

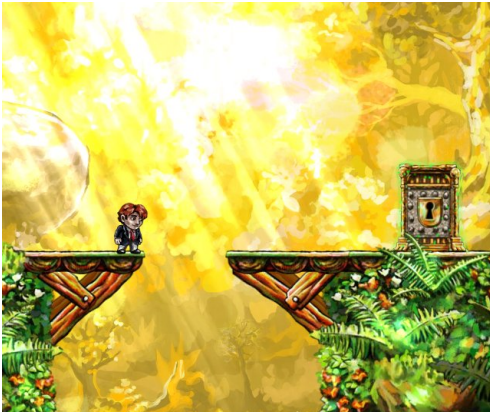
Towards a Theory of Choice Poetics

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University of California Santa Cruz

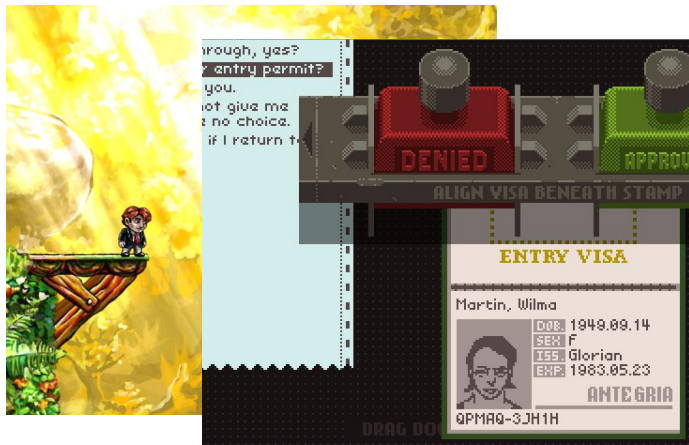
April 4th, 2014

The Big Picture



Games can tell stories.

The Big Picture



They can do things other media cannot.

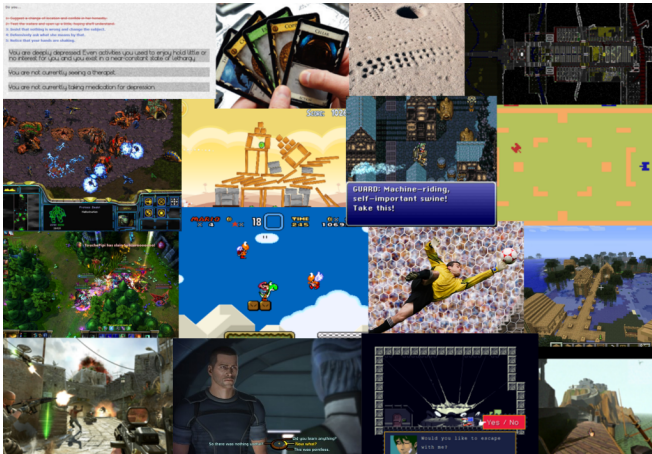
The Big Picture



We don't understand this very well.

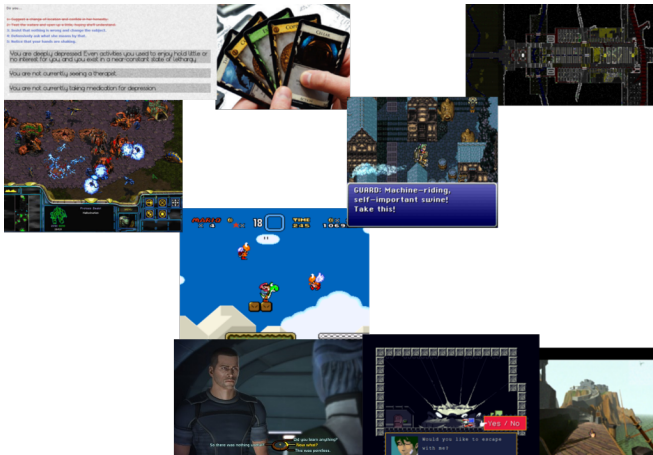
The Big Picture

Meaning in Games



The Big Picture

Choice Poetics

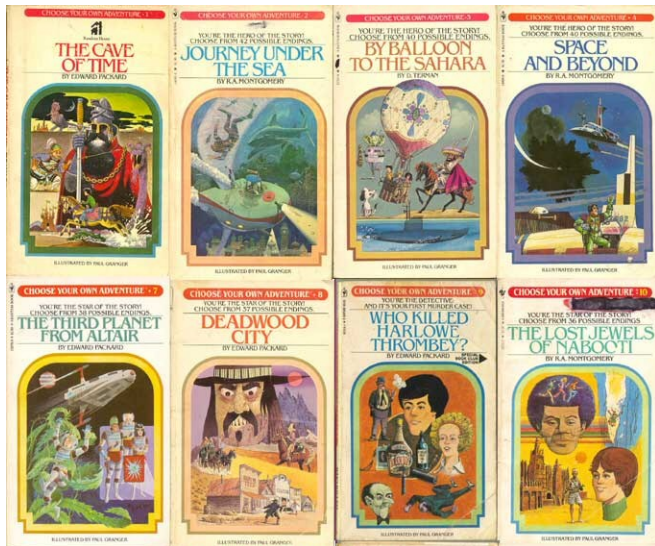


Choice Poetics (explicit discrete choices)

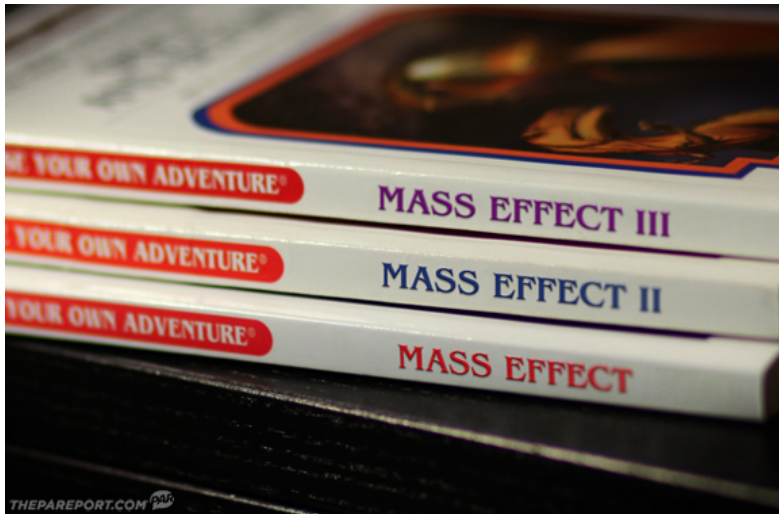


- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ **Background & Motivation**
- ▶ Example choice
- ▶ Choice poetics
 - ▶ Modes of engagement
 - ▶ Choice idioms
 - ▶ Dimensions of player experience

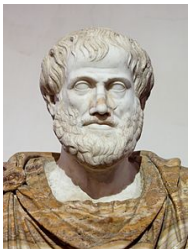
Story Games



Story Games



Related Work



Aristotle
Meaning in Narrative
circa 335 B.C.



Bogost
Meaning in Games
20XX

From the Choice of Games game design blog category*:

- ▶ 4 Common Mistakes in Interactive Novels
- ▶ 5 Rules for Writing Interesting Choices in Multiple-Choice Games
- ▶ Make a “Choice of” Game Your Own: Authorial Intent in IF
- ▶ By the Numbers: How to Write a Long Interactive Novel That Doesn't Suck

*<http://www.choiceofgames.com/category/blog/game-design/>

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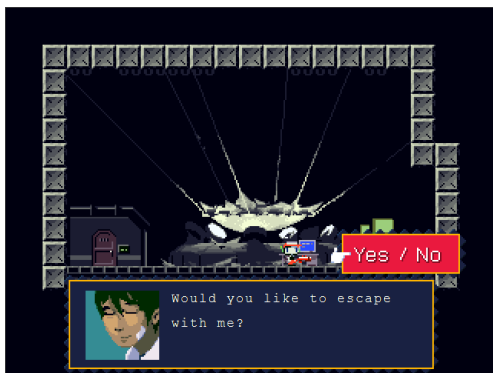
Example Choice



Example Choice

Some observations...

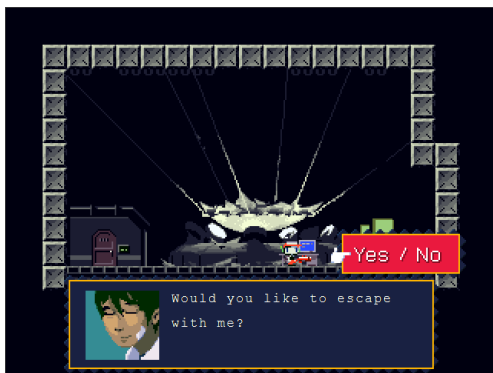
- ▶ Binary (Yes/No)
- ▶ Low-information
- ▶ High-stakes
- ▶ Outcomes aligned with narrative



Example Choice

Dramatic effect...

- ▶ Transition between narrative arcs
- ▶ Contextualizes play going forwards
- ▶ Feelings of uncertainty and/or regret



Choice Poetics: Overview

- ▶ Modes of Engagement
- ▶ Choice Idioms
- ▶ Dimensions of Experience

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- ▶ Modes of Engagement—How players approach choices
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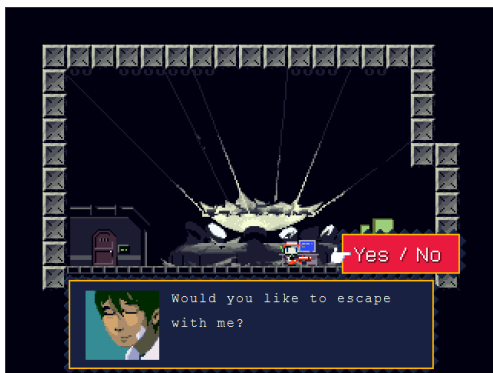
Choice Poetics: Overview

- ▶ Modes of Engagement—How players approach choices
- ▶ Choice Idioms—Specific choice structures and their effects
- ▶ Dimensions of Experience—Things that choice structures affect

Example: Modes of Engagement

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- ▶ Transition between narrative arcs
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- ▶ **Feelings of uncertainty and/or regret**



Modes of Engagement: Avatar Play



Modes of Engagement: Role Play



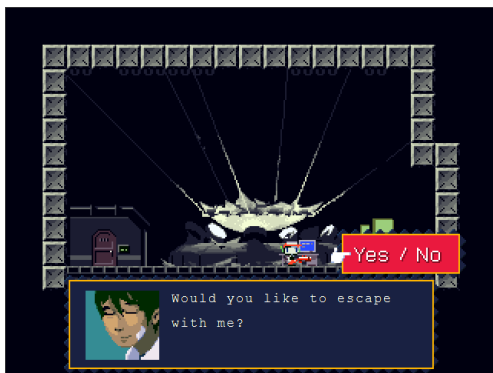
Modes of Engagement: Power Play



Example: Modes of Engagement

Dramatic effect...

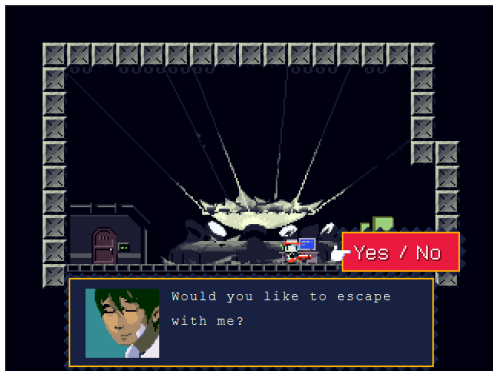
- ▶ Transition between narrative arcs
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Example: Choice Idioms

Some observations...

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- ▶ **Low-information**
- ▶ High-stakes
- ▶ Outcomes aligned with narrative



Choice Idioms: Blind Choice

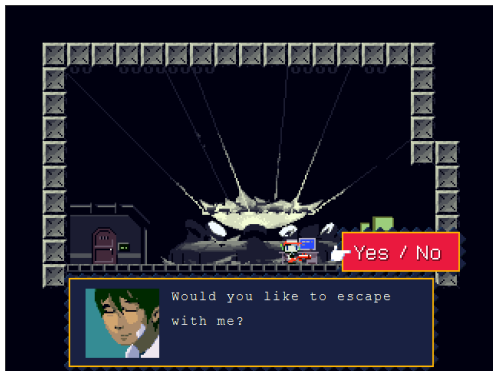


- ▶ *Blind choice*
 - ▶ May appear more important than it really is.
 - ▶ May lead to regret or frustration.
 - ▶ May encourage exploratory play.

Example: Choice Idioms

Some observations...

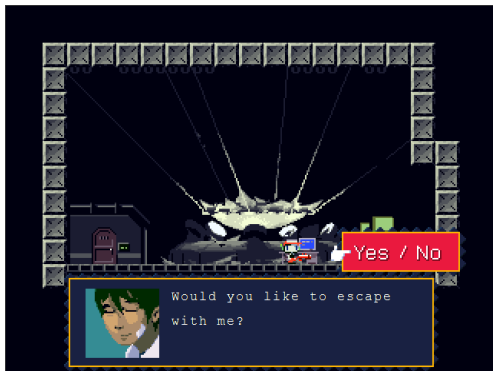
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Example: Dimensions of Player Experience

Some observations...

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- ▶ High-stakes
- ▶ **Outcomes aligned with narrative**



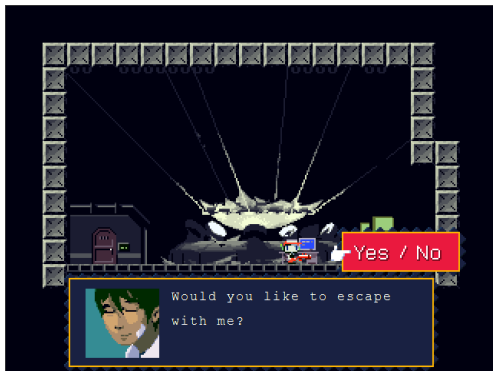
Dimensions of Experience: Regret



Example: Dimensions of Player Experience

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- ▶ Low-information
- ▶ High-stakes
- ▶ **Outcomes aligned with narrative**



Choice Poetics

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(this work is only a beginning)

Questions?



- ▶ Choice poetics
 - ▶ Modes of engagement
 - ▶ Choice idioms
 - ▶ Dimensions of player experience

Example Choice

