

*“Building the Future and Keeping the Past Alive  
Are One and the Same Thing”—A Rhetorical Analysis  
of the “Metal Gear Solid” Saga*

SVEN DWULECKI

## One Game to Awe Them All

War has changed. It's no longer about nations, ideologies, or ethnicity. It's an endless series of proxy battles fought by mercenaries and machines. War—and its consumption of life—has become a well-oiled machine. War has changed. ID-tagged soldiers carry ID-tagged weapons, use ID-tagged gear. Nano-machines inside their bodies enhance and regulate their abilities. Genetic control, information control, emotion control, battlefield control. Everything is monitored and kept under control. War has changed. The age of deterrence has become the age of control. All in the name of averting catastrophe wrought by weapons of mass destruction. And he who controls the battlefield controls history. War has changed. When the battlefield is under total control war becomes routine (Globalgamereport 2008: 1:24-3:00).

This introductory monologue leaves no doubt that the world of *Metal Gear Solid* has taken a turn for the worst in its last instalment. As we take a closer look at this opening scene, we see how a game exposition may serve as a forward glimpse of upcoming dystopian events; we also remark the highly rhetorical character of the game. The monologue describes how the entire world became one giant war theatre while structuring its content deliberately through the tagline “war has changed”. Parallelisms and epistrophes emphasize the importance of structural changes in society. At first glance the visual layer seemingly contradicts the narrator, as pictures of a

convoy in a Middle Eastern environment draw comparisons to the Afghanistan or Iraq conflicts yet both levels reinforce each other in order to create a strong connection between contemporary society and potential dystopian outcomes in a nearby future. The state of total warfare marks the apex of a tetralogy that seeks a match among videogames. Its highly developed rhetoric is often attributed to Hideo Kojima who will be regarded as the orator of this game franchise.

The primary goal of this chapter is to investigate the basic factors that videogame orators can utilize to engage their audience(s). The *Metal Gear Solid* saga serves as an excellent subject for investigation, considering it covers about twenty years of videogame history while being credited as one of the most influential games of all time (GamesRadar Staff 2015). The first step is to clarify the reason for videogames being a difficult medium for rhetorical intervention. Secondly, the analyzed game franchise *Metal Gear Solid* is to be introduced. While its vast narrative would overextend the limitations of this chapter, it is necessary to understand the basic dystopian themes and acknowledge their rhetorical presentation. The core unit *Painting a Picture with Pixels* introduces the four basic levels of game rhetoric: stage, agents, agency, and immersion fractures, the last one of which is one of four new theoretical concepts. Immersion fractures and its antonym, immersion shatters, will be equally introduced as ludo-performative stasis and the *homunculus digitalis*. The former describes the necessity to engage in the activity of playing in order to activate narrative or persuasive content, while the latter explains how the game’s artificial intelligence serves as proxy for distance communication.

## Videogames and Rhetoric—An Unlikely Couple

Games can be just as persuasive as speeches or books. A longstanding misconception of videogames is their seemingly limited ability to transmit meaningful messages. In the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* [*Historical Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*] one may read that games have no persuasive capabilities whatsoever (Pekar 2009: col. 1069). Many consumers might verify that statement with common phrases such as “It’s just a game” or “Nothing more than a game”. But does that equal a “Game Over” for any kind of game rhetoric? Not at all. The rhetoric of videogames is a strikingly under-researched field and scholars has just begun to examine how games develop unique means to attract its users.

Gonzalo Frasca's theory of simulation and Ian Bogost's procedural rhetoric might be considered cornerstones of persuasion research in games. According to Gonzalo Frasca, the core element of videogames is simulation. The idea is best explained with the simple example of *Microsoft Flight Simulator*. This game imitates the behavior of planes under different circumstances and represents its natural real life abilities (Frasca 2003: 223f). Bogost combined this idea with Aristotle's theory of rhetoric. Procedural rhetoric is considered here to be "the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions, rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures" (Bogost 2007: ix). A rhetorician is enabled to influence his audience by creating rules within the game that represent the nature of any given system through the simulation of procedures. The orators can utilize the communicative power of computers in form of procedural rhetoric. Bogost describes in *Persuasive Games* his understanding of digital texts and their persuasive potential:

I suggest the name *procedural rhetoric* for the new type of persuasive and expressive practice at work [...]. *Procedurality* refers to a way of creating, explaining, or understanding processes. And processes define the way things work: the methods, techniques, and logics that drive the operation of systems, from mechanical systems like engines to organizational systems like high schools to conceptual systems like religious faith. Rhetoric refers to effective and persuasive expression. Procedural rhetoric, then, is a practice of persuading through processes in general and computational processes in particular (Bogost 2007: 2).

The term "system" is of major importance in his theory. Bogost does not align himself with the systems theorists like Luhmann or Esposito et al., but remains loyal to his computer science background. For him, computers are systems which are capable of understanding and executing rules and exactly this feature makes them a promising object of study. For Bogost "the ability to execute a series of rules fundamentally separates computers from other media" (Bogost 2007: 4). This so-called procedurality is the crucial criterion of distinction. Jonathan Lessard concisely defines the exact meaning of this term as such:

[Procedurality] describes an object whose actual manifestation results from the strict application of a specific set of rules (or procedures) to a particular context. Procedurality allows for the delivery of responses to changes in input and setting. [...] Being particularly suited to the rapid carrying out of large sets of instructions, computers have become a natural medium for procedural objects (Lessard 2014: 407).

Therefore, computers are machines that generate rule-based replies. Yet these replies require at their inner core a structuring mind and—in case of communicational intentionality—a strategic communicator. Bogost utilizes this leverage point and defines procedural rhetoric as “a technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created” (Bogost 2007: 3). The remaining question refers to the extent to which Bogost’s understanding of rhetoric can withstand the demands set by scholars in rhetorical studies. Bogost concentrates his theory exclusively on Aristotle’s work on argumentation (*logos*). Following Bogost’s theses, computers are capable to represent regularities in our actual world through their simulative nature. These representations, however, are not complete argumentative schemes, but merely enthymemes. Only the participation of the recipient can reveal the silent premise of the argument. It leads the user towards active interaction with the theme while it also forces her to reflect about the situation at hand. A procedural enthymeme would, therefore, result in a situation where “the player *literally* fills in the missing portion of the syllogism by interacting with the application, but that action is constrained by the rules” (Bogost 2007: 34). The orator becomes the decisive force that determines which rules are implemented and therefore transmit meaning<sup>1</sup>.

## The *Metal Gear Solid* Saga—A Synopsis of Dystopian Motives

The main theme of the series deals in general with militarism with all its facets and nuances. Tobias Meißner describes the achievement of *Metal Gear Solid* as such:

Although the game deals with the use of violence and militaristic precision [...], cause and morality are repeatedly questioned in an unusual insistent kind of way. During the constant radio-contact with combat head office, all schemes of loyalty and motivations are uncloaked as a complex construct of disinformation and delusion (Meißner, Mertens 2002: 89f)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Bogost’s insufficient transformation of Aristotle’s theories is addressed in a separate paper *Advertisers Beyond Borders*, which is to be published in Polish by Facta Ficta Research Centre in a forthcoming book *50 twarzy popkultury [50 Shades of Popular Culture]*.

<sup>2</sup> Translated from: „Obwohl das Spiel von Gewaltanwendung und militärischer Präzision handelt [...] werden auf ungewöhnlich insistierende Weise immer wieder Sinn und Moral in Frage gestellt. Während des andauernden Fundverkehrs mit der Einsatzbasis entpuppen sich sämtliche scheinbar festgefügt Schemata von Loyalität und Motivation als komplexes Geflecht aus Desinformation und Selbsttäuschung“. If not stated otherwise, all translations from German are mine.

The narrative has evolved over time into a grand scale criticism of developments within contemporary society and refers to its dangerous dystopian potential. Unlike other intellectual properties that focus on specific themes, yet tell an independent story with each game, *Metal Gear Solid* constitutes a grand tale of human struggle to prevent rising dystopia and displays conflicting personal vision of a utopian society. *Metal Gear Solid* set the standard and revealed the bright future of modern video game rhetoric.

*Metal Gear Solid* (also *MGS1*) is regarded as the cradle of the series. Released in 1998, it was an exclusive title for the Sony PlayStation and subject of a remake for Nintendo's GameCube in 2004 under the subtitle *The Twin Snakes* (Lechner 2012a). The story takes place in a not so distant future of 2005 at Shadow Moses Island; a nuclear waste disposal facility to the public eye and a secret black ops R&D site below the surface. The main protagonist, Solid Snake, is sent to stop members of his former unit *FOXHOUND* (Lechner 2012b). These rogue agents threaten the US president with several nuclear warheads that they have captured while taking over the facility. By doing so, they gained control of the top-secret super-weapon called *Metal Gear REX*, which becomes the constant theme throughout the series and after which the series is named. REX is a bipedal weapon system that allows launching nuclear warheads from any location without the need of rocket propulsion. These projectiles would be undetectable for satellites and end the doctrine of mutual assured destruction in favour of its owner's victory. Throughout the game, the player realizes that many of her early assumptions about the roles and power dynamics within the scenario are different than expected and they hint towards a dystopian society.

Dystopian ideas reoccur throughout the *Metal Gear Solid* saga and *MGS1* lays out the ground work for it. In the very beginning of the game, the plot suggests a potential dystopian outcome if the player fails in her mission. Foxhound's threat of using nuclear weapons as a bargaining chip is a direct reference to the continued real life threat of MUF (Material Unaccounted For) and its destructive potential in the hands of terrorists (Office for Nuclear Regulation 2006, KefkaProduction 2016: 48:00-49:40). Likewise, the presence of genetically enhanced soldiers as well as human clones alludes to structural changes in the military. Instead of searching and training humans to become better combatants, gene manipulations shall engineer the qualified specialists (KefkaProduction 2016: 13:00-14:38). Humans lose their value as individuals and are represented as tools. This narrative framework perfectly supports the

gameplay. Instead of buying into these ideological premises delivered by the antagonists, the player always has to keep her cover and preserve lives by not engaging in direct conflicts. Overall, the topic of weaponization is present not only through human enemies. The secret development of super weapons like Metal Gear REX is a Janus-faced element. The idea of superior battle equipment as a solution to the conflict encapsulates the utopian hope of militarists willing to reach a distinct pivot point, at which confrontation is useless because one power massively surpasses the other. However, the game clearly states repeatedly that such weapon systems are not tied to a certain entity (KefkaProduction 2016: 4:54:23-4:54:43). Eternal warfare is an equally likely scenario portrayed in the game as well as the danger of a single dangerous individual abusing the destructive potential of such superior weapons.

Released 2001, *Metal Gear Solid 2—Sons of Liberty* was the flagship product for a new *Playstation 2* and took an unexpected narrative turn. In 2007 Snake has left the military and founded “Philanthropy” with his friend Otacon. This fictional NGO pursues the quest to stop the distribution of Metal Gear units. In a prologue level, the player sneaks into a tanker just to witness how Revolver Ocelot, one of his opponents from *MGS1*, steals a Metal Gear Ray unit and sinks the entire tank. Two years later, the protagonist of the game infiltrates the offshore clean-up facility Big Shell that was constructed to deal with the massive oil spillage of the sunken tanker. Like in the first game, the agent enters the scenery by diving. In an iconic homage of *MGS1*, the character lifts his breathing mask in the first elevator and shocks the audience. Instead of Solid Snake, the player is in control of a new character with the code-name *Raiden*. This rookie agent must fight against a group of rogue agents called *Dead Cell* that threaten to destroy the facility.

If the story sounds familiar at this point, it is neither a coincidence nor laziness of its creators, but a dystopian narrative of data control that is revealed over the course of *MGS2*. Raiden turns out to be the king’s pawn in the elaborate plot of The Patriots. This secret-society planned and staged the entire attack on Big Shell in order to “create” a second Solid Snake (Stanton 2015). After the Shadow Moses incident, Solid Snake has become a legend. By posing the same challenges to another talented soldier, The Patriots hoped to engineer a new superior fighter (Lechner 2012c). As a result, the player has to face enemies that highly resemble the foes from the first *MGS* title. The dystopian narrative is interwoven in every part of *MGS2*. The Patriots not only are a threat to a liberal society by secretly taking over the economy, military, and politics but they also execute programs to restructure society (Howell 2016). The

entire game refers back to the questions of the first game and goes a step further. The idea of weaponization is extended to the flow of information in the form of „Arsenal Gear”. This new super weapon not only is a giant battle station but contains the super-computer *GW*. It was designed to integrate itself into the internet and serves as an instrument for information control with the power to alter or delete any form of digital data (KefkaProduction 2013a: 03:16-56-03:19:50). Taking into account that *MGS2* was released in 2001, it is a strikingly accurate prediction of up-coming ideas like the *PRISM* surveillance program. Total information control as a way to reorganize and control society is one of the most explicitly described dystopian nightmares presented in the saga.

*Metal Gear Solid 3—Snake Eater* goes back to the future with its audience and says “Welcome to the Jungle”. The game series, released in 2004, does not continue its narrative path of an imminent future, but it moves back to the year 1964. In the middle of the Cold War, the player gets to understand how the legendary Big Boss earned his namesake in the rain forests of the USSR. *MGS3* is a James Bond-esque tale of loyalty and betrayal. Focusing this time on the agents, the dystopian narrative poses the question of soldiers losing any meaning due to the rise of super weapon such as *Metal Gear* (KefkaProduction 2013b: 02:02:07-02:04:35). This super weapon serves again as a metaphor for the strife to raze out established power structures. Once more, militarists’ utopian hopes collide with the overall dystopian consequences.

The Cold War is reframed and understood as the seed of dystopian futurism. While the player is aware that no dramatic negative incident could have happened in this timeline due to the a priori knowledge of the franchise to that point, several distinct moments hint towards the origin of future problems dating back to these events. A very prominent moment is the dialogue between Snake and Aleksandr Granin. It turns out that the former director of the weapon design bureau is the inventor of the *Metal Gear* concept (KefkaProduction 2013b: 01:24:42-01:25:36). His designs at that time were too advanced to be realized but marks the rise of a dystopian phantasy slowly realizing itself. The same holds true for *The Patriots*. Their origin is intensely discussed in the game and states that a vast secret fund to finance the war effort against Nazi Germany created the precursor of this organization and explains its source of influence. This scene can be interpreted as “a typical dystopian confrontation between equally impersonal instances of *The Lord of Logos* and *The Enemy of the State*” (Maj 2013: 71). Snake represents the rebel that tries to single-handedly overthrow the Russian forces. Meanwhile, Granin can be understood as a

Lord of Logos. Despite his discharge, he keeps shaping history behind the curtains—originally, as the architect of Russian military power, later as the traitor who allowed to raise Metal Gear technology in the west. In both cases, his acts lay the foundation for the entire dystopian narrative frame of the MGS-saga. He is the untouchable puppet master pulling the strings, whose death can only be caused by a mentally deranged antagonist, and still it has no impact on his overall legacy.

*Metal Gear Solid 4—Guns of the Patriots* leaves the past behind and confronts the gamer with a possible dystopian future. The game, released in 2008, was again a flagship title for Sony and its *Playstation 4*. *MGS4* offers the most complex storyline so far and reunites different narrative threads. The player is back in control of Solid Snake. The protagonist body ages at an accelerated pace due to a genetic malfunction and has only very limited time to live. “War has changed” (Globalgamereport 2008: 1:24-1:28) is the main theme under which the game presents various dystopian notions. Most importantly, this tag line sums up the entire experience of the game that the player gains. Not only have the pacing and controls changed in comparison to the older *MGS* games, but so has the storyworld.

In 2014 unfolds militaristic dystopia in which large private military companies dictate world events. Technological advancements of all kind further extend their might by increasing effectiveness and progressing dehumanization of the individual soldier. Meanwhile, the series antagonist, Revolver Ocelot, plans to overthrow The Patriots and re-establish the mercenaries’ utopia *Outer Heaven*. Originally founded by the deceased Big Boss, *Outer Heaven* stands for an army without a nation that only responds to its own agenda. At this pivotal point, it is most apparent how “utopian impulses” become the driving force in the narrative of the game franchise (Jameson 2005: 5). Each antagonist operates on a utopian impulse that motivates the character to restructure society. In the end, a utopian hope’s origins lie in a dystopian weapon: the *FOXDie* virus serves as a blueprint for *FOXALIVE*—a computer virus that destroys the entire surveillance and power structure of The Patriots (*MGS 2008*). As a result, society regains a chance to negotiate a new social contract.



## Painting a Picture with Pixels—Fundamentals of Dystopian Game Rhetoric

Videogame rhetoric operates on four levels. Like other pieces of art, games consist of a multilayered fabric of individual components that (if assembled in a purposeful manner) may establish a game's rhetoric. In order to deliver a more comprehensible picture, games can be imagined as an empty canvas. The artist's obligation is to add content to this hollow realm until the intended status has been reached. All games originate from the state of non-being and transform into a virtually shaped form. Nonetheless, they still carry this core as a final product. Only the player's interaction unfolds the entire magnitude of textual information to the audience. This state can be described as *ludo-performative stasis*. As long as no one plays the game, its contained information remains locked. Ludic interaction dissolves this stasis, yet pure interaction may not reveal all the content embedded in the procedural structure of such artefacts. It is entirely dependent on the ludic performance of the player to what extent information is revealed. Consequently, videogames remain stuck in the nexus between rhetoricians' dystopia and utopia. Unplayed or unrecognized persuasive texts within a game become in the virtual realm space of non-existence. These remain invisible to the eye of the user and can be described as a dystopian nightmare for any strategic communicator. However, successful reception by the audience shall be considered the utopia of the persuader. It is rarely seen by its creator, often only imagined in its mind and only traceable with modern technology<sup>3</sup>. Strategically thinking rhetoricians strive for such insights in order to improve their set of instruments (*organon*). These tools create and embed persuasive messages in videogames and communicate those across the time and space. They establish a multidimensional construct that allows to gain influence over its audience throughout different levels. In order to differentiate those distinct layers, four dimensions shall be introduced in the following chapters and be dissected in a more thorough manner: *Stage, Agents, Agency, and Immersion Fractures*.

<sup>3</sup> One of the most effective methods of tracking player progression are so called trophy or achievement systems which record player performance and reward certain in-game accomplishments with digital badges or points.

## Stage

The groundwork for every game is the virtual world itself. Standing in front of the imaginative white canvas, the rhetorician may start a picture with the storyworld. None of the upcoming structures—neither agents nor agency—can be built without the circumventing elements that position them and their relations. Games are not defined by mere encounters, but of those encounters embedded in their surrounding environment. Just like an empty space signifies a realm of infinite opportunities and requires the audience's creativity to fill in the visual gap (*totum pro parte*), so does a fully developed environment, narrowing itself down by referring to a specific place (*pars pro toto*). Nonetheless, these places allow for the rhetoric of proxemics. The way a space is arranged, its defined limitations and embedded references, determines how recipients can abstract from these virtual worlds an impulse for action in the real world. Metaphoric and exploratory stages are two examples of rhetorical intervention in the *Metal Gear Solid* franchise.

A prime example of the structural importance of the stage is *Shadow Moses Island*. This fictional space is the origin for the hero's journey of Solid Snake, the main protagonist. Ludo-performative mechanics were already present in the first game, for instance, they appeared in a segment in which the player has a thermo-sensitive key card. Only if the player understands that through spending a specific amount of time in a freezing warehouse and respectively a furnace in order to change the shape of the key card will one be able to progress. Therefore, the stage itself became an intrinsic part of the game's mechanic. However, more interestingly is an overarching comparison between the nuclear disposal facility in its first and the last game's appearance.

In *MGS4*, Shadow Moses Island serves as a place of remembrance equally to the players, as it does to Snake. The level's start frames the spatial significance with a rhetorical device that is explained later onwards as an immersion fracture. Without any explanation, the player finds herself confronted with a game passage from *MGS1*. To be more precise, the game presents the second level of Shadow Moses Island—the chopper landing zone in front of the main gate. *MGS4* emulates all aspects of the original title, including visuals and gameplay mechanics. After reaching the air vent, the game reframes this short level as Snake's dream. This scene is significant in two respects. Firstly, instead of using the visually updated version of Shadow Moses Island, the player is transferred back into a gaming experience dating back twenty

years from the release of *MGS4*. These cues express not only the past time for Snake but also for the franchise itself and those players who stuck to the game franchise. Secondly, in the moment Snake suddenly awakens, the overall game world is depicted in the usual graphics; however, his head remains in the *PS1* version for a second before being replaced by its current counterpart. This moment is a harbinger for the upcoming gameplay element that shows how Snake and the loyal player refer their current experiences to the original Shadow Moses Incident. Throughout the entire level on Shadow Moses Island, Snake passes through iconic spaces of the military complex. As he reaches these spaces, audio flashbacks are triggered. The player can listen to specific audio files present in the original game. For Snake and the players familiar with *MGS1* this point marks the close connection between spatial location, auditory narration and ludic action. In this instance the virtual stage is the trigger for memories and offers a chance for comparison. While the fictional world of *Metal Gear Solid* deals with the same object—Shadow Moses Island—the player is confronted with a real-life progression. The game mechanics of the original game are actively (re)experienced in the beginning of the level and contrasted by the visual and mechanical advancements of the game. While Snake narrates in the beginning of the game how the world has changed, the players experience that change most prominently during this level. Forced to feel the limitations of the past, experiencing established progress between these game systems and finally witnessing the connection between past and present helps the player to understand how the world of *MGS* has dramatically changed. This act of procedurally established comparison creates a powerful rhetoric. It combines the different levels of a storyworld into a unified experience of considerable transition. It is a place of remembrance.

## Agents

The second level of rhetoric creation is performed by agents. They are the main subject and focus of any game. Like no other medium, games profit from nearly limitless possibilities. Prior to digital entertainment, a rhetorician was restricted by the availability of recourses and structural determinators. Without the power of computer simulation, films can only represent what is present in front of the lens. If a producer could not find an actor with the right looks or enough talent, the problem cannot be resolved. The highly praised written medium *book* is even more limited. It required from the reader a sufficient amount of imagination to transfer the writing

descriptions into a proper image in her mind’s eye. Videogames can create everything that is necessary in their virtual reality. Only the abilities of the orators set limitations. Like books, games can present everything that did, could or might exist. However, the mode of perception is different. While books merely communicate through the written word, games can freely choose between visual and auditory channels as well as different semiotic codes. Provided with distinct output devices, like a *DualShock* controller, even tactile feedback is possible. These structural determinators pose a severe threat on the orator’s abilities for distance communication. A rhetorician can hardly predict circumstances of reception. Games hold the potential to solve this issue.

The artificial intelligence (AI) of a game constitutes a *homunculus digitalis*. The *homunculus* is originally an alchemistic theory (Lachman 2006: 7-10). It refers to the creation of an artificial life form. In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Goethe’s *Faust* both protagonists strive towards this goal (Lachman 2006: 7-10). Their digital counterparts have unusual rhetorical qualities. The AI offers a so-far untapped pool of opportunities for persuasive actions. The most natural rhetorical situation is the face-to-face communication (Knappe 2009: 14). Distance communication equals a one-sided letter exchange where the only feedback is delivered through a common acquaintance. Distance communication is problematic due to its lack of options for intervention. The orator is forced to anticipate the situation of reception without or with just limited insight into its specific configuration. For instance, a novelist can hardly predict who is going to buy his or her book, unless it is sold in very specific book stores with a small target group. The same applies to advertisement. A marketer might envision a certain mode of reception, but has almost no influence over the precise positioning of the posters. Videogames suffer under the same basic principle, but profit from procedural adaptability. The game creator cannot sit next to each and every player, but the AI can. The *homunculus digitalis* can represent the creator and communicate in his place. This proxy can be filled with a wide array of commands. According to its core definition, the options within a game are always limited<sup>4</sup>. Although it might encapsulate thousands—if not millions—of combinatory options, there is a curb. If the orator addresses each of these choices by programming

<sup>4</sup> According to Johan Huizinga (1950: 13), Roger Caillois (1961: 10) or Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2003: 96) games are rule-based. This predetermines all possible outcomes within the game.

a procedural set of rules, the *homunculus digitalis* is theoretically capable of addressing each action of the player with a proper response. The effort can be immense, however, its advantage is obvious. While the author is bound by his physical presence, a digital agent can be easily multiplied and distributed. It can adjust and configure its strategies in accordance with situational needs. A simple example is built into every MGS-game. At the beginning of the game, the player is asked about her previous knowledge of the series. Depending on the answer, the game adjusts. For instance, in *Snake Eater* the player shall communicate which title she prefers. If *MGS1* is chosen, the stamina bar will decrease slower, while *MGS2* will result in Naked Snake wearing a Raiden mask. The *homunculus digitalis*' influence takes place on a macro level, controlling a segment of the game secretly.

## Agency

Agency is the driving force behind any agent's action—especially the player's. Agency is often described as “a person's ability to control their actions and, through them, events in the external world” (Haggard, Tsakiris 2009: 242). Game characters only seemingly possess this ability. The *homunculus digitalis* serves its creator's will and simply executes orders. Its simulation of human features, like agency, is the result of rhetorical consideration to convey a sense of likeness. Agency is more relevant for the player and plays a central role for any persuasive intervention due to the permanent danger of *reactance*. This state of perceived threat to one's freedom of action increases mental defences and lowers the likelihood of persuasion (Gröppel-Klein, Königstorfer, Terlutter 2010: 129). Videogames are especially prone to this problem. As mentioned before, the rhetoric of games is subjugated by its necessity of offering a choice to the player. Consequently, the creation of procedural links between agency and causal effects serves a clearly rhetorical goal.

The boss fight against *The Sorrow* exemplifies how game mechanics can express agency. This enemy appears several times in *Snake Eater*. What is noteworthy is the circumstance that within the narrative continuum of *MGS The Sorrow* died about two years before the first encounter with Snake. The Sorrow is a materialized ghost who tries to protect The Boss. The showdown between the unlikely opponents takes place at a long river. Snake must move upstream to reach his next destination. The Sorrow's prime ability is to reanimate the souls of the dead and uses his skill to impede Snake's advance. The boss fight's mechanics are crafted in such a manner that

they actively respond to prior actions by the player. The more enemies that have been killed up to this point in the game, the more ghost enemies that have to be dealt with. These antagonists cannot be attacked by Snake. Evasion is the sole option to prevent damage here. The procedural link between violence and mental damage creates a strong argument against the act of killing. With every eliminated opponent, the risk of damage increases in this level and reduces the likelihood to succeed. The so often bemoaned lack of consequence for virtual murder is a vital game mechanics. If the player would have chosen to refrain from any lethal methods, only the ghosts of the dead Cobra Unit members would be present, who died no matter which solution the player picked. Each ghost can be interpreted as the felt guilt that is linked to the act of ending a human life. If a certain amount victim is surpassed, the mental damage is unavoidable. Congruously, the only way for Snake to win this fight is to die. After using a fake death pill or actively being killed by The Sorrow, the player has a short timeframe to use a revival pill. To a certain extent this game mechanic demands retribution for committed offenses. The player will be confronted with her choices so far in the game. At its core, it puts the question of necessity: Was is absolutely necessary to kill these soldiers and was it worth the now occurring trouble? In the game that heavily favours stealth over action, this question ties back to the realization that murder is a last resort and a consequence to prior failure to solve a task without brute force. The next example is quite the opposite, declaring consequences first and following up on those threats much later in the game.

## Immersion Fractures

The most promising level of persuasive intervention is a phenomenon that shall be called immersion fracture. It has become a rarely challenged assumption that immersion is the holy grail of videogame design (Pulsipher 2008). The videogame user shall forget about all her surroundings, dive into a virtual reality, and feel as a meaningful part of this alternative existence. This mental swap between worlds is a concept, not new at all, to human kind. Aristotle's idea of *catharsis* anticipates a certain degree of immersion in order to emotionally respond to the drama on the stage (Wolf 2013: 42). Games operate on very similar assumptions. If the fictional world is experienced on an equal level to the actual world, messages of all kind may be transferred. At this point, a new concept of digital rhetoric shall be introduced, i.e. immersion fractures. While most developers strive towards the total immersion of

the user, I argue, by contrast, that a well-crafted strategic use of immersion interrupting actions can actively support the wider rhetorical goal. Immersion fractures shall be called all phenomena that deliberately deconstruct the immersive effects of videogames and replace it with the direct address of the gamer. This new term should not be understood as a statement against immersion, nor is it the intention of the author to doubt that the quest for more immersion is in general a proven method to keep players in the game. However, immersion also entails a problematic aspect of all fictional world theories. Taking into consideration the words of German rhetoric researcher Joachim Knape, rhetoric only takes place in so-called “normal communication” frames, while art is an enpragmatic realm that is not only distinctively different from the actual world but also moves within the sphere of “special communication”—special types of communication that lift *Gricean Maxims* of communication<sup>5</sup>. These maxims postulate four basic rules that establish communication: avoid obscurity of expression, avoid ambiguity, be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity), and be orderly (Grice 1975: 46). Art is not bound to these rules and neither are games. In other words, due to the fact that games do not exclusively portray the world in its current state, it supposedly lacks persuasive power—at least, if one follows the predominant theory. In order to become rhetorically relevant, game developers may apply immersion fractures to communicate pragmatic messages to its audience<sup>6</sup>. In the concrete case of videogames, this means that an immersion fracture occurs within a game session by consciously breaking the fictional/ludic frame and establishes for a short instance a direct contact with the player. In a manner of speaking, the game characters stop interacting with each other and instead start addressing to the gamer.

In order to support this concept, I would like to refer to Roland Barthes and his thoughts on the photography in *La chambre claire* [*Camera Lucida*] (Barthes 1981). Barthes created the twin concepts of *studium* and *punctum* that was meant to be applicable to all kinds of art; therefore, it can be easily transferred to the videogame realm. The primary mode of access for Barthes is *studium*, directly relating to the Latin route “to be invested in” (Barthes 1981: 26). The recipient engages with the photography,

<sup>5</sup> The original terms are *Normal-* and *Sonderkommunikation*. Both are further explained under the following article (Knape 2008: 894-927).

<sup>6</sup> There are certainly other means to persuade a gamer with(in) games. This paper argues that immersion fractures allow for rhetorical interaction within the standard communication standards. The way games can be used to endorse products and brand through games is discussed in further detail in the aforementioned text *Advertisers Beyond Borders*.

analyses it and tries to combine individual with cultural knowledge to decode the intertextual semiotic codes. The gamer engages precisely in the same manner. The game is literally *studied*, meaning deconstructed, and allows the player to successfully interact in the digital world. Under perfect circumstances, the player experiences the state of immersion. The second mode of entrance is very different and described by Barthes with the following words: "This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the studium with my sovereign consciousness), it is the element which rises from the scene, shoot out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. This second element which will disturb the studium I shall therefore call *punctum*" (Barthes 1981: 26). Barthes perceives this wound to be the source of power for many pieces of art to captivate people (Barthes 1981: 27). In the realm of videogames, the metaphorical wound that breaks the studium finds its equivalent in the immersion fracture. Like the punctum, it breaks the studium (in that case immersion) and replaces it with something painfully remarkable.

Originating from this line of thought, the term immersion fracture is consciously crafted. It signifies a specific relationship between the intensity of immersion suspension and its rhetorical influence. Like the fracture of a bone, its intensity of destruction determines the pain that is caused. Immersion fractures can be compared with moderate bone fractures. They cause pain (*punctum*), but cause for a limited time a stronger bond (*systasis*). The equivalent to the medical callus is, rhetorically speaking, persuasion (Knappe 2000: 34). For some time after the immersion fracture, the player is captivated by this extraordinary occurrence. Both instances might lose their intensifying influence, however, the memory of this moment remains. Immersion fractures are unique moments and stand out in a game. In order to do so, the inflicted intensity of disruption is a key aspect. Again, the medical comparison helps to grasp the differences. A small, clean break does not cause the creation of a callus. In a game, tiny fractures might not be consciously understood by the player. They fail to cause the necessary pain Barthes described. Conversely, if the force turns out to be too great and the damage too intense, the entire immersion collapses. As a result, the player may perceive the game to be deficient. This occurrence could be understood as an immersion shatter and defines the antonym for immersion fractures. While immersion fractures serve as a useful and intentional effect, immersion collapses are unintentional failures to sustain the suspension of disbelief and hurt its author's intention. As a consequence, the creation of effective immersion fractures is a calculated undertaking that requires caution and utmost calibration of



force. Hideo Kojima proved himself to be an elaborate artist who frequently used immersion fracture to awe his audience and communicate messages beyond the game relevant realm.

The boss fights against *Psycho Mantis* are prime examples of immersion fractures. The *Metal Gear Solid* saga never frowned upon supernatural elements. As his name already indicates, Psycho Mantis is a psychic, blessed with the ability to read the mind of his opponents (Concelmo 2007). While other abilities, like levitation, are certainly noteworthy, it is his defining feature that exemplifies the mechanics behind immersion fractures at its best. This reoccurring foe shall be discussed for his appearances in *MGS1* and *MGS4*. The player first encounters Mantis in the head bureau of the Shadow Moses Island. In order to prove his supernatural abilities to Solid Snake (and the player alike), he involves himself in a triad of challenges in with each challenge is more difficult than the previous one. At first, Mantis tries to prove his ability of mind reading after elaborating upon the playstyle of the gamer. Fundamentally, this is a verbalized scoreboard that responds to the number of kills, alarms, or saves caused by the individual player (Concelmo 2007). This is not entirely impressive, unless the player also possesses other Konami games. In that case, the *homonculus digitalis* reads its save files, identifies Konami titles, like *Castlevania* or *Pro Evolution Soccer* and asks whether these games were enjoyable (Concelmo 2007). The direction of addressing is important. With Solid Snake being introduced as a technology-averse person, it is highly unlikely that Mantis is truly addressing Snake, yet instead talking with the player. The player becomes a witness of a shift in communication mode. In that instance, Kojima is basically ignoring the presence of Snake. The gamer witnesses how the situation develops out of fictional framing, leaves its agents behind, and opens up a brief interplay between Kojima and his addressee. The player is actively rewarded for being a customer of *Konami* prior to the acquisition of *Metal Gear Solid* by unlocking this personalized discourse. Commercial prowess is also rewarded in the next stage of Psycho Mantis ritual of proving himself. As the next step, Mantis exemplifies his telekinetic abilities. If the player owns a *DualShock* controller, the game will properly respond to this. Psycho Mantis keeps ignoring Snake and demands from the player to position the controller on an even surface or floor. Then, Mantis will seemingly move the *DualShock* with the power of his mind. What really takes place is a series of executed commands that active the vibration motors inside the controller. Through the vibrations, the controller will start to move slightly on the floor (Concelmo 2007). Looking at the communication aspect of this scenario,

the frame has widened up again. Instead of just transmitting texts through the digital proxy of Psycho Mantis, Kojima is now directly referring to a larger context. The player is addressed as a player, commanded to enact a series of small tasks in the physical world (instead of the digital one that would be constitutional for normal digital play) and becomes a voyeur of the resulting events outside the screen and in front of herself. After these demonstrations of power, the ludic frame is reinstated and the player seemingly engages in just another boss battle. However, the player is about to enter the third test of Psycho Mantis. In the beginning of this fight, it is impossible to hit the enemy; Mantis evades all bullets, explosives, and physical attacks (Concelmo 2007). He frames those instances as a result of his mind reading abilities thanks to which he discovers Snake's plans. This time, the player has to realize that only by following the demonstrated pattern of immersion fracture one will deal with the situation. The game is impossible to win within the virtual world itself. The *homunculus digitalis* constantly executes the rule that any kind of action will be countered with a reaction, until the player starts to reframe her thinking. It requires a significant alteration in the game's setup. The solution is to pause the game, unplug the controller from slot 1 and insert it in slot two (Concelmo 2007). That way Mantis loses his "connection" to Snake's mind. By uncoupling the gamer's actions and Mantis' reactions, the boss fight becomes winnable. In a subtle manner, the player is persuaded to alter her reference frame from the digital towards the real world. This examples illustrates how immersion fractures enable behavior change and therefore rhetoric even within videogames.

## All Good Things Come to an End

"I'm no hero. Never was, never will be"  
— Solid Snake

This statement is a quite unusual self-description of a main protagonist that functions primarily as a soldier extraordinaire. However, the entire *Metal Gear Solid* saga is unusual with regard to its rhetorical goal. While other games series are frequently in doubt to endorse violence, *MGS* always emphasizes its critical position on the subject of war. It is a tale of the constant struggle of mankind to build a utopia and causing hereby transitory states of dystopia. However, the most remarkable aspect of this franchise lies in its limitless potential to connect with all different aspects of research.

This chapter focuses on *Metal Gear Solid* in order to present the four cornerstones of game rhetoric. As alluded to earlier, every orator working with virtual realities is to paint a picture using pixels. The stage serves as the room that creates relations and allows to connect different levels of gameplay, like Shadow Moses Island does connect the player's/Snake's memories with specific spaces. The agents allow for persuasive intervention. The AI serves as a proxy for the orators and executes his orders. This *homunculus digitalis* allows for a simulation of face-to-face like communication situations. The sense of agency decides over the rhetorical success of the game. Procedural rhetoric allows game designers to create arguments that question decisions already made by the player. Ludo-performative stasis means that as long as no one plays the game, its contained information remains locked. Only ludic interaction dissolves this stasis and activates persuasive content. The concept introduced at the last part of the chapter is the immersion fracture. These strategically placed interruptions allow for short shifts in communication frames. Roland Barthes' modes of perception fit remarkably well in the context of videogames. Immersion fractures are the equivalent of Barth's *punctum*. The antonym immersion shatter expresses the wrongly calibrated utilization of this technique and does not support any rhetorical goal. All these aspects can be found in *Metal Gear Solid*. Hideo Kojima mastered the right measurement of these individual components. His saga is so vast, its narration so complex, and its influence on the industry so extensive that it does not matter how many pages would be filled with the analysis of these exceptional games—with all their strengths and weaknesses—it will remain a scholastic utopian goal.

## Works Cited

- AdamSpencer87 (2013), ‘Metal Gear Solid English HD Cutscenes—Meryl’s Death’, YouTube.com, online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRLeEsBwz4E> [accessed: 30.11.2016].
- Barthes, Roland (1981), *Camera Lucida*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Bogost, Ian (2007), *Procedural Rhetoric*, Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Caillois, Roger (1961), *Man, play, and games*, New York: The Free Press.
- Concelmo, Chad (2007), ‘The Memory Card .03: The Encounter with Psycho Mantis. Web.’, *Destructoid.com*, online: <https://www.destructoid.com/the-memory-card-03-the-encounter-with-psycho-mantis-31477.phtml> [accessed: 30.11.2016].
- Frasca, Gonzalo (2003), ‘Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology’, in: Mark J.P. Wolf, Bernard Perron (eds.), *Video/Game/Theory*, New York: Routledge.
- GamesRadar Staff (2013), ‘The 50 most important games of all time’, *Gamesradar.com*, online: <http://www.gamesradar.com/50-most-important-games-all-time/> [accessed: 30.11.2016].
- Globalgamerepot (2008), ‘Metal Gear Solid 4—Cinematic Opening [HQ]’, YouTube.com, online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bRyzkoJwo4> [accessed: 30.11.2016].
- Grice, Paul (1975), *Logic and conversation*, in: Peter Cole, Jerry L Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and semantics 3: Speech Acts*, New York: Academic Press.
- Gröppel-Klein, Andrea, Königstorfer Jörg, Terlutter Ralf (2010), ‘Reaktanz’, in: Georg Felser (ed.), *Konsumentenpsychologie*, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer.
- Haggard, Patrick, Tsakiris Manos (2009), *The Experience of Agency*, in: *Current Directions in Psychological Science*: 4 (18), online: <http://www.pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/lab/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Haggard-Tsakiris-2009-CurrDirPsych.pdf> [accessed: 30.11.2016].
- Howell, James Clinton (2016), ‘The Patriots’ Legacy—“Who are the Patriots?”—Page 2’, *Metalgearsolid.net*, online: <http://www.metalgearsolid.net/features/patriots-legacy-who-are-the-patriots-2> [accessed: 30.11.2016].

- Huizinga, Johan (1950), *Homo Ludens*, Boston: The Beacon Press.
- Jameson, Fredric (2005), *Archaeologies of the Future*. London: Verso.
- KefkaProduction (2013a), 'Metal Gear Solid 2—The Movie [HD] Full Story', *YouTube.com*, online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5AunfmI8bs> [accessed: 30.11.2016].
- KefkaProduction (2013b), 'Metal Gear Solid 3—The Movie [HD] Full Story', *YouTube.com*, online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zndcY57Tijo> [accessed: 30.11.2016].
- KefkaProduction (2016), 'Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes THE MOVIE—Full Story', *YouTube.com*, online: 19.02.2016.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_WVstq\\_DYYk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_WVstq_DYYk) [accessed: 30.11.2016].
- Knappe, Joachim (2008), *Rhetorik der Künste*, in: Fix Ulla, Gardt Andreas, Knappe Joachim (eds.), *Rhetorik und Stilistik. Ein internationales Handbuch historischer und systematischer Forschung/Rhetoric and Stylistics. An International Handbook of Historical and Systematic Research*, vol. 1, Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Knappe, Joachim (2009), *Rhetorik des Gesprächs*, in: Joachim Knappe (ed.), *Rhetorik im Gespräch*, Berlin: Weidler Buchverlag.
- Knappe, Joachim (2000), *Was ist Rhetorik?*, Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Verlag.
- Lachman, Gary (2006), 'Homuncli, Golems, and Artificial Life', *Quest Magazine*: 1 (94), pp. 7-10.
- Lechner, Maximilian (2012a), 'Metal Gear—Die Geschichte der Metal-Gear-Reihe. Metal Gear Solid (1998)', *Gamepro.de*, online: [http://www.gamepro.de/playstation/spiele/ps3/metal-gear-solid-hd-collection/artikel/metal\\_gear,47437,3004470,6.html#metal-gear-solid-1998](http://www.gamepro.de/playstation/spiele/ps3/metal-gear-solid-hd-collection/artikel/metal_gear,47437,3004470,6.html#metal-gear-solid-1998) [accessed: 30.11.2016].
- Lechner Maximilian (2012b): 'Metal Gear—Die Geschichte der Metal-Gear-Reihe. Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty (2001)', *Gamepro.de*, online: [http://www.gamepro.de/playstation/spiele/ps3/metal-gear-solid-hd-collection/artikel/metal\\_gear,47437,3004470,8.html](http://www.gamepro.de/playstation/spiele/ps3/metal-gear-solid-hd-collection/artikel/metal_gear,47437,3004470,8.html) [accessed: 30.11.2016].

- Lechner, Maximilian (2012c), ‘Metal Gear—Die Geschichte der Metal-Gear-Reihe. *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* (2004)’, *Gamepro.de*, online: [http://www.gamepro.de/playstation/spiele/ps3/metal-gear-solid-hd-collektion/artikel/metal\\_gear,47437,3004470,7.html](http://www.gamepro.de/playstation/spiele/ps3/metal-gear-solid-hd-collektion/artikel/metal_gear,47437,3004470,7.html) [accessed: 30.11.2016].
- Lessard, Jonathan (2014), ‘Procedural’, in: Ryan Marie-Laure, Emerson Lori, Robertson Benjamin J. (eds.), *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Maj, Krzysztof M. (2013), ‘Center of Commandments and Peripheries of Disobedience. The City and The Outlands in Janusz A. Zajdel’s Dystopian Fiction’, in: Efe Duyan (ed.), *Literature and Urban Space*, Istanbul: Mimar Sinan University Press, pp. 69-77.
- Meißner, Tobias, Mertens Mathias (2002), *Wir waren Space Invaders*, Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn Verlag.
- MGS (2008), ‘MGS4 Guns of the Patriots 53: FoxAlive’, *Youtube.com*, online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mHnFjcl58ZY> [accessed: 30.11.2016].
- Office for Nuclear Regulation (2006), ‘An introduction to Material Unaccounted For (MUF)’, *Onr.org.uk*, online: <http://www.onr.org.uk/safeguards/muf.html> [accessed: 30.11.2016].
- Pekar, Thomas (2009), *Spiel*, in: Gert Ueding (ed.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, Vol. 9. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Pulsipher, Lewis (2008): ‘Why Immersion Shouldn’t Be the ‘Holy Grail’’, *Gamasutra.com*, online: [http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/112545/Opinion\\_Why\\_Immersion\\_Shouldnt\\_Be\\_The\\_Holy\\_Grail.php](http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/112545/Opinion_Why_Immersion_Shouldnt_Be_The_Holy_Grail.php) [accessed: 30.11.2016].
- Salen, Katie, Eric Zimmerman (2003), *Rules of Play—Game Design Fundamentals*, Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Stanton, Richard (2015), ‘Metal Gear Solid—Everything you Need to Know about the Entire Series’, *TheGuardian.com*, online: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/sep/07/metal-gear-solid-everything-you-need-to-know-about-entire-series> [accessed: 30.11.2016].

Wolf, Werner (2013), 'Aesthetic Illusion', in: Werner Wolf, Walter Bernhart, Andreas Mahler (eds.), *Immersion and Distance—Aesthetic Illusion in Literature and Other Media*, Amsterdam: Rodopi.