HOW ETHICS STRUCTURES ARE DEFINED AND REINFORCED IN VIDEO GAME ENVIRONMENTS

Adam J. Thompson

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Master's Thesis Committee

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Elena Bertozzi, Ph.D.

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Thom Gillespie, Ph.D.

____

J. Wesley Baker, Ph.D.

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Dedication

First and foremost, this work is dedicated to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
May everything I do be found acceptable in His sight and bring glory to Him.

Secondly, to my loving wife, without whose support I would never have made it this far.
Your patience, understanding, and sacrifice know no boundaries.

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Video games (and games in general), are best evaluated as a “space apart,” and rather than attempting to determine whether certain games are morally “good” or “bad” by evaluating the merits of their content, the focus of this thesis is instead on evaluating how the ethics structures inside the game worlds are developed and reinforced. Video game ethics structures are generally defined through the story (narrative) elements included in the game and by the choices afforded to players. The structures are then reinforced by the rules that dictate what players can and cannot do and the consequences for adhering to and/or breaking the “laws” of the game. Through an analysis of numerous games, this thesis seeks to explore the current methods used for developing and reinforcing these ethics structures and suggests improvements to them.

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[1] Introduction

[1.1] Morality Play

Video game play is now the norm among young adults, especially males; the industry reports that the average gamer's age is now thirty-three (Entertainment Software Association, 2006, p. 2). 15% of the video and computer games sold in 2005 held an M rating (Entertainment Software Association, 2006, p. 4) for "Mature" (Entertainment Software Rating Board, 1999), and generally this rating is due to seemingly gratuitous levels of violence and gore. However, it is difficult to say whether or not such "mature" content is really what players are looking for in their video games.

Regardless of the relative maturity of their content, video games are now often transformed from what some consider simple entertainment into experiments in human behavior, complete with their own systems of right versus wrong. Video games have the potential to contain their own ethics (or "principles of conduct") governing what is considered moral (or "conforming to a standard of right behavior") within the society of the game world (Merriam-Webster). The rules (or "laws," in a traditional sense) of the game are then used to reinforce the ethics set up in the game world [discussed in greater detail in section 2.2]. Ideally, it is then left to players to determine how morally they desire to act within the game world. However, in order for any of the preceding statements to be held as valid, it must first be evaluated whether or not video games can in fact convey ethics.

Any created work embodies, at least in some small part, the values of the creator (Dymek & Lennerfors, 2005, p. 3), and Robert Lauder proposes that "there is a moral dimension to every work of art" (2002, p. 66). Every novel presents a moral outlook on life (Gardiner, 1953, pp. 118-129), and "the same can be said of films" (Lauder, 2002, p. 67).

Lauder also argues that "great films can have a profound influence on us and can influence us morally" (2002, p. 66). It can be argued that video games contain the same potential for communicating ethics (Dymek & Lennerfors, 2005), and game developer Chris Crawford asserts that "cultural communication [goes] on whenever someone sits down to play a game" (Reeder, 1992). Unlike more passive forms of entertainment, video games allow the audience to become active participants in the stories and worlds being presented. With this added element of interactivity, video games allow players to act within created worlds, instead of just reacting to them (Brey, 1999, p. 8; Thomas, 2004, p. 102). This interactivity allows for game worlds that can mimic both real and surreal environments with complex rules "that allow for many forms of social interaction" (Thomas, 2004, p. 101).

[1.2] Hidden Potential

While the potential for video games to convey ethical principles seems to exist, Neal Thomas proclaims that the potential has yet to be effectively tapped:

> Films and games both tell stories, but the general focus in games is that of privileging means over ends. The player engages with a storied system that has the often clichéd trappings of a traditional epic narrative, but on the other hand lacks a discrete beginning, middle, and end. So where films have developed a sophisticated use of allegory and parable – they are enjoyable for their knotty web of action, consequence and destiny among characters – video games as a genre to date are often found lacking. This has implications for communicating ideas about morality. (2004, p. 102)

Thomas summarizes his thoughts on the inadequacy of the moral capacity of video games by describing them as "world[s] of highly prosaic ends achieved through highly baroque means" (p. 106). This shortcoming undoubtedly stems from the rules-based, cause and effect nature of video games, which only allows for a finite number of interactions programmed by the designer (Sicart, 2005b, p. 15; Thomas, 2004, p. 103). And while moral agency may, in fact, be limited and measured by the rules built into a game world (Thomas,

2004, p. 107), much can likely be done to provide players with moral choice in a game world in spite of these constraints.

Huizinga theorized that through play “a society expresses its interpretation of life and the world” (1955). Given the interactive nature of video games, no other current form of play seemingly has more potential for exploration into morality. This form of play can allow gamers to experience what it may be like to be a hero, a villain, or perhaps even a victim. Players can be provided the possibility of exploring morally complex situations from the safety and security of a recliner. Before their eyes, virtual worlds are displayed in vivid, high-definition imagery on a widescreen television, freeing them to explore morality without the burden of real world consequences.

Unfortunately, when the ethics of video games are discussed in the popular media, it is often in relation to an individual who is alleged to have committed a crime. Depending on the crime committed, one of any number of “violent” video games is targeted as a potential trigger (in part) for the individual’s actions (Bradley, 2005; Couvrette, 2006; Toobin, 2003). Most criticism of video games is focused on the moral content of the games, rather than their moral capacity (Thomas, 2004, p. 104). Instead, what is needed is evaluation of the interaction of players with the game world. It can be said that video games “only exist as moral experience[s] when played... games from their design are moral objects, but we need to consider how they are experienced by players in order to fully understand the ethics of computer games” (Sicart, 2005b, p. 15). In other words, in order to fully understand video game world ethics structures, one must critically analyze the ways users can interact with those created worlds.

It is crucial that one understands the context in which game actions occur. Video game worlds can represent complex ethics structures, but violent actions, for example, do not necessarily equate to "bad" actions when evaluated within the proper context (Consalvo, 2005, pp. 9-10). Therefore, in order to fully comprehend the scope and purpose of actions within a game, anyone who truly desires to understand the game must spend some time playing it.

Huizinga felt that games were set apart from the world in general by a "magic circle," with rules as a boundary to keep them separate (1955). Mia Consalvo expands on this concept:

> In that scenario, games are walled off as a space apart – where we can create different rules, rewards, and punishments for the activities that take place within. Killing can be rewarded, and civilizations might best be taken over by "culture flipping" them. Players can experiment (to greater and lesser degrees) with potential actions, including exploring, socializing, empathizing, killing, being selfish, being silly, being inconsistent, or being all powerful. The results of those actions will vary based on the game being played, and its own particular rule set. (2005, p. 10)

However, the distinction between where the game ends and reality begins is often subtle, and games are "always embedded in reality and interpreted both inside and outside [their] conceptual space[s]" (Dodig-Crnkovic & Larsson, 2005, p. 20). At times, this makes it very difficult to separate the ethics defined in a game world from the evaluator's real world standards. Regardless, the ethics structures of video games are most effectively evaluated when the game spaces are viewed as separate worlds.

This thesis starts from that assumption that video games (and games in general) are best evaluated as a "space apart." As a result, rather than attempting to determine whether certain games are morally "good" or "bad" by evaluating the merits of their content, the

focus of this thesis is on evaluating how the ethics structures inside the game worlds are defined and reinforced. These worlds have the potential to reflect (or oppose) cultural values, solidify abstract views, and even redefine existing values and/or introduce new ones. Rather than simply evaluating the merits of a gamer's actions within a game world, it is critical that each game's moral framework be evaluated comprehensively and within the context of each particular game world. Video games are a form of "play," possessing the unique potential to provide an environment in which players can explore ethics structures both similar and dissimilar to societal norms (Brey, 1999, p. 10; Dodig-Crnkovic & Larsson, 2005, p. 22). But before that potential can be thoroughly detailed, it is important first to develop an understanding of how ethics structures can (and do) exist and function within video game environments.

[2] Game Ethics

[2.1] Moral Exploration

> Games are widely used as educational tools, not just for pilots, soldiers and surgeons, but also in schools and businesses... Games require players to construct hypotheses, solve problems, develop strategies, and learn the rules of the in-game world through trial and error. Gamers must also be able to juggle several different tasks, evaluate risks and make quick decisions... (Entertainment Software Association, 2006)

As a supporter of electronic entertainment, the ESA is understandably going to bring the positive aspects of video games to the forefront of any discussion, but the fact remains that unlike most forms of media, video games possess the unique ability to demand a response from players and then provide a reaction to them. It is this ability to provide a reaction, in simplistic terms **interactivity**, that makes video games the perfect medium for exploring cause and effect ethics-based scenarios (Dodig-Crnkovic & Larsson, 2005, p. 10).

A majority of modern games might only offer very shallow moral explorations (Thomas, pp. 103-104), or seemingly none at all. However, much can be learned by critically analyzing a few of the more interesting examples, specifically *Grand Theft Auto - Vice City*, *Fable*, and *Deus Ex - Invisible War*. Many games task players with the responsibility of protecting other characters or righting some sort of wrong that has been done (often through violent means). But other games offer more interesting moral quandaries, including such gameplay mechanics as the ability to lie, cheat and even steal virtual possessions within the game environment [see *Deus Ex - Invisible War* and *Fable*]. It seems that game designers have discovered the potential of video games to express moral choices; they are "building games in which morality apparently affects the gameplay and aesthetics of the game. The user's character 'is' evil or good according to some internal 'moral-o-meter', and the

appearance of the avatar changes accordingly" [comments made in reference to *Fable* and *Star Wars - Knights of the Old Republic*] (Sicart, 2005a, p. 11).

[2.2] Game "Laws"

In a traditional sense, laws are principles that aid in determining what is generally considered right and wrong (or legal and illegal) in a given society. Illegal actions are typically those that have the potential to infringe on the freedoms of others by inflicting some sort of harm. For instance, there are laws that help protect citizens from harm due to automobile accidents, laws that punish those who steal the property of others, and laws that punish those who commit murder. In essence, laws are the "rules" that dictate what we can and cannot do, or at least should and should not do. Perhaps not too surprisingly, the laws (or "rules") governing video game worlds often parallel the structure of many of the same laws we see in everyday life, such as punishment for stealing as seen in *Fable* (Lionhead Studios, 2004), or the police response to players' violent actions in *Grand Theft Auto - Vice City* (Rockstar Games, 2002).

Video game theorist Jesper Juuls defines a game as a "rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable" (2005, p. 30). Video games are then defined as "games played using computer power, where the computer upholds the rules of the game and the game is played using a video display" (2005, p. 1). In video games, the rules are the "laws" of the game world that have been set up by the designer(s) to define what players can and cannot do in a game world and to attribute consequences to their actions [see section3.3]. While the laws themselves do not necessarily

create scenarios of moral dilemma, they can be used to communicate which actions are deemed morally acceptable in a game world and which are not.

A video game ethics structure is generally defined through the story (narrative) elements included in the game (Thomas, 2004, p. 107) and by the choices afforded to players [see section 3.2], so it is story-based games that seem to best communicate more complex ethics structures. In essence, the story of the game creates a framework within which the laws of the game world can be communicated. The ethics structure is then reinforced by the rules that dictate what players can and cannot do (Sicart, 2005b, p. 14) and the consequences [see section 3.3] for adhering to and/or breaking the "laws" of the game (Consalvo, 2005, pp. 9-10). Ideally, players are given the freedom to decide whether or not they wish to abide by the moral standards defined by the games laws.

Video game rules serve to define which actions are possible in a game world and which ones are not. Likewise, they dictate which actions will result in successful progression through the game, and which ones will not. Neal Thomas proposes that video games "use objects, skill affordances, environments, and characters... to delegate or circumscribe how the game will unfold through the player's interaction, while leaving as much room as possible for the player to fill in the rest through their use of the game" (2004, p. 109). The rules can be considered as "a relevant part in the ethical construction of the experience, as the constraints and affordances that [they] impose on the player might actually have embedded values" (Sicart, 2005b, p. 15). Depending on the rules and available choices set up for the game world, players may (or may not) be allowed to make decisions based on their moral preferences.

Assuming that values can be embedded in the choices provided to players, nearly every video game, regardless of its genre, structure, and gameplay mechanics, has the potential to create an environment that contains ethics-based decision-making scenarios. Puzzle style games such as the work productivity-reducing *Solitaire* are decidedly limited in their capacity to convey moral dilemmas (the question of whether a player should favor one suit over another does not cause much moral deliberation), so it is difficult for designers to embed values into such decisions. However, it has been shown that the inclusion of a story can increase immersion in a game world (Schneider, Lang, Shin, & Bradley, 2004), and as games add characters, branching storylines, and multiple end-game scenarios, the potential for more complex ethics structures seems to emerge. The rules reinforce the ethics structure defined by the story and choices available to the player, and as the rules governing a game world increase in complexity, so too does that world's capacity to define a believable ethics structure.

[2.3] Game World Ethics

A game as simple as *Super Mario Bros.* provides a basic ethics structure (Nintendo, 1985). In this now classic game, Princess Toadstool has been captured by Bowser, and it is up to Mario (and his brother Luigi, if two players are participating) to take on the quest of traveling through the perils of the Mushroom Kingdom to rescue her. The game introduces the elements of good versus evil, a villain to be defeated, and a princess to be saved. The game reinforces many traditionally-held real world values, thus introducing an ethics structure that is easily understood by players: Males should protect females, partaking in "quests" is noble, and risking ones life for the greater good is the responsibility of those who wish to be heroes. Players may not be forced to make difficult moral decisions, but it is easily understood that it is a noble undertaking to rescue a princess, and thus the quest of Mario

and Luigi is for the good of the Mushroom Kingdom. From a consequentialist standpoint, preferable actions are those that bring about the greatest good (versus bad) to the greatest number of people, and "immoral acts are those that unnecessarily harm others" (Brey, 1999, p. 8). The simplistic structure of *Super Mario Bros.* provides a basic ethics structure that attempts to justify the killing of numerous enemies throughout the course of the game; Mario and Luigi's enemies must be sacrificed for the greater good of the Mushroom Kingdom.

Other games, such as *God of War*, intentionally play against players' comfort level with morally reprehensible acts (Sony Computer Entertainment America, 2005a). At one point in the game, players must push a cage onto a switch that engulfs the cage in flames and triggers a door to open. The caveat is that the only cage available to place on the switch is one that is holding an innocent man pleading to be set free. In order to proceed through the game, players must push his cage onto the switch, burning him alive while listening to his screams of pain. As in *Super Mario Bros.*, players of *God of War* are not allowed to choose how they wish to proceed through the game, a simple "killing is just" ethics structure that Neal Thomas compares to the plot of many action films [comments made in reference to *Quake* (id Software, 1996)] (2004, p. 103). However, players in control of Mario are never forced to kill innocent people or creatures that have posed no threat to them whatsoever. Regardless of how sadistic many of Kratos' actions in *God of War* may seem, it is critical that such events be evaluated within the context of the game world in which they occur.

[2.4] Context

In the free, downloadable game *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!*, players take on the roles of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, two distraught teens on a rampage (Ledonne, 2005).

The low-budget, low-detail game parallels the events of the tragic, April 20, 1999 shooting spree at Columbine High School. Obviously, a game based around this subject matter is controversial, but when viewed as an artistic expression of the event, the game carries a great degree meaning. In an interview, Danny Ledonne, the game's designer, states:

> 'I think this is a great way to confront people's moral sensibilities. You must CHOOSE to kill in SCMRPG. You have to chase down your victims. You carry shotguns and they run away from you, unarmed, making a bloody gurgling noise when you kill them. Do you feel guilty? Do you kill one of them or fifty? The choice is entirely yours. You enter a classroom later to find the bloody bodies still lying there from your rampage. Do you feel triumph or remorse? Most videogames never cast doubt over the player's actions. SCMRPG does and I love it.' (Brian D. Crecente, 2006)

The game does not intentionally seek to glorify the killing, and even shows photos of the dead shooters after they eventually committed suicide. This allows players of *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* to explore the event and potentially understand it in context. Richard Castaldo, a student paralyzed in the real life shooting and a player of the game, summarizes his thoughts on the game as follows:

> 'I think that ultimately a videogame is just another medium for artistic expression. But, you do end up killing literally hundreds of representations of high-schoolers. But I'm not sure the ultimate intention was to trivialize it. It seemed like the purpose was to expose people to what happened in a unique perspective. There are probably a lot of people that would find it and play it out of curiosity. And find out more about Columbine than they usually would have were it not in game form. And in this process learn that what they did was not glamorous in any way.' (Brian D. Crecente, 2006)

Most video games do not attempt to directly recreate controversial real world events, but video games ethics structures and systems of law rarely avoid at least some parallels to real world ethics structures. And while there may in fact be similarities, each game's system of reinforcing right versus wrong actions must be evaluated within the context

set up for the game's internal world. Mia Consalvo acknowledges game context as the following:

> If we acknowledge games can provide such opportunities in 'walled off' spaces, is it appropriate to judge games, or game player actions, by an external set of rules – rules that originate outside the magic circle? Games may reward players for particular actions – actions that would definitely not be rewarded in daily life. But should our standards for appropriate actions in daily life carry over to our game life? The Sims encourages players to create happy successful families, but also allows players to kill their Sims through neglect as well as indirect actions. Yet the player may be rewarded by the game for such violent actions (getting that family-wrecker out of the home, for example). We should not be so quick to question such actions, if we do believe games really are a space apart, governed by a 'different' set of rules. (2005, pp. 9-10)

When viewed within the "walled off space" of the game world, the moral meaning of a player's actions in a game world can change. In the case of *God of War* [as mentioned in section 2.3], the player is in control of Kratos, a Spartan warrior on a quest of revenge against Ares, the Greek god of war. Kratos is introduced as a man who has a complete disregard for any life other than his own and has nothing to lose. He is no stranger to killing anyone who stands in his way, and players in control of him have little choice in the matter. It should come as no surprise then, that players are forced to engage in such actions as sacrificing an innocent man in a cage. While violence generally is not considered an acceptable answer to every dilemma in the real world, in the context of *God of War's* game world, it is often the only answer.

If you compare the violence in *God of War* to generally accepted moral standards in the real world, it may seem repulsive. Certainly, the violence is intended to be graphic and gratuitous; it is glorified violence turned into entertainment, but in the context or "magic circle" of the game world it seems appropriate. Allowing players to choose non-violent alternatives would not be fitting for the character and world developed for the game. Kratos

is a violent and savage warrior, and the enemies he fights are evil and grotesque. But in order for games to transcend pure entertainment into something that instead allows players to become more active participants, choices must be provided to them.

The following sections of this document seek to detail the ways ethics structures are defined through the choices afforded to players and then ultimately reinforced through the rules that dictate what they can and cannot do in the game world and the resulting consequences provided. In general, only simple game world ethics can be expressed without giving decision-making control to the player. In order for players to make morally significant decisions in a game world, choices must be provided and the options provided must have measurable consequences; in other words, cause and effect.

[3] Cause & Effect

[3.1] Variables

Video games, by their very nature, are well suited to allow for customized interactions based on player input. A game can easily store information concerning a player's choices and then later recall that information to be used in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most interesting, and most relevant to the topic at hand, is the use of stored information (or variables) to alter how a game world will respond to players based on their actions much earlier during the course of a game; a basic cause and effect type of interaction. One such basic example occurs in *Resident Evil 4* (Capcom, 2005). Early in the game, players come across a wolf caught in a bear trap, alive and apparently in pain. They can decide whether or not to free the animal, at the potential risk of being attacked themselves. At the time of the decision, players are unaware that if they decide to free the animal, it will return later in the game to assist the player during a difficult battle. A similar cause and effect mechanism can be used in practically any game to track players' actions over time, perhaps resulting in different game endings dependent upon various decisions made throughout the course of the game. In essence, players make choices, and their decisions can be stored and recalled (either instantly or later on) as variables used to affect the outcome of a game.

[3.2] Choices

Upcoming games, such as Irrational Games' *Bioshock* (coming in November of 2007), promise experiences "all about being confronted with moral dilemmas and making choices" (Ashley, 2006, p. 69). The story of *Bioshock* plays out in a game world that has collapsed due to fighting over a gene-altering substance named "Adam." Ken Levine, lead designer for Irrational Games, states:

> '...[T]he only way to get Adam is to recycle it from dead bodies ...What's more, the only ones who can do this are the Gatherers. You'll see the big Protector and the little girl walking around, and they don't bother you if you don't bother them. The little girl carries this long syringe device, and there are bodies scattered throughout the world.
>
> ...She'll wander around and find a dead body, before calling to her Protector to follow her. Then she'll kneel down, put this syringe in the body and extract the Adam. The only way she can process and recycle this Adam is through her own body, so she drinks the stuff, and you can watch all this happening.
>
> ...You now have a choice to make in the world. There are people who encourage you and reward you for getting through the game without ever harmfully interacting with the Gatherers, ... [b]ut the reward for taking the Adam from the Gatherers is quite high - it means a lot of resources for you. So we're going to give you a real moral choice to make - is this something you're willing to participate in.' (Hogarty, 2006)

Clearly, this degree of control provides players with the freedom to make very personal choices based on experimentation with their own moral preferences. Some might see games players as "moral beings that evaluate their actions and the choices they make" (2005b, p. 15), while others question whether or not they actually make meaningful choices in a game:

> How do players make choices about what they will or won't do in games? Do they follow rules in all circumstances or bend rules to achieve a greater good? Would a player shoot a dog in a game if that [were] the only way to win? How does a player justify murder in a game? Do players position the experience as 'just a game' or as a cathartic release from everyday pressures? (Consalvo, 2005, p. 9)

Regardless of whether or not the inclusion of such choices will lead players to reflect on their decisions, it at least allows for the potential. Unlike *Super Mario Bros.*, where a player cannot expect to progress through the game by not rescuing the princess, *BioShock* promises to offer players moral choices that will significantly alter the way the story evolves throughout the game. If players decide that they should not harm the Gatherers, they can still advance through the game and find alternative means to obtain the gene altering substance Adam.

Players are allowed to choose how they wish to proceed through the game based on their own moral preferences, and, most importantly, the choices they make will have significant consequences.

[3.3] Consequences

Having the ability to make choices gives players the freedom to express their morality through their actions in the game (Sicart, 2005b, p. 15), but actions performed without coherent responses from a game will ultimately seem meaningless to players. A number of recent games allow players to make complex choices and experience the resulting consequences. *Fable*, for example, promises "for every choice, a consequence," adding importance to the decisions players must make throughout the course of the game (Lionhead Studios, 2004). To force players into making decisions, they must often choose between two conflicting mission objectives. One early mission has players selecting to either protect innocent villagers from a gang of marauders or alternatively joining with the villains and killing the villagers. To add further complication to the decision, a larger monetary reward is given for attacking the villagers, forcing players to prioritize between wealth and their moral alignment in the game.

In a similar fashion to *Fable*, 2003's *Postal²* claims to offer a game experience that is "only as violent as you are," allowing players to choose peaceful alternatives to conflict (Running With Scissors, 2003). The reality of that claim is debatable; the choice of non-violence is seldom a viable option when players are regularly thrust into situations where it proves very difficult, if not impossible, to simply flee from conflict. Quoting a description from Wikipedia:

> In *Postal*^{2}, the player takes on the role of 'The Postal Dude', a tall thin man with a goatee, sunglasses, a blue alien t-shirt and a big black leather coat. 'The Postal Dude' lives in a trailer park with his nagging wife (only identified in the credits as 'Postal Dude's Bitch'.) in the fictional Arizona mining town of 'Paradise.'
>
> The game levels are split into days of the week starting Monday and finishing Friday. At the start of each day the player is given several tasks to accomplish, such as 'Get milk,' 'Confess sins,' etc. The rest is, supposedly, up to the player.
>
> The purpose of the game is to get through as much of the game as possible without going berserk and gunning people down, or, failing that, to avoid getting caught and being thrown in jail. This proves to be exceedingly difficult, as the citizens of Paradise seem absolutely determined to make life hell for one another. The player must put up with being flipped the bird, being mugged, being attacked by protestors, being put upon by an obnoxious convenience store owner/Taliban terrorist and his patrons who cut before you in the 'money-line,' a hideously annoying marching band and Gary Coleman, among many, many other things. (Wikipedia, 2006)

Nonetheless, the game does make the choice for non-violence an interesting one by forcing the player to engage in menial tasks such as waiting in line at the grocery store for goat's milk. It may be more entertaining to steal the milk from the grocery store's shelves and attempt to escape using whatever weapons are available, but is it a good moral choice? In a game that attempts to emulate the ethics structure of a real world environment, players who desire to play as if the game is in fact real are supposedly able to do so. Ultimately though, the decision is more likely driven simply by a number of potential motivating factors behind players' decisions.

[4] Motivations

[4.1] Incentives

Having choices is important, and having consequences to those choices is equally important. But in order for players to make what are (hopefully) interesting and difficult moral decisions, there generally must be some sort of incentive for making such decisions. While a player's ethical choices in a game world can potentially be driven by numerous factors, there seem to be a few that emerge as common trends. Some are simply constraints determined by the rules built into the game world, while others may be used to encourage players to respond to the game world in certain ways. By playing through numerous video games (approximately twenty) and noting common trends, I have compiled a list of incentives for player actions for discussion in this thesis. The following factors emerged as the most common and can be considered for more in-depth evaluation:

- **Accidents**
- **Required Actions**
- **Sense of Duty**
- **Curiosity**
- **Reward Gain**
- **Moral Bias**
- **No Alternative**
- **Penalty Avoidance**

[4.2] Accidents

At times, it is possible for a player to accidentally trigger responses from the game world for actions that were not intentional. For example, when a player accidentally harms a friendly character in *Deus Ex - Invisible War*, the character will typically respond with anger, and, if the action continues, will likely turn hostile toward the player (Ion Storm, 2003a). This can be frustrating to the player if the action performed was unintentional, since the game does not allow for the ability to apologize for such errant actions. However, since multiple actions are generally required before a character will turn hostile, the game is

generally forgiving of accidental interactions. In a similar real-world scenario, a person could apologize for his or her actions and seek non-violent resolution to most situations.

In just about any game that utilizes dialogue trees, accidental responses can potentially result from something as simple as the player inadvertently choosing an errant dialogue response when conversing with a character. This can lead to the player receiving a response to an unintended statement. Often times, the only remedy is to load a previously saved game state and repeat the conversation with the correct option(s) chosen. Quite simply, any game that allows for at least two different outcomes based on a player's decision between two or more actions will allow for at least some form of accidents to occur, but, more importantly, will also allow for the expression of a player's curiosity within the game's system of ethics.

[4.3] Curiosity

Some players are no doubt motivated by nothing more than curiosity about what will happen if they perform certain actions in the game world. Maybe they are testing the game's continuity to find out where it breaks down, or perhaps they are trying to find the most preferable outcome. Or, it could be that they are simply testing "what if" scenarios. In *Deus Ex - Invisible War*, what will happen if a player attempts to play through the entire game without ever killing anyone? Assuming the game allows for this option throughout its entirety, a player could play through the game, or at least parts of it, in two different ways, testing the results of each option and determining which yields the most favorable result. In *Fable*, players can experiment with playing the game as a generous wizard, a devious thief, or many other possible character combinations. How their avatar develops both physically and morally is based solely upon the decisions they make as they progress through the game.

[4.4] No Alternative

The ability to explore one's curiosity in a game world is reliant on whether or not the availability of multiple outcomes has been provided. If only one outcome is possible, or only one choice leads to success, the ability of players to test alternatives is diminished and/or eliminated entirely. Regardless, if the required action leads to a result that has moral implication within the framework of the game, it can still add to the game's overall experience and act as an incentive for a player's actions. In *Shadow of the Colossus*, players must kill sixteen enormous enemies in order to gain the power to resurrect a fallen loved one, but they do not realize the ramifications of their actions until very late in the game (Sony Computer Entertainment America, 2005b). While they have no control over the lead character's decisions made throughout the game, players cannot deny the emotional impact made when they finally realize the moral implications of their actions in the game world.

It would seem that if a player is not offered any alternative solutions to a dilemma, there is no real choice to be made. While this may be true, it does not mean that the lack of viable alternatives must result in a game that is devoid of morally significant choices. One such example comes at the end of *Half-Life* when players are offered the choice whether or not to join forces with a mysterious character known only as "G-Man," who has evidently been behind all of the conspiracies developed through the game's story (Valve, 1998). This "choice" is no real choice at all, since failing to join with him results in death when he transports Gordon Freeman (the player's character) to a room filled with hundreds of well-armed, hostile aliens. Either decision will bring the game to a conclusion, but players are able to choose whether they "win" or "lose" at the end. Regardless of the choice players make, they are ultimately left only with questions potentially answered in the game's sequel(s).

Manhunt places players in the role of James Earl Cash, a violent criminal who has been spared from lethal injection by a man named Lionel Starkweather (Rockstar Games, 2004). Cash, a death row inmate, is used by Starkweather as an involuntary lead actor in his snuff films; players of the game are required to kill enemies in gruesome fashions, regardless of how they would prefer to proceed through the game. As described on the back of the game's packaging:

> You awake to the sound of your own panicked breath. You must run, hide and fight to survive. If you can stay alive long enough, you may find out who did this to you. THIS IS A BRUTAL BLOOD SPORT. America is full of run down, broken rust-belt towns where nobody cares and anything goes. In Carcer City, nothing matters anymore and all that's left are cheap thrills. The ultimate rush is the power to grant life and take it away, for sport. This time, James Earl Cash, you are the sport. They gave you your life back, now, they are going to hunt you down. (Rockstar Games)

Killing Cash's enemies is the only viable option since simply sneaking past them is rarely possible, and killing them in what might be considered as more "humane" ways (for example, a bullet to the head) is discouraged since players are awarded a higher ranking for the level for performing especially violent killings [the aspect of rewards is discussed in section 4.6]. Players have no alternative means of progressing through the game, and by being forced to gruesomely kill their enemies, they may be better able to empathize with Cash's difficult moral dilemma.

In *ICO*, players are tasked with guiding a young boy named Ico and his female companion, Yorda, out of a mysterious castle rife with various environmental puzzles (Sony Computer Entertainment America, 2001). Yorda is weak and frail and is dependent on Ico's physical strength to help her over and around many of the game's obstacles. For instance, Ico must help Yorda by lowering bridges to help her across chasms, pulling her up onto ledges that are too high for her to climb, or by pulling levers that she is too weak to move. Ico is

also responsible for protecting Yorda from the dark spirits present in the fortress who regularly appear and attempt to capture her; if she is left alone for too long, the spirits will attack, creating a frantic tension when players must rush back to protect her while in the middle of solving the game's various puzzles.

At the heart of *ICO* is the unspoken rule that in order to succeed, the characters must help one another; a mutual dependency without which the characters could not survive. In order to proceed through the game, players are required to assist Yorda through the environment. While players again may have no alternative choices, the moral message of the game is still communicated; protection of the weak is viewed as an honorable act, and teamwork can lead to survival.

Each of these games illustrates how various types of moral values can be expressed without actually giving the player any choices apart from success or failure in a task. It could, however, be assumed that the moral connections players might feel toward their actions in a game world would be lessened by their inability to actually make decisions; an exploration into moral agency as it relates to decision-making in game worlds would be necessary to expand on this assumption.

[4.5] Required Actions

While not providing the player any alternatives at all might be the easiest solution from a design standpoint, there is also the potential incentive of required actions. This incentive is driven by required decisions that players must make or certain actions that must be performed in order to proceed forward in a game. Here, players are able to choose between two or more options, but must choose one before they can proceed. At the end of

Fable, the lead character is required to decide between possession of a powerful weapon or his sister's life; the choice is one between ultimate power and selfless mercy. This final decision has to be made by players before the game's ending sequence is played and it ultimately determines if players are "good" or "evil." *Fable* gives players a decision to be made, and in order to complete the game, requires a decision.

For decisions based on players' ethics, the potential outcome should ideally carry moral implications in the game world. For some players, the benefits of obtaining such a powerful weapon no doubt outweigh the negative adjustment to their moral alignment in the game. The incentives players feel for earning rewards or avoiding a penalties are often two interdependent motivators.

[4.6] Reward Gain / Penalty Avoidance

As in reality, the focus of most games' rules is generally on what the player is not allowed to do within the society of the game's world. In part, this is due to the if/then nature of game rules (if the player does this, then this should happen). This is a very rudimentary system of rewards versus penalties. For example, in *Grand Theft Auto - Vice City*, if a player directs Tommy Vercetti (the main character) to begin shooting pedestrians, it will not be long before the police show up and try to restore order (Rockstar Games, 2002). If Tommy evades police and is able to prolong his killing spree, his "wanted level" will rise, resulting in a more intense police presence, even up to the level of SWAT team helicopters being called in to assist in the chase. At its core, this game world's design roughly mirrors the mechanics of a real world system of laws and is immediately intuitive to players; if players do this, then this will likely happen.

Players who are caught stealing from non-player characters (or NPCs) in *Fable* are pursued by guards until they are caught. Behaving as "civilized" citizens will instead reward players with a peaceful existence, and performing good deeds generally results in monetary rewards [penalties and rewards can also be used to reinforce a game's ethics structure and maintain consistency, a usage discussed in section 5]. If players know that certain actions will result in either rewards or penalties, they can be encouraged to take certain actions and discouraged from taking others. But, if a game offers the potential for a great reward while at the same time a great risk of penalty, it can create an exciting tension for players. Stealing a tank from a military base in *Grand Theft Auto - Vice City* is very risky due to the amount of security forces present, but the reward of being able to wreak havoc in a nearly indestructible vehicle may be far too great a temptation for most players to ignore. Players must balance the potential reward versus the risk of penalty.

At times, rewards and penalties alone may not be enough to nudge players into making difficult moral decisions. Decisions made in a game world can also be made not only on the basis of personal gain, but, under the correct game circumstances, can be motivated by a sense of duty to non-player characters (NPCs) in the game. If players can be imbued with the responsibility of caring for their game character or other characters in a game world, it is possible to introduce situations where they will feel the need to make decisions concerning the health and well-being of those characters.

[4.7] Sense of Duty

The Thing, at times, introduces interesting moral dilemmas related to a sense of duty (Universal Interactive, 2002). Throughout the course of the game, players are able to partner up with up to four NPCs who will fight along Blake (the lead character) against the

invading thing creatures. Unique to *The Thing*, these NPCs each possess individual “fear” and “trust” levels. These levels can be seen via a squad member management menu and icons will also appear over squad members to notify players when they have specific needs (medical attention, ammo, weapon, etc.).

Their level of fear relates to how frightened they are in their current situation, and can be managed by players by getting the team member out of the immediate area, by giving him a weapon so he can protect himself, or (temporarily) by giving him an adrenaline injection. If an NPC’s fear level rises too high, he will begin to “crack up” and may even eventually commit suicide.

Trust levels relate to what degree the NPCs trust Blake and how confident they are that he is not infected. The NPCs must remain confident that Blake is not a thing himself, and if their trust levels drop too low, they will refuse to take commands from Blake and may even open fire on him. To manage the trust of his team members, Blake can provide them with weapons, ammo, and health. He can even perform a blood test on himself to definitively prove that he is not infected. The trust levels of the NPCs will also fluctuate based on how Blake performs in combat; if he shies away from conflict, they will lose trust in him, whereas if he is aggressively killing the thing creatures, their trust levels will increase.

Since any character in the game can potentially be an un-mutated form of the “thing” creatures, players are sometimes forced to consider if it is right to kill team members without definitive proof of infection. After all, players do not want their team members to mutate and begin attacking Blake or his team members, but having their support in combat situations is a definite asset. They must decide whether or not to risk personal safety and the

safety and trust of their team members by allowing potentially infected characters to live. They must also manage the fear levels of their squad members. This complex dynamic lends an interesting sense of responsibility and feeling of empathy toward the NPCs in the game.

ICO also toys with this sense of duty by encouraging players to care about the fate of Ico and Yorda. And, while players do not have the choice of whether or not to protect Yorda (if she's captured, the game ends), through the game's simple story, players can begin to legitimately care about the characters and desire to see them succeed in their escape from the castle. Ideally, players will develop a sense of duty toward Yorda, and protect her not only out of fear of failure, but rather because they legitimately care about her well being. It would be interesting if there were no immediate penalty associated with not helping Yorda; how many players would decide to leave her behind? And if they did not leave her behind, would it be only out of fear that she might be needed later in the game? Perhaps such a decision could be determined by something more personal than a success/failure scenario built into the game; players could instead succeed or fail regardless of their decision, but depending on their emotional involvement in the game and personal moral bias, may (or may not) suffer guilt later on. After completing the game, players could be left to wonder what happened to Yorda after they left her behind. Or alternatively, what would have happened if they had left her behind?

[4.8] Moral Bias

At times, players may desire to make decisions in a game world based on personal preferences stemming from their beliefs of what actions they determine are right or wrong in a game world. The potential motivation of decisions made based on this moral bias seems most likely to emerge in games that allow for open-ended moral decisions. In the futuristic

world of *Deus Ex - Invisible War*, players are able to make ethical statements resulting from the biomodifications they wish to "install" in their character. For example, one biomod restores health by directly converting bio energy to health. Another, more morally questionable biomod, breaks down corpses and uses them for reconstructive healing with twice the amount of healing power being gained from unconscious (non-deceased) targets. Players must weigh their character's life against the lives of the other, potentially non-threatening, NPCs. Either solution is acceptable in the game world, and it is entirely up to players to decide which biomod is more in line with the ethics they desire to express through their game play.

In games that offer a lesser degree of moral freedom, players could also make morally biased decisions because they feel an emotional attachment to the characters presented onscreen. In *Lemmings*, players are tasked with the responsibility of rescuing as many of the Lemming creatures as possible during each stage of the game (DMA Design, 1991). The Lemmings are mindless creatures that simply walk in a straight line until they either meet up with a wall or fall from a cliff. Players may feel sadness or guilt when the mindless creatures perish, so they could make it their personal goal to rescue every single Lemming without any casualties. The game itself does not punish players for losing Lemmings unless an insufficient number are rescued to meet the requirements of the stage, but out of a personal moral bias, players could decide that the loss of any Lemmings is unacceptable.

Regardless of players' motivations for making moral decisions in video game environments, players are not likely to make such difficult decisions if they do not feel as if the actions really matter within the context of the game. Certainly, no decision made in a game is very important when viewed externally, but from within the context of the game

world, players can make decisions that result in anything from their avatar's hair turning gray to the destruction (or salvation) of entire civilizations. But, in order for any choices made by the player to seem meaningful (and thus worthy of moral deliberation), they must elicit some form of response from the game world. Players need to feel as if the decisions they make do, in fact, affect the game world in some way and make a difference in how they will progress through the game. One simple way to implement such responses is through how the player is penalized and/or rewarded for actions in the game environment.

[5] Penalties & Rewards

[5.1] Core Components

A majority of video game systems of law can be broken down into the two simple components of penalties and rewards. These components have been previously discussed as potential incentives for players, but they are also core components to nearly any gameplay structure based on moral choice and are used to reinforce the rules of the game world. In their most basic forms, penalties can be defined as any actions that results in a game ending prematurely and players being forced to restart from the beginning (or some saved checkpoint), while rewards would result in progression forward and the eventual completion of the game. Logic would dictate that a player would desire to be rewarded for his or her actions in a game environment, so it stands to reason that this would be the more favorable of the two options in most circumstances.

Certainly, only very simple games would provide only these two available extremes. Puzzle style games (*Tetris*, for example (Pazhitnov, 1985)) might involve simple races against time with the player attempting to reach certain objectives before the allotted time expires. By comparison, narrative-driven games, which tend to be more complex in nature, will generally include a greater number of levels of penalties and rewards. Some of the most open-ended games even allow the player to determine which responses are considered penalties (unfavorable results) and which response are rewards (favorable results).

[5.2] Case Study: Grand Theft Auto - Vice City

Grand Theft Auto - Vice City, a game often praised for its "sandbox" style of gameplay where the player can practically do anything at any time, provides players with a game world

in which they can be as careful or as reckless as they see fit. As indicated by its title, the game certainly encourages less-than-scrupulous behavior, but, if desired, players can choose public transportation or even direct Tommy Vercetti (the lead character) to walk to his destinations instead of utilizing stolen vehicles. However, walking or running to a destination at the other end of the game's large city is time-consuming (and generally boring), while stealing a vehicle in the game is typically easier and more entertaining. It involves only one simple button press when near a vehicle, and, as long as no police officers are in the immediate area, rarely results in any adverse consequences. It is important to note that this game's idea of penalty comes ultimately in only two ways; either the player is "Busted" (arrested) or "Wasted" (killed). Either way, Tommy re-appears almost instantly outside of either the police station or the hospital minus a small amount of cash and all of his weapons.

While stealing vehicles would seem to be an unlawful and seemingly undesirable activity deserving of penalty in the real world, the world of *Vice City* rewards the illegal act. At any point in the game, this is the type of dilemma with which players are faced; is the risk of penalty (stealing a vehicle and being potentially pursued by police), worth the reward (the fun of having a vehicle to drive around the game's large city)? *Vice City* doesn't allow for complete freedom, however, and in order to progress through the game's main story, players are required to engage in various "illegal" activities in the game world, often resulting in the necessity to evade the authorities.

In the context of *Vice City's* game world, players are expected to think and act like a criminal, so actions traditionally regarded as "bad" (random acts of violence, soliciting prostitutes, theft, assassination, etc.) are generally acceptable and rewarded actions, although

that does not mean that they go unnoticed by *Vice City's* law enforcement officials. Assuming players are able to evade and/or shoot their way through the opposition, they are rewarded monetarily at the end of a successfully completed mission; with the increased risk involved with completing the game's story-driven missions comes greater reward. [Ironically, players can also seek rewards for helping people in need, a moral dichotomy discussed in greater detail in section 7.4.]

[5.3] Case Study: Fable

Other games provide even greater open-ended moral decision-making on the part of the player. In *Fable*, players' actions are tracked continuously, with most actions being associated with either a "good" or "evil" alignment value. Bullying other NPCs might result in an increase of the character's evil rating, while performing good deeds (such as assisting an NPC in need) will generally result in an addition to the character's good rating. The character's alignment is tracked on a linear scale, with good on the right and evil on the left; players can determine, through their in-game actions, how the scale will be adjusted. As the scale moves in one direction or the other, the player's avatar begins to change both physically and in his abilities.

At the extreme ends of the scale, their avatar will begin to take on either a devilish or angelic appearance. Along with the changes in appearance, a more evil character will have an easier time performing evil acts such as stealing from vendors in the game or casting damaging magic spells. Conversely, a good character will earn the respect of townsfolk and will more easily be able to cast magic used to heal himself (or other characters). Players are rewarded in the way that they see fit, with each action adding to a good or evil alignment for the character. If players are trying to create the most evil character possible, any decision

that results in an increase in the evil alignment of their character will be favorable, but often the more interesting, and more difficult, option is in developing a very "good" character; the game frequently introduces situations to the player that make being "good" seem much more difficult.

Early in the game, players of *Fable* are introduced to a character named Whisper who accompanies them on a few early quests and fights alongside them; Whisper is one of only a few characters that are used in this capacity. At a later point in the game (perhaps halfway through the game's story), players are challenged with a lengthy series of arena battles where their hero must fight through rounds against increasingly difficult foes. After the first few rounds, they are paired with Whisper. She fights courageously alongside them until the final round when they are forced to face off against her. Whisper proves to be a worthy adversary, but she eventually admits defeat. At the end of this battle, players are offered the opportunity to simply accept her concession or to kill her for an extra 10,000 gold. Of course, the decision is easier for players choosing to be evil, but for the player who wants to keep their character aligned toward good, the extra gold poses a very difficult dilemma; 10,000 gold can be very useful for upgrading weapons and armor, but is it worth the drop in their character's good alignment and the loss of a potential ally? Here, penalty and reward are seemingly offered to players concurrently, resulting in a very intriguing dilemma.

[5.4] Case Study: Deus Ex - Invisible War

Deus Ex - Invisible War introduces similar ethical gameplay decisions, often forcing the player to choose between morally opposing options. In *Deus Ex - Invisible War*, players are cast in the role of Alex D., a biogenetically engineered superhuman. The game promises to offer players "non-lethal, non-violent resolution to conflict, allowing [them] to make ...

ethical statement[s] through [their] actions" (Ion Storm, 2003b). While the premise sounds exciting, the game unfortunately does not always allow for purely "ethical" choices. For example, in one mission early in the game, the player must obtain an aircraft and a pilot to travel to another destination. A woman by the name of Sophia Sak is holding a jet, belonging to pilot Sid Black, as collateral due to a debt of 1,000 credits owed to her for a lost shipment of goods. Players can approach the problem in at least one of two ways: Incapacitate Sophia Sak and all of her security guards in order to gain access to the jet, or obtain the 1,000 credits necessary to pay for the release of Sid Black's jet. Killing is obviously not a valid "ethical" decision, or at least not one generally considered morally good, so that option can be discredited automatically if players are trying to avoid any criminal activity. While it is possible to incapacitate enemies without killing them, it still means resorting to some form of violence.

Earning the money needed for payment of Sid's piloting skills (and to pay his debt as well, if desired) proves to be less than an "ethical" decision as well. The only way to earn the required money is to bet on a greasel fight, which is apparently the future's version of cockfights; greasels are small, mutant, dinosaur-like creatures, pitted against each other to fight to the death in cages. Players are offered an opportunity to rig the fight by killing the prize-winning greasel, Gob-Zilla (a greasel Sophia Sak owns), before the fight begins. While killing a greasel and betting on a rigged fight is possibly more ethical than killing (or incapacitating) five or six humans, it is still not a decision that some would consider "ethical." In the framework of the game, however, it is an acceptable decision. It is additionally possible to simply lie about killing Gob-Zilla and bet for him (instead of against his weaker replacement) to win the required money. Perhaps lying is better than killing, but neither is generally considered ethical.

In the world of *Deus Ex - Invisible War*, stealth and deception seem to be considered more "ethical" than violence, and the death of a greasel is apparently inconsequential. This is not to say that the game is flawed in giving players these options, but it does not always seem to provide alternatives that are in no way unethical. This is best described as a "moral dilemma," to which there is no ideal answer (van Es, 2003, p. 93). Overall, the game gives players more freedom to make ethics-based decisions than many previous games.

It is also interesting to note that even players' gender selection for their avatar has an effect on the game experience. For players who choose to use a female avatar, for example, Sid's fee is 400 credits as opposed to the 500 credits charged to a male passenger on his jet, and his conversation is also much more flirtatious in nature. It seems that sometimes it might be beneficial to take on the role of an attractive female avatar since players are "rewarded" for having made such a selection.

[6] Factors

[6.1] Positive and Negative

The concepts of penalties versus rewards are arguably important components used in reinforcing a game world's ethics structure, and there also exist a number of gameplay factors that can be observed as recurring devices used for implementing ethics-based decision-making processes in video games. In order for players to be rewarded or penalized for their moral decisions, alternatives must be provided that slant toward both sides of the moral spectrum. In general, these can be broken down into two main categories of actions (positive and negative) and include the following:

Positive

- **Pacifism**
- **Honesty**
- **Charity**
- **Loyalty**

Negative

- **Violence**
- **Dishonesty**
- **Greed**
- **Disloyalty**

While this brief list generally mirrors some of the values one would expect to see in the real world, it is again important to specifically evaluate how the ethics of game worlds are structured; some of the actions labeled as negative may actually be perfectly acceptable depending on the structure of the game world, and may even result in players being rewarded.

[6.2] Pacifism vs. Violence

First, consider violence; violence is likely the most common gameplay mechanic used when providing players with moral decision-making power. Most often, the choice is provided to them as the options of violence (killing) versus pacifism (usually stealth

techniques used to avoid confrontation) or alternatively lethal violence versus non-lethal violence. Some might argue that the second implementation is not necessarily ethical, but in context of the structure of many game worlds, rendering an opponent unconscious is not considered a violent act since no long-lasting harm has been done [see *Deus Ex - Invisible War*].

Other games, like *Fable*, rarely allow for non-lethal violence, and nearly all violence is treated as a negative (or "evil") interaction. On the other end of the scale, there are numerous games that do not allow for an avoidance of violence at all, and the player is expected (and generally encouraged) to pursue violence as the means to solving most problems [see *Grand Theft Auto - Vice City* and *Postal*[2]]. Unfortunately, game structures such as *Vice City's*, while not uncommon, end up being rendered ethically shallow since the violence loses its moral significance when treated as such a common means to an end. However, there exist other games that place players in situations of unavoidable and expected violence as a means of providing purpose to players' violent actions. With detailed visuals of historically-accurate battlefields, *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30* provides players with the experience of reenacting many of the actual combat scenarios faced by the 101st Airborne Paratroopers during World War II (Gearbox Software, 2005). Pacifism is never offered as a viable option, although it is unlikely that it would have been an option in the real life scenarios either. In this case, the lack of a non-violent alternative makes perfect sense.

[6.3] Honesty vs. Dishonesty

The provision of the choice between violent and non-violent solutions is a valuable catalyst for allowing players to make moral decisions in a game environment. However,

games that provide methods for even more complex moral choices have the potential to immerse players even deeper into the game world's ethics. Allowing for players to choose how honest they wish their in-game character to be is one such additional method, implemented by allowing the choice between honesty and dishonesty. Generally, these options are provided to the player through dialogue trees. When engaged in conversation with NPCs, some games provide players with the opportunity to not only guide the conversation toward a topic or respond to questions in chosen ways, but also to be dishonest toward the NPCs. The intent of this dishonesty could be to protect another NPC, to gain items from an NPC favoring a certain response, or even to change an NPC's opinion of their character (either favorably or not). Regardless of the intent, players are generally aware of the chosen response's dishonest nature.

In *Indigo Prophecy*, the lead character has committed a murder, the details and cause of which players will spend a significant portion of the game's duration trying to unravel (Quantic Dream, 2005). When questioned by NPCs at select points during the game, players are provided the option to direct the lead character, Lucas Kane, to tell a lie to cover his tracks. Players' options are generally simple one-word phrases, so the choices quite simply may be labeled "Lie" and "Truth." And, while lying may keep Lucas' actions from being discovered, the dishonest act generally results in a decrease to his mental health status (which ranges from "Neutral" down to "Wrecked"). If Lucas' mental health status drops too low, the game will end. Helping others, such as saving a drowning boy, or performing simple "comforting" physical acts such as eating or drinking, will usually increase his mental health status. The added emotional element of players' empathy toward Lucas enhances the impact of the story by drawing them into the game and demanding an emotional investment in its eventual outcome.

[6.4] Greed vs. Charity

Apart from being able to select how honest they wish to be with NPCs during conversations, players are also often given the ability to determine how selfish or selfless they wish to be concerning possessions or assistance in a game world. Similar to honesty and dishonesty are greed and charity, with the most extreme form of greed being actual theft of property from NPCs. While perhaps not direct opposites, the concepts of greed and charity both deal with how the player is able to make choices concerning possessions (usually inventory items) and assistance in the game world. In general terms, greed refers to the ability of players to deliberately withhold possessions or assistance in the game while charity is the ability to give freely of their characters' possessions to other NPCs. Both of these game mechanics have been implemented effectively in *Fable*. "Evil" acts, such as killing Whisper [discussed in section 5.3], can increase players' wealth if they are willing to make such greedy decisions. If they instead wish to avoid taking the path of greediness and larceny, they are able to increase how favorably their character is viewed by NPCs by performing charitable acts such as giving gifts, running errands, or retrieving lost items; all acts generally regarded as "good."

One of the skills players are able to acquire in *Fable* is termed "Guile." This skill is directly related to how well their character can sneak around quietly, pick locks, and, most importantly, how effectively he can steal items from merchants when they are not looking. At higher levels of Guile, characters can quickly, and relatively easily, steal items from merchant's shops or the pockets of unsuspecting civilians. Since *Fable* constantly monitors players' actions, theft is always rewarded (or penalized, depending on perspective) with an increase in the character's "evil" rating, regardless of whether or not he is directly penalized

by being caught in the act. Ultimately, it all comes down to what degree of importance players wish to attribute to in-game wealth and possessions.

Animal Crossing is a game entirely structured around materialism and a quest for possessions (Nintendo of America). This game can best be defined as a life simulation, and players control a character in a fanciful town inhabited by various quirky characters. Players can engage in task such as fishing, planting trees, catching bugs, and many other commonplace activities. The player's overall goal (if it can be said that there even is a goal) is to expand the size of their character's home and collect various possessions to display and items with which to decorate. Unlike an open-ended experience such as the one provided in *Fable*, players are only able to obtain their possessions through good actions such as running errands for the other townsfolk, selling collected fish and fruit, or trading with merchants and other residents. There is no lying, cheating, or stealing allowed in the world of *Animal Crossing*. No matter how great the temptation may be to the player, the ability is simply not built into the game. The closest thing to "stealing" is visiting the town's police station and claiming lost & found items that were not actually "lost" by the player. In essence, the goal is greed, but players must use honest means to feed their need for material possessions.

[6.5] Loyalty vs. Disloyalty

While not unlike greed and charity, the level of loyalty (or disloyalty) players feel toward NPCs and/or a sense of duty to game world ethics can also create some interesting moral dilemmas. At times, these decisions are no doubt made out of situational convenience, but if a game is able to cause players to empathize with certain NPCs and feel as if moral decisions relating to them are, in fact, important in the game world, the basis of these decisions potentially can stem from conscious, moral decisions on the behalf of players.

This premise of a sense of loyalty to NPCs is one of the driving forces behind players' motivations in *Deus Ex - Invisible War*. As the back of the game box claims, "When a terrorist attack occurs in Chicago, you must decide whether your choice of allegiance is the right one." Throughout the game, players are tugged from one side of a conspiracy to another, never really certain with which of three opposing factions they should cooperate. Even the end outcome of the game is determined by the alliances made and is affected by whom they help and/or hinder throughout the course of the game. During the final stages of the game, players must ultimately decide who they wish to aid; a decision that affects which ending sequence of the game is experienced and one that determines whether or not players feel success or remorse for their decision.

The Thing [discussed in section 4.7] attempts to create a sense of duty or loyalty to the NPCs in the game, but ends up falling flat since there is little consequence for losing members of their squad. In fact, this is a common flaw in most squad-based games; most often, there is no serious consequence for losing a squad member. Even *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30* with its realistic locations, impressive enemy artificial intelligence (AI), and characters based on actual persons, suffers this flaw; a squad member can perish and then suddenly reappear for the next mission. Some might argue that if players were to fail missions due to a squad member's death, it would make the game more about keeping squad members alive than killing enemies. It would also undoubtedly add a certain degree of frustration to the game, especially when AI-controlled squad members might not perform at a level equal to players' skill levels, resulting in frequent deaths and/or mission failures.

However, in order to add moral weight to players' decisions in a game world, their actions must have consequences. Perhaps this could mean that they must complete the

mission alone and then recruit new (perhaps unskilled?) squad members for the next mission. Regardless of the method used to implement the consequences, players' actions will seem much more important if there are visible long-term effects in addition to the immediate responses generally provided in most games; for example, squad members who do not simply re-appear at the beginning of the next mission.

[7] Responses

[7.1] Long-Term Effects

Whether they are decisions made from simple curiosity or a personal bias, the moral decisions players make in a video game environment will be more interesting to make if the available options will result in significant, measurable responses. While penalties and rewards are typically immediate responses to players' actions, long-lasting consequences can make their decisions and actions seem even more critical, thus further reinforcing the ethics structure of the game world. Warren Spector, creator of the *Deus Ex* series of games states:

> "...[I]f you're going make a game that allows players to make significant choices that puts them in control of a narrative or of a character in a simulated world, you do have an obligation. You have an obligation to show the consequences of choices. One of the biggest problems with games, especially more linear games, is they say 'kill everything that moves. Good player!' 'Or win this game,' and then they pat you on the back for solving a puzzle, killing virtual things or crashing a car in a fantastic way... .[T]he fact is that we have to show the consequences of choices or those choices are meaningless. We have to show that, if you kill somebody, then someone might think that's great but there's going to be a lot of people that are really mad, and that has to have a direct impact on your gameplay experience.
>
> It can't just be rewards for solving a puzzle or killing that thing or even saving that thing. Even saving someone, because there might have been someone who wanted that person dead and now they hate you. So in the context of a story that players are sharing in the telling, you have to show the consequences..." (Sheffield, 2007)

These long-term effects mentioned by Spector and implemented into *Deus Ex* and its sequel *Deus Ex - Invisible War* force players to consider not just the short-term, immediate game world reactions, but also how the choices made and actions taken might affect the game much later on. This game mechanic encourages players to really consider the ramifications of their actions. Just as in similar real-world decisions, the decisions made in *Deus Ex* must be made after careful consideration of their long-term implications. The

alliances they choose, enemies they kill, and even the locks they pick all have the potential to affect available options and outcomes later in the game.

Rather than just simple, immediate responses, video games have the unique opportunity to allow players to make choices that will affect the outcome of events or availability of options much later in the game. *Grand Theft Auto - Vice City*, with its free-roaming open-ended gameplay environment, allows for a lot of freedom but is unfortunately devoid of long-term consequences. Tommy Vercetti does not develop a police record, wanted signs are not posted to encourage his apprehension, and, apart from the various crime bosses, no one seems to even recognize him. In this case, such game mechanics might overly complicate the game, but if it did provide longer-lasting consequences, it would force players to consider the long-term effects of their actions, apart from the immediate responses the game currently provides. This open-ended world does allow for a great deal of experimentation, however, and players are even able to create their own games within the game world; for example, players can test how fast they can drive without crashing, how far or how high they can jump a car, how many pedestrians they can run over before being apprehended, and the list goes on. From a marketing standpoint, this provides the players with nearly endless possibilities and a great deal of replay value for their game purchase.

Deus Ex - Invisible War, on the other hand, adds replay value by providing players with the opportunity to make decisions that have long-term effects. Depending on which faction(s) they choose to serve (dictated by their choice of available mission objectives), alternative objectives will be available to them later in the game, encouraging multiple plays through the game. *Fable* allows players to develop their characters through their choices of “good” and “evil” actions and even alter their character’s appearance by their choice of

tattoos and eating habits, allowing each player's experience to differ at least slightly. *Star Wars - Knights of the Old Republic* allows players to make choices between the "light" and "dark" sides of the "force" with associated consequences (BioWare, 2003). According to the game's official web site:

> Your actions throughout the game will create momentum towards either the dark or light side of the Force. Whether you are choosing an evil thing to say, or you're satisfying a generous and heroic quest, those actions are associated with good or evil and will start to really accumulate. People that you meet in the game will start to react to things that you've done, and you can become famous (or infamous) for certain things. [A]s you approach the end of the game, ...your actions will have a massive impact on the galaxy and the fate of the Republic. (LucasArts, 2003)

Each of these three games offers players the opportunity to make decisions and see the results played out through immediate responses as well as long-term consequences. They provide them with the ability to collectively shape their individual experiences throughout the course of the game, affecting its ultimate outcome. And, apart from the apparent replay value added through such a game design, this design allows players to make decisions that feel much more important in the game's world.

[7.2] Reactions

Along the way, the consequences of players' actions are often reinforced through how NPCs react to their character. To add believability to a game world's system of ethics, it is important that NPCs exhibit natural responses to players' moral choices. For example, NPCs in *Fable* will cower in fear from evil characters with high degrees of "scariness" and "renown" (two of four tracked personality traits). Un-holstering a weapon in a bar in the futuristic world of *Deus Ex* will attract the attention of the game's law enforcement officials and result in screams of fear from the bar's patrons.

Believable reactions such as these can enhance the level of immersion players feel in these game worlds, but it is important that the reactions are in fact believable. For example, some NPCs in *Fable* will not respond to violence no matter much they are antagonized. At best, they might flee from players to find safety. In *Deus Ex - Invisible War* players have the ability to throw small objects. Generally, throwing such objects at other characters will result in a response of general annoyance, but even repeated strikes with objects will not cause some characters to respond defensively. Even so, receiving at least some sort of response is a step in the right direction from a design standpoint, but while these immediate responses alert players that their actions have been noticed and add a certain degree of believability to the game world's ethics system, it is also important that NPCs have a memory of players' past actions.

[7.3] Memory

If the NPCs in a game world remember how players have responded to them previously in the course of the game, it can encourage players to more carefully consider their actions; they will then have to consider not only the immediate response to their actions, but also responses that may or may not come later in the game. For example, representatives of the Omar, one of the factions in *Deus Ex - Invisible War*, will provide Alex D. with a discount for black market goods throughout the entire game if he (or she, since the character can also be a female) performs a few favors for them early in the game. This "memory" built into the NPCs can play an important role in players' decision-making process once they realize that the Omar (and other characters) and able to "remember" past conversations and actions.

This is unlike the structure of *Grand Theft Auto - Vice City*, a game that maintains no long-term records of players' moral choices (apart from a screen of statistics that does not factor into gameplay) and thus lends itself to a more fast-paced, frenetic experience devoid of any long-term consequences. Conversely, *Hitman - Blood Money* (IO Interactive, 2006a), keeps track of a player's "notoriety," a system described on their web site as follows:

> As with any hitman, retaining your anonymity is incredibly important - it becomes impossible to work if you are recognizable. Players will now be given the opportunity to 'clean up' after any botched hits. For instance, CCTV tapes can be removed from the scene, further evidence such as bodies, can be hidden in objects such as freezers, crates, garbage bins and laundry trolleys to prevent guards raising the alarm. The player should also consider the best way to get rid of any witnesses.
>
> Should the player not take all necessary precautions to protect their identity, then they will find their *Notoriety* increasing. Newspaper articles reporting on the assassination will reveal more and more information about their identity as Hitman and produce a clearer photo fit image, to the point where guards and other NPCs will begin to react to them. (IO Interactive, 2006b)

It is important though that any implementation of NPC memory does not undermine players' overall game experience. To keep the rules from becoming "unfair" in their permanence, the developer has made it possible for players to reverse the Notoriety effects by buying off witnesses and the police chief, or, if necessary, purchasing an entirely new identity for their character. While this may slightly "cheapen" the potential long-term effects of players' actions, it serves to keep the game from ultimately becoming frustrating.

[7.4] Consistency

Paramount to any system of moral consequences is consistency. If a game's system of penalties, rewards, and resultant consequences for moral decisions is inconsistent, the importance of making difficult moral decisions will be trivialized. Players should be rewarded and penalized based on a consistent set of rules, grounded in the system of ethics established

in the game world; this is the only way they can truly understand the consequences for their decisions.

Grand Theft Auto - Vice City unfortunately breaks this consistency by simultaneously offering a reward to players for performing both good and bad actions. For example, players can steal an ambulance and attempt to complete life-saving missions to earn money. These missions consist of driving the ambulance to various locations, picking up injured people, and returning them to the hospital within a given time limit. While this is a noble undertaking, the game ironically does not care if the player runs over innocent civilians on the way to pick up the injured people. As long as the few people that are to be rescued are not harmed in any way, the mission is deemed successful. Obviously, this approach seems a bit skewed, since it would seem more plausible that no innocent lives should be lost when players are behind the wheel of an ambulance (even if it is stolen). They are instead rewarded for saving lives, and not punished for killing at the same time.

This discrepancy in moral consistency can make *Vice City* a confusing moral experience for players attempting to evaluate the meaning of their actions; however, it must be realized that the overall intent of the game is likely not to dispense moral discourse on the effects of wanton violence on society. Other games already mentioned [*Deus Ex - Invisible War*, *Fable*, *Postal*], while perhaps also not offering terribly deep, moral experiences, generally provide more consistent responses for players.

If a weapon is used in the presence of law enforcement officials in the world of *Deus Ex - Invisible War,* players know that they will be pursued (although the same would also be true in *Vice City*). The game also allows players to kill indiscriminately, so, if desired, they

could choose to eliminate the law enforcement agents, although attempting to do so usually results in a response that is both swift and powerful. If players decide to kill someone, they will suffer no immediate consequences as long as the act is performed in secret. However, if the body is later discovered, they may then have to deal with the consequences of their actions. These are consistent responses throughout the game and also parallel many of the responses a person would expect in the real world.

[8] Conclusion

[8.1] Playing with Ethics

"The move away from linear narratives to more complex games that allow players to make moral choices... means that games provide an opportunity to discuss moral questions" (The Economist, 2005). Whether for good or bad, games have the potential to make people think about moral dilemmas in entirely new ways, without the risk of actually harming anyone in real life. All game developers need now is game content that lends itself to realistic ethics structures and morally complicated situations. Players need games that allow them to truly express themselves morally in the game world. In essence, they need the ability to make choices that do not conflict with their moral preferences within that world. When games reach a level of visual realism that blurs the line between what is reality and what is a game, developers may need to be prepared to also create the level of detail required for realistic simulations of ethics structures.

Some of the games discussed have already made headway in enhancing the game experience through interesting moral dilemmas integrated into the gameplay. *Deus Ex*, *Deus Ex - Invisible War*, *Black & White*, *Fable*, and *Star Wars - Knights of the Old Republic* all provide players with the ability to alter the outcome of game events through their decisions. By tracking player behaviors, these games adapt their storylines and outcomes based on players' responses to sometimes challenging moral decisions integrated into the gameplay. And, while future games promise to expand the realm of possibilities available to players, there are some recommendations that can be made based on observations of current games.

[8.2] Recommendations

Sicart proposed that "implementing ethical discourses in game design might lead to more mature, challenging products" (2005b, p. 14). In agreement with that proposition, and in response to the games that have already begun implementing interesting ethics structures, I have developed a list of recommended improvements. The utilization of the following elements could result in more cohesive and realistic game world ethics structures that are clearly defined and logically reinforced. The result should be games that can be played multiple times, with unique experiences and potentially different outcomes that are directly related to players' choices throughout the course of the game. This will ideally allow for experimentation with moral agency inside the "magic circle" of the game (Huizinga, 1955).

[Consistency] Above all else, a game world's ethics structure should be consistent. Players should not be rewarded for one action and similarly rewarded for a nearly opposite action [see *Grand Theft Auto - Vice City* analysis in section 7.4]. If players are rewarded for "wrong" actions, then they should not also be rewarded for "right" actions; the system of rewards and punishments should be universally applicable within the game world. While there can be groups (or even the player) working against the ethics of the game world, these actions should always be perceived as socially unacceptable within the ethics structure of the game.

[Consequences] Actions in the game world should have logical consequences that reinforce the ethics structure inherent in the game, as discussed in depth in section 3. If players steal automobiles, they should be pursued by the police [see *Grand Theft Auto - Vice City* in section 5.2] and punished if caught. Or, if players steal something from under the

nose of an NPC, the NPC should accuse them of such actions and react accordingly [see *Fable* in section 5.3].

[Alternatives] Any ethics structure should provide options to the player that he or she would consider "ethical" given the circumstances set up in the game (unless the intent is to create a specific moral dilemma). In the case of *Deus Ex: Invisible War* [discussed in section 5.4], players could be given a viable option that does not involve dishonesty or violence.

[Moral Dilemma] If it adds to the game experience, moral dilemmas can be introduced into the game's story, forcing players to make decisions between two seemingly "right" choices, or perhaps equally "bad" solutions. Or, players could be asked to choose which "path" they desire to follow; will they be "good", or will they be "evil"? Each choice should then have its own logical consequences.

[NPC Reactions] Non-player characters (NPCs) should follow the same system of ethics set up for players and react to players' actions accordingly. If a player pulls out a gun in a public space, the civilian NPCs could scream and run away while law enforcement agents could engage in defensive action. If players lie to NPCs, they should lose a degree of trust in the player's character [see section 7.2].

[Long-Term Effects] The game world should allow for both immediate responses and long-term effects. NPCs should remember how players have acted in their past interactions with them and respond to current interactions with a memory of the past. For example, if the player has shown himself to be a violent individual (and the NPC is aware of

this), the NPC should react with fear or distrust. If the player has been violent toward a particular NPC or perhaps a family member or friend of the NPC, the NPC could potentially retaliate and attack the player. In squad-based games, fallen squad members should not later reappear unscathed in later missions [see *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30* in section 6.5].

[Empathy] Players should feel that their actions toward other game characters actually matter. Players should be encouraged to care about NPCs, whether they live or die, and whether the NPCs approve of their actions; guilt would seem to be a powerful game mechanic if used properly, and empathy toward NPCs or even the player's own avatar could be an effective tool in engaging players on an emotional level.

[Atonement] Players may wish to experiment with the game's ethics structure or perhaps test it for consistency, but many current game structures punish players for accidental and/or experimental actions [see sections 4.2 and 4.3]. Thus, if players are provided the opportunity to atone for their actions (whether they be intentional or accidental), it could provide greater freedom for experimentation in the game world. Allowing players to ask for forgiveness from an NPC or simply warning them (without punishment) for their curiosity could make a game world seem more flexible.

[8.3] Future Research

While not all-inclusive, the recommendations listed above would undoubtedly enhance any game with a storyline and ethics structure complex enough to support their usage. In addition to providing an outlet for player's exploration of ethics, games that include the ability for players to make moral decisions resulting in multiple outcomes have

added replay value and are more economical purchases for the buyer. If a game can be experienced in numerous ways with potentially different outcomes, players will be encouraged to experience the game in its entirety not just once, but multiple times, greatly adding to the value of their purchase. It remains to be seen if games that allow for a higher degree of moral freedom will hold a greater appeal to consumers.

Generally, there seems to be a current trend toward ethics structures in games that adjust to players' decisions, and this is a trend that can be expected to continue. Time and further studies will tell us whether or not a majority of players are truly interested in exploring ethics within a video game environment, but for now, interested players can at least enjoy the sampling of the morally-interesting games available today. And, with more powerful game consoles entering the market and computer processing power increasing yearly, more complex moral simulations are almost certain to emerge. No longer then will simple "save the princess" quests satisfy the needs of the players who are looking for deeper meaning and the potential for moral exploration in their games.

Real world ethics structures are not all encompassing; situations arise that require decisions to be made that are not explicitly covered by a culture's ethics. Some day, people may be able to use video games to explore the consequences of making such difficult decisions, but the current ethics structures in most video games simply will not allow for that level of moral complexity. Until video game developers begin spending more development time on the moral content and structure of their games, players unavoidably will remain content to steal cars, run over pedestrians, save the world from aliens, and attack villagers with giant ape creatures. Advancements in artificial intelligence and complex, dynamic narratives will likely be necessary to advance the field, but as game complexity and

visual detail continues to increase, players likely will demand more complex interactions with their game worlds. Even so, much can be (and has already been) done with current technology to provide players with logical and meaningful moral choices within game worlds, free from the consequences of the real world. Perhaps very soon players will be able to truly express their "interpretation of life and the world" within the worlds of video games (Huizinga, 1955).

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Vita

Adam J. Thompson

Portfolio available online at www.adamjthompson.com

[Education]

Master of Arts
Immersive Mediated Environments
Department of Telecommunications, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN
August 2007

Bachelor of Arts
Major: Multimedia Technology, Minor: Art
Department of Communication Arts, Cedarville University, Cedarville, OH
December 1998

[Technical]

Platforms
PC operating systems (Windows 95 -XP) and Macintosh operating systems (OS9 and OSX)

3D Animation
Maya Unlimited (3.0 -7.0), Discreet 3D Studio Max 2.5, Lightwave (basic) – Used for complex 3D character animation, logo animations, and effects

Interactive Media Design
JavaScript (basic), HTML (hand-coded for 12 years), CSS, Flash (3.0 – CS3), Dreamweaver (4.0 – CS3), Director (basic), PHP (basic) – Used for commercial web design projects and CD/DVD design

Image Editing
Photoshop (3.0 – CS3) – Used for commercial digital design work and television graphics

Video Editing
Velocity/Reality, Premiere, Bink and Smacker video compression tools, various compression software applications and codecs including MPEG2 – Used for commercial video editing and VideoCD / DVD authoring

Compositing
After Effects, DFX, Digital Fusion – Used for adding special effects and motion as well as compositing multi-layer renderings from animation and video software

Audio Editing
Sound Forge 6, Vegas Pro, ACID Pro, and Goldwave – Used for commercial multi-track audio editing and CD mastering for radio commercials and independent projects

[Employment]

Sinclair Community College (Dayton, OH)
Assistant Professor, Visual Communications, 09/04-Current
Courses taught include:

- Design Basics: 2D
- Interactive Digital Theory
- Web Page Design I
- Web Page Design II
- Digital Imaging

Continue to Create (Dayton, OH)
Director, 01/01-Current

- Self-employed as a freelance media designer and animator.

Indiana University (Bloomington, IN)
Associate Instructor, 08/02-05/04

- Primary responsibilities included lab assistance and grading of exams and all weekly lab-produced assignments for T356 (TV Studio Operations & Directing, 25-30 students each semester)
- Provided student assistance in the areas of studio lighting, camera operation, set design, script formatting, switcher usage, chroma keying, audio mixing, and graphic design (Photoshop and WriteDeko)

EBI Video & Film (Davenport, IA)
2D & 3D Graphic Artist / Multimedia Specialist / Senior Editor, 12/98-06/02

- 2D & 3D graphics for a variety of video productions including music videos, corporate videos, commercials, and logo animations
- Multimedia content creation including web sites, Flash animations, instructional CD-Roms, streaming media files, and compressed audio/video files
- Video and audio recording/editing using DPS Velocity non-linear editing systems and camera work with BETA SP and MiniDV formats
- Some experience with MPEG2 streaming hardware and software

EBI Video & Film (Davenport, IA)
3D Graphic Artist / Technical Director, 12/99-02/01

- Responsible for the design and creation of graphic templates, animations, bumpers, and compressions for three separate television news broadcasts
- Involvement in all facets of 3D animation production including modeling, character animation, character "skinning" and rigging, texture creation and application, dynamics, lighting, rendering, and compositing
- Technical direction for a nationally-released computer animated video, with responsibilities including rendering workflow design, compositing setup and output, troubleshooting of rendered scenes, hardware and software technical support, research and implementation of a multi-node 3D rendering system, and some Windows NT network administration

EBI Video & Film (Davenport, IA)
Production Graphics Assistant, 12/98-12/99

- Supplied supplemental graphics for the video production department
- Assisted in the design of the "look and feel" of various 2D & 3D graphical elements and 3D animations for video productions
- Occasional grip duties and some camera operation for location shoots

[Research]

- Ethics in interactive entertainments – How video games can be improved through the incorporation of believable ethics structures
- 3D character animation – Creating character emotion through animation
- Game Design – Creating morality in games through complex character interactions and cause/effect actions

[Design]

URLs available online at www.adamjthompson.com

- re:Films (2006) – Site Design | HTML | Flash Coding | PHP Programming
- Deckard Photography (2005) – Site Design | HTML | PHP Programming
- Molly Z. Illustration (2004) – Flash Animation
- BodyWear, LLC (2004) – HTML | eCommerce Setup | PHP Programming
- 2004 IDEAS Festival (2004) – Site Layout | HTML | Flash Coding
- 2003 IDEAS Festival (2003) – Site Design | Logo Design | HTML Coding
- The TAG Studio (2003) – HTML | Flash Interface | Image Collages
- Designer Images Photography (2003) – HTML | Flash Animation / Interface
- MidAmerican Equipment & Supplies, Inc. (2002) – Site Design | HTML
- Monahan Photographic Artist (2002) – HTML | Flash Animation
- St. Louis Creative (2001) – HTML | Flash Animation / Interface | Media Encoding
- DocuForms (2001) – HTML
- Tails from the Ark (2000) – Site Design | HTML | Flash Game | Media Encoding