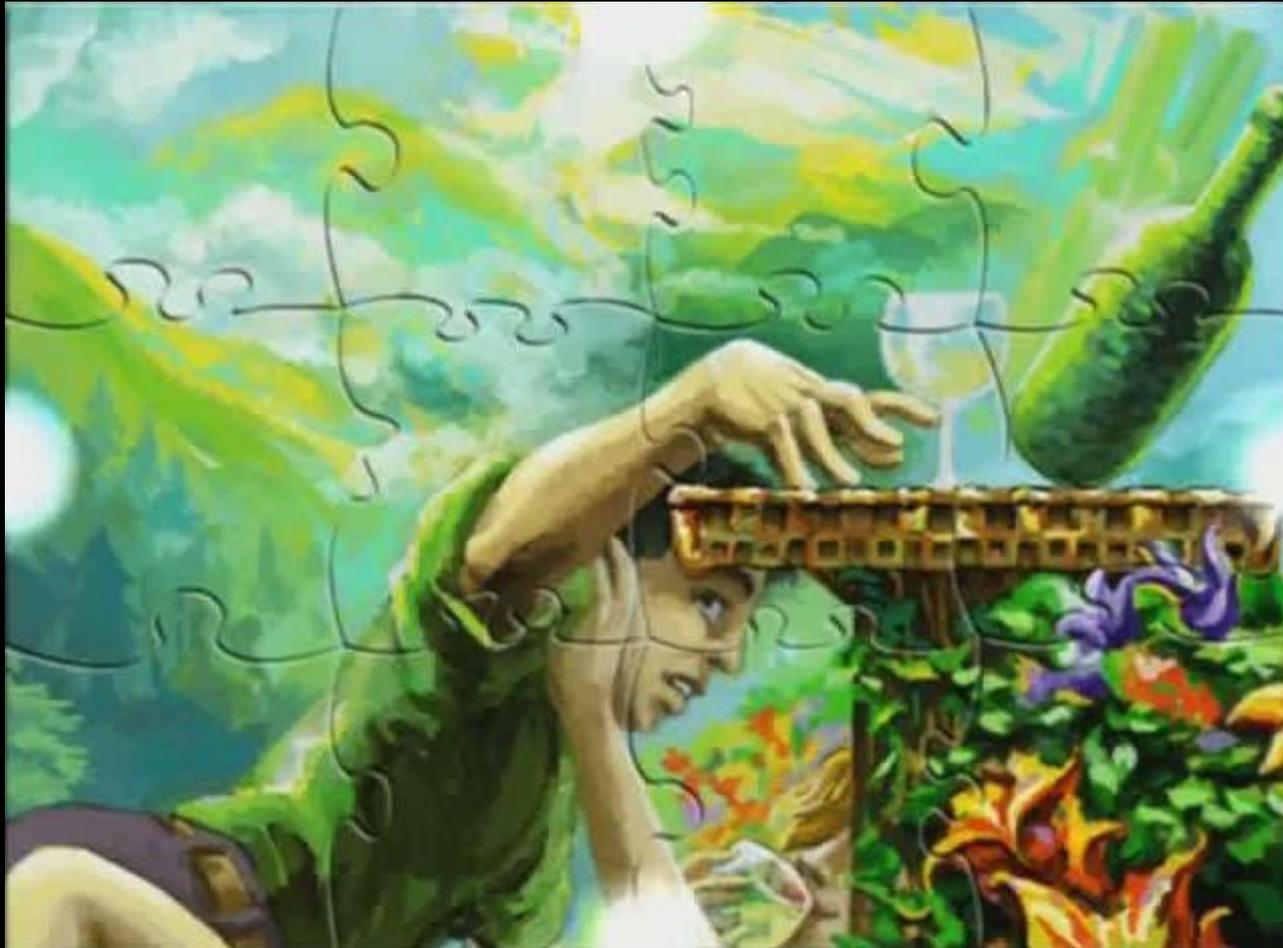
3. Time and Mystery

4. Time and Place

5. TIME AND DECISION

6. HESITANCE

Braid is a True "Quest" Game

Puzzle Problems (ergodic or pictorial puzzles)

To describe the game as a "puzzle-platformer" is distracting: *explicit* puzzle-solving is what we do (to traverse gamespace), but it seems too simplistic *since we are also invited to <u>interpret</u> what the "problem" is, or what the "image" is that we are trying to piece together and understand.* There are given puzzles, but they are also <u>a means for thinking about other human puzzles</u>.

"Quest" (a search, inquiry, investigation, pursuit)

Although we refer to "quests" in games as though what they ask us to do fits that description, in reality what they provide are *tasks* masked as quests via story. *Quests* are pregnant with resources for meaning beyond the immediate situation upon which we re/act.

No "Solutions," Only Choices

John Archibald Wheeler's "It-from-Bit"

"It from bit. Otherwise put, every 'it'—every particle, every field of force, even the space-time continuum itself—derives its function, its meaning, its very existence entirely—even if in some contexts indirectly—from the apparatus-elicited answers to yes-or-no questions, binary choices, bits. 'It from bit' symbolizes the idea that every item of the physical world has at bottom—a very deep bottom, in most instances—an immaterial source and explanation; that which we call reality arises in the last analysis from the posing of yes–no questions and the registering of equipment-evoked responses; in short, that all things physical are information-theoretic in origin and that this is a participatory universe."

An old existential theme, enhanced: we are *doomed to choose*, but we can also *choose to learn from our choices* (ours, others, history, stories), to reflect on and make sense of our experience (acknowledge regret, error)…

THE HUMANITY OF MISTAKES

GNOSEOLOGICAL ORDER

The *slow unfolding and evolution* of understanding in time as a model for knowledge (of WORLD and SELF)

Not only does the game value providing the means and experience of sudden insight (into mechanics, diegetic order, story) *by design*, it stages a central problem of human judgment:

1. understanding revelation is slow, hard won, fragile, personal, and ultimately partial;
2. whereas action is fast (the assumed primary mode of games), absolute, irreversible (in our world) and ultimately social: it affects others, and the world.

TIM & BAINBRIDGE (OPPENHEIMER)

KENNETH BAINBRIDGE: *REGRET*

1. Lead of Manhattan Project
2. Conducted the "Trinity Test"
3. "Now we're all sons-of-bitches"
4. Post-test: dedicated to ending nuclear testing
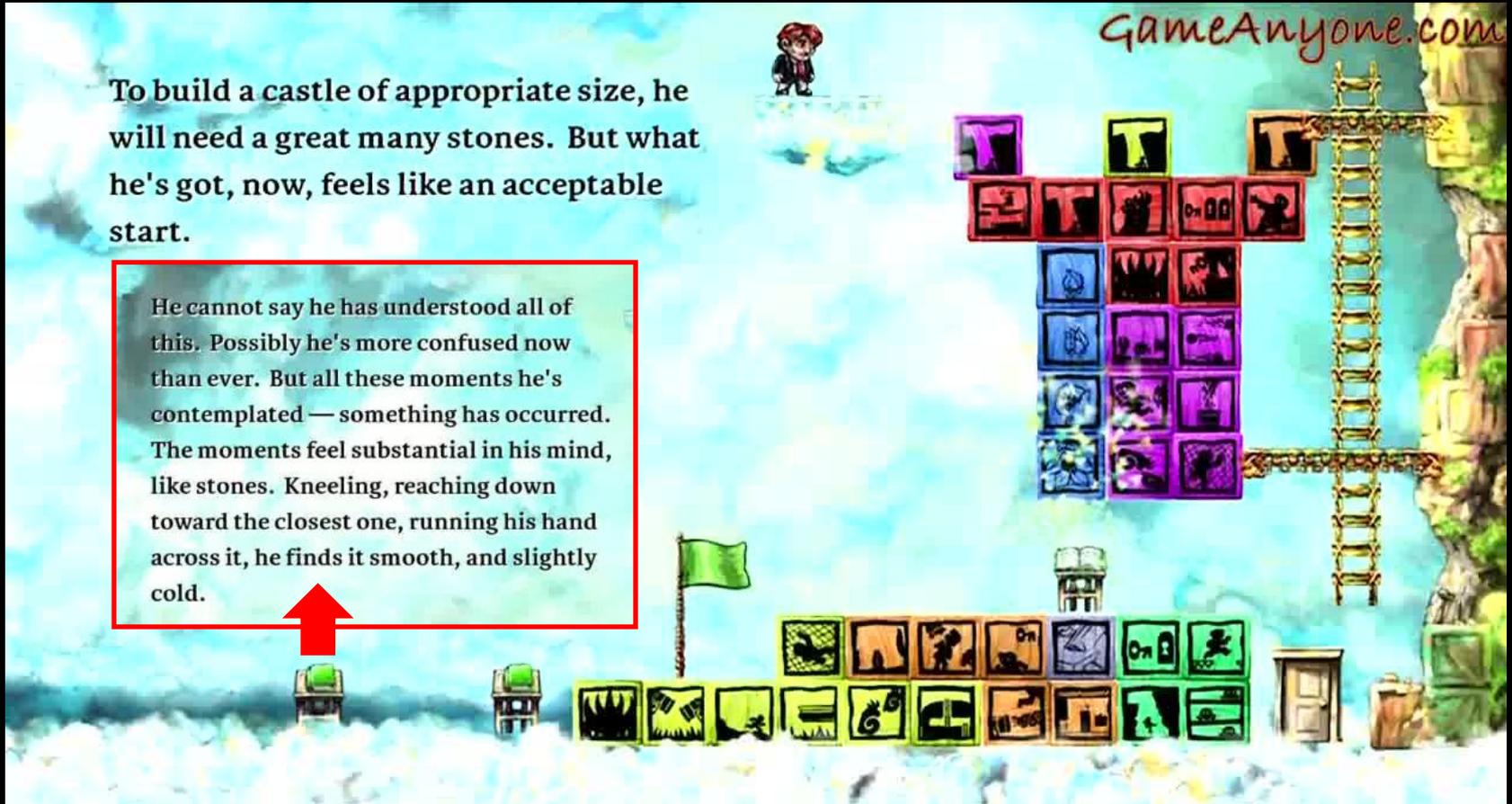5. Argued for transparency and open, civilian control

IMPLICATIONS: this research and *related choices* should not be conducted in isolation and without regard to human impact. Mistakes, to be fully acknowledged, must be reflected on, *learned from*. We must CHANGE OURSELVES.

A FIGURE OF REFLECTION

Learning from experience / A new foundation

NEXT TIME

1. Read: Game Mod Assignment document
2. Read: Schrank's "Against Procedurality"