

Conveying a Message to an Ethical Player

Robin Di Capua

Supervisor: Miguel Sicart

Media Technology and Games, Design and Analysis

ITU Copenhagen

2008

Contents

Abstract.....	3
Introduction.....	4
The Ethical Player.....	5
Morality and Values of Artifacts	7
Postphenomenological approach to game artifacts	9
Case Study: De Menezes International	13
Messages and Players	15
Conclusion	22
References.....	24

Abstract

This paper will analyze the issues of dealing with ethical players and their relation to virtual environments through agency given by artifacts. Conveying messages through gameplay is one topic of interest of this paper and as a practical example a case study will be used: *De Menezes International* is a project in which I'm involved as a game designer. The relation between humans and technologies will be discussed as a basis to relate game artifacts and players following postphenomenology theories. The goal is to show that technology is never neutral and that it shapes our understanding and interpretation of the world. Such framework will then be applied to virtual environments by giving an explanation of the different aspects involved in the experience of a videogame.

Introduction

In the last years game studies have started to seriously take in account player experience as an important aspect to both develop and understand videogames. Nowadays players can encounter virtual environments where they can exert agency in many different ways, interact with non playing characters (NPCs), take decisions affecting their gameplay and so on.

The expression “game experience” has started to spread and is used in keynotes, articles, books, interviews and reviews. The experience a videogame provides is the main focus of game developers, all the elements designed and produced by the team collaborate to create the envisioned game experience.

Providing a certain game experience to players can also be a way for a designer to make a statement or to convey a message. “Serious games” for example are one genre that doesn’t necessarily aim at the fun aspect of the experience but more at giving a political, social or cultural view on a relevant topic. Videogames can then convey messages to people like other media do.

The way messages are conveyed through videogames is part of the focus of this paper. The other aspect will be *to who* those messages are conveyed. Of course we tend to call “players” the people engaging with videogames, but the approach taken by this work will focus on players as *ethical beings*.

The “ethical player” will be discussed in the first chapter in order to take in account the moral values that are brought into the experience by players. After that an analysis on how artifacts have embedded values and morals will be discussed. Using postphenomenology theories it will be shown how technology influences our perception and interpretation of the world. This theoretical background will

then by applied to videogames, since I will argue that in games we have artifacts that influence the player experience and therefore the interpretation of the game world.

A case study will be used to support those claims and to give a practical example on how the concepts of ethical player, artifacts and game experience merge together to convey a certain message. As a result, this paper will give some insights to game designers for applying ethical design to videogames in order to successfully convey the messages they want through the game experience they envisioned.

The Ethical Player

If we want to take in account the moral values that players bring into their game experience, it is productive to see them as ethical beings. If we want to shift our focus on experience it becomes crucial to start thinking about the way players engage with the game as rational agents. “Rational agents consider a range of alternatives, moral or not, and ethical agents must be able to choose among a range of moral options. So good models of moral and ethical mechanisms should account for these tensions” (Danielson, 2005). Players should then be considered also as ethical players, bringing their own moral values into the equation that shapes their experiences.

Players are not isolated beings but they belong to a community of gamers that interact with each other and share opinion about their game experience. Miguel Sicart argues that “a fundamental part of the ethical process of developing our moral understanding of games as players is the belonging to a game community, the presence and interaction with other ethical beings that play computer games.” (Sicart, Computer Games, Players, Ethics, 2006). It is important to understand that

players share their passion for videogames with other players thanks to Internet forums, websites, magazines or by oral conversation.

Players also belong to different cultures, therefore the game experience is also influenced by the ethical values of such culture. “The player of a computer game is a moral agent that plays according to a set of values that is created partially by the ethical nature of the design and the game experience, but also by the individual, communitarian and cultural values that inform her ethical being” (Sicart, Computer Games, Players, Ethics, 2006).

It is important to frame the analysis of the ethical players and the morality of a videogame by looking at the game experience rather than just the content of the game. If we want to look at games as moral objects played by ethical beings, we need to analyze the way players internalize and interpret the content by engaging with the product. Judging the content without taking in account the way it is experienced is a wrong approach that can lead to cheap judgmental critiques about games with violence and mature content. “The content of the games does not exclusively determine the morality of games” (Sicart, Computer Games, Players, Ethics, 2006).

I would argue that game designers should apply ethical thinking during the design process of a videogame in order to enrich the player experience. This applies for any kind of game but especially for games that aim at a particular experience, games with strong narrative intent and serious games. As suggested by Miguel Sicart we can think about two ways of applying ethical computer game design: *open ethical game design* and *closed ethical game design*.

“An open ethical game design is one in which the values of the player and the player community can be implemented in the gameworld, resulting in new content and/or practices deemed as ethical, beyond those afforded by the game design” (Sicart, Computer Games, Players, Ethics, 2006). “A closed ethical game design is one in which the game is designed to create an ethical experience in which the player cannot implement her values beyond the constraints of the game” (Sicart, Computer Games, Players, Ethics, 2006).

There are many ways to implement ethical game design, depending on the genre and the intention and ideology of a game; this paper would like to focus on

messages to players and how to express and convey a certain statement by taking in account players as ethical beings. I argue that when ethical players enjoy a game crafted by ethical design their experience can be more involving and stimulating compared to one where they cannot apply ethical thinking to the actions or events of the game.

An example also quoted in Sicart's dissertation is *Star Wars: Knights of The Old Republic* (Bioware, 2003) where players have ethical choices to take, but where the feedback is given in terms of "good points" or "bad points". The game is designed to judge players' actions with "good" or "bad", therefore depriving players to give personal and moral judgment on their actions.

By applying ethical design to their products game designers can enrich player experience by implementing a layer of freedom where players feel that they have the possibility of morally interpreting their actions. This will provide a more engaging experience and a bigger attachment to the virtual environment since players can feel that their own contribution shapes their game experience.

Players can of course disagree with certain messages, since ultimately those statements reflect the designer's point of view. In this case it is important that even though players disagree with the designers, they can still understand and have a meaningful and coherent interpretation of the conveyed messages. If players understand the designers' intentions, they can still respect their point of view and enjoy the confrontation of ideas.

As we will see later we can use the concept of "ideal player" to analyze the way designers tried to convey messages by taking in account the moral and ethical values of the actual players.

Morality and Values of Artifacts

In the everyday life technology helps us in many ways, from going to work with cars to read books with glasses or write e-mails with computers. Through those artifacts we experience our world and the way technology is designed influences the way we experience our reality. Since artifacts are designed in a certain way to provide a certain usage they cannot be seen as neutral objects: there is no such thing as neutral technology.

Every technological artifact embodies some kind of moral value that is interpreted by ethical beings thanks to their cultural, political and social background.

“Artifacts are no passive and inert entities. They actually co-shape what actors do.” (Verbeek, *Artifacts and Attachment: a post-script philosophy of mediation*).

Technology has always some influence on how humans perceive and experience the world through their mediation. It is important to notice that this relation is a mutual relation, “in their mutual relationship, they co-shape one another” (Verbeek, *Artifacts and Attachment: a post-script philosophy of mediation*). For example the invention of the train in the 19th century gave people a totally different feeling of distances and motion. It’s not surprising that Impressionism as an artistic form made its appearance right after the arrival of the train; with its blurry and dynamic style Impressionism was different from anything seen before in visual arts. Artists were influenced by their experiences provided by the motion of trains on railways.

Artifacts can also have prescriptions about how and who can use them. For example rotating doors at the entrances of public buildings are unusable by handicapped people on a wheelchair. Such choice can raise ethical questions on why a particular building was designed with such doors. There are multiple ways of designing technology and when we chose one it is productive to think about what we inscribe into the artifact and which can be the consequences of its use in a particular context.

The attachment to artifacts can be explained through postphenomenology theories that describe the experience and interpretation of reality. Such theories can be used to analyze how artifacts mediate our reality. “Postphenomenology aims to understand the “contact” between humans and world: the experiences and actions

in which they co-shape each other.” (Verbeek, *Artifacts and Attachment: a post-script philosophy of mediation*).

This approach can be useful in order to analyze the influence on the experience of the world through an artifact that embeds certain “scripts”. The script concept indicates “the actively prescribing role of technologies in human actions” (Verbeek, *Materializing Morality: Design Ethics and Technological Mediation*). When developing a technology the designers “anticipate how users will interact with the product they are designing and, implicitly or explicitly, build prescriptions for use into the materiality of the product” (Verbeek, *Materializing Morality: Design Ethics and Technological Mediation*). That means that artifacts embed values and shape the actions of the users.

If artifacts co-shape the way we experience the real world I would argue that the same happens when we talk about artifacts in virtual environments. The Gravity Gun in *Half Life 2* (Valve, 2004) is an example of how a game artifact can shape the experience of the game world. In *Half Life 2* players can pick up objects using the Gravity Gun and move or throw them around. Such agency gives a different meaning to props compared to games where objects do not allow interaction. Thanks to the Gravity Gun players will start thinking about how to exploit the physicality of props by deeply analyzing the virtual environment. This way of experience the game space is co-shaped by both player and the game artifact Gravity Gun.

The goal of the next chapter is to define what artifacts in virtual environments are, and how they co-shape the player experience.

Postphenomenological approach to game artifacts

To properly convey a certain experience for a player we first have to define the elements that define it. My postphenomenological approach will involve five elements in the equation: “Player”, “Artifacts”, “Game World” and “Real World”. Those elements will be clearly defined and used to explain how they interact with

each other when a design decision is taken in order to convey a certain message to the player.

By “player” I’ll use the concept of “ideal player”, meaning the player that experience the game in the way the designer had in mind. The role of the ideal player is taken on by the actual player during its performance in playing the game.

With “real world” I’ll indicate the perception of the designers about the real world, both in terms of representation of things and interpretation of social or cultural aspects. During gameplay the real world perception of the player will be compared to the instance of the designers. An ideal mediation in this case would see the vision of the player meeting the one of the designers.

The “game world” will be the projection of the real world framed in a virtual instance by the designers. The game world is experienced in a virtual environment where the game takes place. Such virtual environment can make inferences and allusions to the real world but also be a product of pure fantasy.

The last element, “artifacts”, is important for the implementation of postphenomenology theories in virtual environments. My claim here is that a videogame is indeed an artifact created using at its base some programming language, but if we analyze it with a different granularity we can see that games present different layers. The rules of the game for example will be seen from my point of view as artifacts designed in order to create a system that reacts to certain inputs; but in a virtual environment we can also interact with objects and use them, like in real life. Why would we consider a car an artifact in real life and not in a virtual environment? The object car in a virtual environment may give players the possibility to drive inside the game space, therefore changing the way they experience the environment.

I will refer to artifacts as a range of tools that are part of the interaction between the player and the game world as defined before. Such tools can be in form of “game objects”, “game mechanics” or “rules”. Game objects such as characters or props are fictional elements that can embody certain properties and capabilities. Game mechanics are “methods invoked by agents within the game world, designed for interaction with the game state (Sicart, Defining Game Mechanics, 2008).

“Rules provide the structure out of which play emerges, by delimiting what the player can and cannot do” (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004).

The understanding of artifacts in virtual environments that I suggest here is different from the one postphenomenology uses for artifacts in real worlds; we can of course virtually use an object in a game but at the same time we are maybe using a character to access the object itself and we are interacting with the rules of the game which were designed as well.

With those elements defined here there is another aspect to take in account, and that is the multistability of technologies. “This multistability of technologies makes it very difficult to predict the ways in which technologies will influence human actions, and accordingly to evaluate this influence in ethical terms. Technologies can be used in unforeseen ways, and therefore have an unforeseen influence on human actions” (Verbeek, *Materializing Morality: Design Ethics and Technological Mediation*). For this reason postphenomenology argues that technologies should be analyzed by looking at the context in which they are used.

In the case of virtual environments I argue that the same happens like in real life. Players can engage with artifacts that have been designed for certain purposes, but sometimes during playtesting sessions it happens that the use of some artifacts leads to unexpected behavior. It is possible that a certain game object, a certain mechanic or a certain rule, if exploited in an unforeseen way, can change the game experience envisioned by the designers. Designers will always try to predict the usage of game artifacts and also try to find unexpected usage through playtesting sessions before the product is released.

As it will be discussed later when the case study will be introduced, it is important to consider, as postphenomenology suggest, the *context* in which artifacts are used. For the purpose of analyzing how messages are conveyed to players I find more productive to look at the game as the context in which artifacts are used. My way of framing the context “videogame” include three of the aspects described before: “player”, “artifacts” and “game world”.

If we want to look at how a certain game tries to mediate a certain message about the real world using some kind of embodiment relation we can frame, or stabilize, our equation in this way:

$$(\textit{Player} - \textit{Artifacts} - \textit{Game World}) \rightarrow \textit{Real World}$$

By doing so we can look at how the videogame, composed by player, artifacts and game world, tries to mediate a certain game experience that inform the real world. The equation can be seen from different point of views. From the designer point of view the player in this case is the ideal player, and the real world is the designer's perception of the real world. When the game is actually experienced by someone else, then we have an actual player that by engaging with artifacts and the game world will make inferences to his or her own vision of the real world.

By including the actual player in the equation I'm arguing here that in order to analyze a videogame we have to take in account the player and the way he or she engage with the game. By doing so players give birth to game experience which should be used to analyze the game itself; like argued before just looking at the content is not enough.

This approach will be clearer when I'll analyze the design choices of my case study. The goal of the next two chapters is to give some concrete examples of how a certain design was born from an idea about a particular game experience. The most relevant design aspects will be discussed using the theories built in the previous chapters in order to show how messages can be conveyed through a design that also takes in account the player as an ethical being.

Case Study: De Menezes International



Figure 1

De Menezes International (Figure 1) is a project that started in 2007 at the IT University of Copenhagen and is still in development. The project is a serious game about terrorism, surveillance, paranoia and which hunt in a big international airport. The players are divided in three teams: civilians, agents and one terrorist.

The role of the civilians consists in role playing a certain character with a certain set of mundane tasks to do before going to the gate and take the plane. All the civilians take the same plane and its departure represents also the end of the round session.

Agents will control the airport by looking around, using surveillance cameras and searching for suspicious behavior. They also have the possibility to search people or to use guns in case of extreme danger.

A terrorist will have the task to collect two bomb parts, assemble them and then decide to explode him or herself into the plane or in the airport.

After every round the roles will be randomly switched and players can decide how many rounds to play before ending the game.

The civilians will have the possibility to talk with each other through a text based chat system that will be shared by the terrorist as well. The idea is that the chat system will allow people to accuse and suspect each other in order to start the witch hunt. Of course the terrorist can try to hide his or her true identity by convincing other civilians that they are wrong. Civillians can also send messages to the agents but they cannot receive feedback from them. What agents can do to catch the terrorist is looking at the behavior of people and also analyze the information sent by the civilians.

Every player can gain a certain amount of points according to the team he or she belongs to. The score is personal and players compete against each other with the goal of accumulating the biggest number of points at the end of the last round. Civillians get points by doing their mundane tasks and by successfully board the plane, while a terrorist gets points according to the number of casualties he or she gets, with a plus if the explosion takes place on the plane. Agents are rewarded for finding or killing the terrorist but they lose points every time they search or kill the wrong person.

When designing *De Menezes International* we had in mind an ideal player in order to take decisions upon the design issues we encountered. Our main goal was to stick to the messages we wanted to convey and to avoid disruptive gameplay that could lead our ideal player to what we thought was a wrong interpretation of the game experience.

Our ideal player is someone interested in exploring the issues of terrorism and surveillance in today's airports. We take for granted that the interpretation and the understanding of the game experience will rise from the ideal player's repertoire of historical facts, news and any kind of information about terrorism and surveillance. "The repertoire consists of all the familiar territory within the text. This may be in the form of references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged" (Iser, 1978).

Since players have some roles and teams they belong to, our ideal player is also willing to role play and engage with the game experience through the assigned

character. This also involves the fact that our ideal player may be engaged in role play the terrorist character, therefore he or she has to be willing to explore this role and compare it to the previous roles played in order to have a big picture of the experience.

De Menezes International was taken as a case study because it involves moral issues and because it allows players to express their ethical behavior in a system that does not rigidly categorize their actions as good or bad. Nevertheless by being involved in the design process of *De Menezes International* I had insights on how the game idea was shaped during the creation of the design document. For these reasons I found this case study particularly suited to be part of my research.

After this general overview the next chapter will analyze game design decisions that support the messages of the game as well as choices that have been taken in order to prevent disruption and interpretations we didn't want to happen in the game experience.

Messages and Players

The overall goal of *De Menezes International* is to provide a game experience that makes people reflect upon the issues of terrorism that affect our world today. Airports have recently been scene of terrorist attacks as well as cases of pure paranoia by people suspecting others just because of their outfit or the language they were speaking.

The name “De Menezes” is actually inspired by the death of Charles De Menezes, a Brazilian young man that was shot dead by police in 2005 in the London Underground because suspected to be a terrorist. The police made a big mistake since De Menezes was innocent, even though the police justified itself by arguing that Charles behaved suspiciously. What we are trying to do with *De Menezes International* is to make players experience how easy it is to misinterpret

suspicious behavior, to suspect the wrong person and also to take wrong decisions dictated by pure paranoia.

Following postphenomenology theories I will start by analyzing the relationship between player and one of the main artifacts of the game: the character, enclosed in “{}” to specify which artifact we are talking about. The relationship is the following:

$$\textit{Player} - \textit{Artifact} \{ \textit{Character} \} \rightarrow (\textit{Game World} - \textit{Real World})$$

Let me explain the different elements of the equation in relation to the case study. To play the game players are asked to engage with a character that has a certain background and predetermined tasks that require to go to certain places in order to acquire points before boarding the plane. This choice has been made in order to invite players to move and do something around the airport. By doing so, players will eventually do some actions that may look potentially suspicious to others.



Figure 2

To achieve this we designed an icon system (Figure 2) where every time a civilian or a terrorist do an action, an icon will pop up on their head. Icons give a general indication of what someone is doing (buying, searching, talking to the phone, assembling etc.). Terrorist tasks also end up triggering some of those icons, like

assembling and searching during the phase where the bomb parts have to be found and assembled. In this case seeing someone with an “assembling” icon can be seen as suspicious, but at the same time it could be a civilian task involving the assembling of a camera in order to take pictures.

This system is designed in order to not have giveaways that will allow players to spot the terrorist with absolute certitude.

When players engage with the artifact “character” they are invited to observe other players, but this is not mandatory. Players can decide to traverse the airport without caring or suspecting people, it’s completely up to them and their ethical behavior will not be judged as good or bad by the game. This leads them to decide whether or not they want to engage with the character behaving like they do in real life. If they want they can choose to be paranoid and suspicious even though this is not their usual behavior when they go to an airport in real life.

During the game experience there’s no such binary division between selfishness and paranoia but more a continuum where sometimes players tend to behave like in real life and sometimes they don’t. This is a fundamental property of the medium, allowing players to experiment things they can’t or don’t experience in real life.

At the end of the round players are invited to judge their own behavior and decisions. Maybe the plane exploded, they lost a huge amount of points and they found out that the terrorist was a character they suspected but they didn’t want to accuse because of their laziness. It can happen that the next round, the same players will be guided by paranoia and by feeling the pressure of accusing someone they will start convincing other players to do the same. Eventually the agents decide to shoot the suspected civilian who will maybe end up being innocent, making both agents and civilians losing points because the plane will not take off after such accident.

This is only one of the many scenarios that can emerge from this videogame. After experiencing one round of the game using their character as an artifact, players are invited to think about the way they played and about the results of the round.

This leads to the second part of the equation, Game World and Real World. Players accusing the wrong person may start thinking about how a small little detail made

them take the wrong decision in the game world. Then a question may come up: how would I behave in the real world in such situation? The parenthesis enclosing game world and real world are meant to signalize how we would like to convey certain messages to players that, by using their character to experience the game world, will make inferences to the real world.

This is the main reason why the game world in this particular case was designed to be a believable virtual version of a real airport that invites people to make a link to their real experiences in real airports. If television and newspaper had an impact on how people behaved in public places after the major terrorist attacks of these last couple of years, I would argue that also *De Menezes International* can make people reflect upon these kinds of issues.

The difference from other form of media is that, by being an experience in a virtual environment, players will be able to create their own experience by engaging with the game world. Therefore they will judge their own moral actions, even though such actions will be framed and confined by the game system developed by the designers.

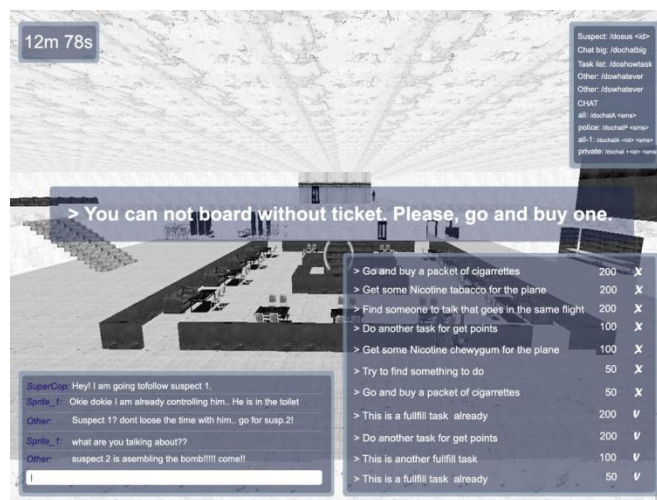


Figure 3

At the core of the gameplay of *De Menezes International*, we have a chat system (Figure 3) that allows players to communicate through text typed on the keyboard. The chat system is an artifact used by the player to experience the game world in a relation of this kind:

(Player – Artifact {Chat System}) – Game World → Real World

Thanks to the chat system the players can contribute to the game experience in a productive way. “The reader’s enjoyment begins when he himself becomes productive, i.e., when the text allows him to bring his own faculties into play” (Iser, 1978). And also, “the apprehension of a literary work {...} is not a passive process of acceptance but a productive response.” (Iser, 1978). I would argue that those claims about texts can be applied to videogames as well in the sense that a productive interaction of the player will increase his or her attachment to the game experience.

The productive response in this case would be the textual feedback that players input in order to express themselves during the game experience. Through the chat system they can accuse other players, help guiding colleagues if they are agents or try to jeopardize civilians’ behavior while playing the terrorist role and so on.

The chat system as an artifact is not neutral though; some design choices were taken in order to provide the kind of experience we envisioned. Civillians, and the terrorist, can chat among themselves, both publicly or in private and they can also exclude one person that will not receive the sent message. Agents can receive messages from civilians but they cannot answer back.

We decided to do that to prevent agents to give orders or tasks to civilians; in the real world the information goes from civilians accusing someone by phone for example, to agents reacting accordingly usually without involving the civilians in the action. Civilians also don’t hear communications among agents in the field, they only see them moving. This choice was taken to mirror in some way the communication in real airports.

Allowing civilians to send messages to all other civilians is indeed unrealistic, but forcing people to catch and talk every person alone would have ended being tedious for the gameplay. The point here is not to show that those choices are right, but that they were taken in order to convey a certain experience and certain messages.

Since the paranoia and the witch hunt were two of the main keywords we wanted to implement in our game we thought about some characteristics that would try to enhance this. We decided for example that not every round of the game would feature a terrorist. This uncertainty about the presence of a threat will provide a more realistic background to the game since the presence of a terrorist in an airport is never assured.

To choose to always have a terrorist could have led to some degenerate strategies involving people that would at all cost find a terrorist because they know there is one for sure. Such strategies could break the envisioned game experience since we wanted to show that paranoia and witch hunt can happen also during the absence of a terrorist in a public place.

Anonymity is also a choice we made to prevent some kind of dominant strategies. Every player has a nickname that is the seat number of his or her ticket. Agents on the other hand have common names like “Agent Smith”. All the names are assigned randomly and will change every game round. In this way it will be impossible for people to know who’s in the lead after each round. Thanks to anonymity it will be impossible to plan strategies in order to make the lead player losing points, therefore assuring that players don’t behave the way they do just to block another player.

The choice of giving guns only to agents was also part of the choices we made in order to have a believable game world that could mirror in a productive way the real world. We thought that giving weapons to civilians and terrorist would have given them agency that could guide them away from communication, ending up in an action based gameplay we didn’t want.

Agents are also invited to use their weapons discretely by using them only in emergency cases since the punishment for killing the wrong civilian is huge in terms of points.

The point system will be the last artifact to be analyzed. It's maybe the most controversial from an ethical design perspective because it's an artifact that judges players action by giving points. The reason why we designed such a system was to give players a reason to move around the airport and do things. We needed civilians going to a gate, we needed a terrorist willing to assemble a bomb and we needed agents willing to watch the airport and search for suspicious people. In some way the point system helps the role playing aspect we discussed before.

The amount of point won or lost is related to our vision of what would be good or bad in an airport according to the team the player belong. For example we judged bad the fact that an agent kills the wrong civilian, and on the other side we award agents for killing the right person but we give even more points for arresting the terrorists after searching and finding a bomb on them. Civillians are awarded if they successfully board the plane but they lose a huge amount of points if the plane explodes; this choice was taken in order to punish civillians for not helping the agents finding the terrorist.

There are a lot of rewards and punishments situations that can be found on the design document of *De Menezes International* but the main point is that they were taken in order to balance the real world aspect of the game and the game experience we wanted to provide.

Those artifacts described above (the rule of a probability of not having a terrorist, the anonymity system, the weapons and the point system) are meant to help to shape the game world for the player in such a way that the inferences to the real world will be more in line with our projection of real world and with the messages we want to convey about it. Such relation can be expressed as following:

$$Player - (Artifact - Game World) \rightarrow Real World$$

It's important to admit that design choices *will* have an influence on the game experience. Like we've discussed in a previous chapter, they will influence the way players understand the game world and make inferences towards the real world. We designed a system that is open to moral freedom and balanced in order

to provide our main key points, but by nature of technologies we have to take in account that our product is not going to be neutral.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to show how ethical game design can be applied to videogames in order to properly convey messages to an ethical player. Every design choice will have some kind of influence on the game experience and can be analyzed from an ethical perspective even though the moral aspect and the influence of such choice was maybe not considered by the designers.

What this work wants to show is that by applying ethical thinking game designers can enrich the game experience, being more aware of the potential consequences of their choices and also successfully convey the meaning of the game experience they envisioned.

In order to frame the relations between players and game artifacts, postphenomenology can be a helpful tool for analyzing the meaning and the way the artifact co-shape the player experience. When using postphenomenology it is important to always be aware of the game context in which it is used and if the user is an ideal player or an actual player.

After designing an artifact with an ideal player in mind some playtesting sessions can suggest that the actual player's experience deviates from the envisioned experience of the ideal player, therefore inviting the designers to rethink their choices from another perspective.

To deliver messages to players and having them interpreting in the expected way is always a challenge. People have different social and cultural repertoires and different backgrounds that will influence their game experience and make it unique. Ethical game design can help facing those challenges by giving tools that lend shaping the envisioned game experience.

Before willing to apply ethical game design though, the designers should be aware that videogames can be more than just games for fun; they are experiences in virtual environments where ethical players engage with artifacts that co-shape the game world, the interpretation of messages and the inferences towards the real world.

References

- Danielson, P. (2005). Playing with Ethics: Games, Norms and Moral Freedom.
- Flanagan, M., Howe, D., & Nissenbaum, H. (2005). Values at Play: Design Tradeoffs in Socially-Oriented Game Design. *ACM* , 751-760.
- Iser, W. (1978). *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Järvinen, A. Studying Game Mechanics. In *Games Without Frontiers* (pp. 250-274). PhD, University of Tampere.
- Nissenbaum, H. (2005). Values in Technical Design. *Encyclopedia of Science Technology and Ethics* , pp. lxvi-lxx.
- Paglieri, F. (2005). Playing By and With the Rules: Norms and Morality in Play Development.
- Phil. (2006, 06 21). Retrieved 03 31, 2008, from www.gameology.org:
http://www.gameology.org/alien_other/player_epsilon
- Rutter, J., & Bryce, J. (2006). *Understanding Digital Games*. Sage.
- Salen, K., & Zimmerman, E. (2004). *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. MIT Press.
- Sicart, M. (2006). Computer Games, Players, Ethics. IT University of Copenhagen.
- Sicart, M. (2008). Defining Game Mechanics. *IT University of Copenhagen* .
- Verbeek, P.-P. A Material Hermeneutic. In P.-P. Verbeek, *What Things Do*. Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Verbeek, P.-P. (n.d.). Artifacts and Attachment: a post-script philosophy of mediation. *personal communication* .
- Verbeek, P.-P. (n.d.). Materializing Morality: Design Ethics and Technological Mediation. *personal communication* .
- Weatherson, B. (2004, November). Morality, Fiction, and Possibility. *Philosophers' Imprint* .

