Abstract

This thesis explores how authorship in video games is a complicated, multi-faceted problem. To problematize this, I explore different facets of authorship: how it is problematic and functions as a basic literary concept, filmic authorship through the lens of the *auteur* theory, the difference between multiple authors and co-authors in collective authorship, and game authorship where I inquire into the minutia of blockbuster games and indie games. I also inquire into video game aesthetics, specifically ludic aesthetics, in order to recognize video games as works of art in light of art critics who dispute this idea. To contrast the problem of authorship in video games, I analyze and compartmentalize Hideo Kojima's signature styles in the *Metal Gear Solid* series (1987 – 2015) and *Death Stranding* (2019) in order to recognize a rare case where a video game director has achieved an auteur-like status within the framework of blockbuster (AAA) video game productions. By extrapolating reoccurring characteristics in his games through the lens of the *auteur* theory, I surmise that recognizing video game auteurs, and authorship in video games by extension (individuals and studios alike), is a step towards recognizing video games as works of art with artistic intentions as opposed to being factory-products purely for entertainment.

Acknowledgements

Coming from the discipline of Film- and Media studies, I begin to realize the significance of my previous undergraduate subjects like Film Theory and Aesthetics, and even more recent graduate subject of Indie Games, where I learned the significance of video game aesthetics. Even though films and video games are their own unique artforms, these subjects have been instrumental in my research of Kojima's games, as the cinematic presentation and film techniques overlaps and fuses with the interactive elements. At the end of this long journey, I realize that this thesis is not just the fulcrum of my graduate program, but that every step of my university days up to this point have been influential in order to climb this particular mountain. My journey has been affected by many people, but two mentors have been critical to where I am today.

My martial-arts teacher, Dang Tieu Diep, whose painstaking attention to details with the emphasis on precision and quality from his Kim Son Quang Kung Fu teachings has virtually made an impact in every aspect of my life. This includes writing where each word and sentence should ideally have a meaningful place in any written work. Discipline and patience are tightly connected, and I try to invoke his teachings to the best of my abilities. Thank you, Sifu.

My supervisor, Jan-Nöel Thon, whose meticulous guidance showed me that no *mountain* is unsurmountable with the right knowledge and research, and for pushing me in the right directions when I was at my lowest. Your research and teaching inspires me to follow my dreams and instincts, and as such you have rekindled my hopes and aspirations for the future. You are a true role model whose footsteps I hope to follow someday. Thank you, Jan.

Special thanks to Beate Brockmeyer for quality checking my vocabulary.

My family, my mother Josephine, my father Sven-Erik, and the love of my life Andrea. You are the Promethean fire that fuels my soul with the divine spark to be the best I can be.

Øyvind Itoc Kalsveen, 20.05.2021, Trondheim.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Video games are an interesting medium since they are in a unique position to tell interactive stories where virtually anyone, regardless of culture and background, can immerse themselves in vivid digital worlds through the eyes of their player avatar. Whether it be collecting stars as an Italian plumber, conquering evil with the power of courage, or simply infiltrating a military base disguised in a cardboard box, video games have become an intrinsic part of our modern society, which is virtually played and consumed everywhere in the world across various platforms.

Video games have come a long way since the limitations of 2D technology and pixelated aesthetics of the early 1990s and prior, where video games have become increasingly complex and photorealistic akin to films, following its rapid technological growth just within these past three decades. Consequently, the video game industry has grown into a multi-billion enterprise where in 2019 the global games market were "estimated to generate US$152.1 billion from 2.5 billion gamers around the world" (Stewart 2019, n.pag.). Video games are becoming increasingly more expensive to make, especially blockbuster or AAA-games, where dozens and hundreds of game designers are crucial in order to successfully create a game by modern standards. Even though video game productions have directors and producers just like in film productions, how can one individual, be it self-proclaimed or attributed, take the main credit in a collaborative project where there are so many creative individuals involved with their own artistic imprint?

Authorship in video games, and the notion of video game auteurs, are equally intriguing as they are contested to the fact that virtually any complex video game creation predicates the meticulous effort of team collaboration involving hundreds of skilled game designers and programmers. The Japanese video game designer Hideo Kojima is a peculiar case study because he has achieved an auteur-like status in the video game industry. His stylistic and innovative games have become idiosyncratic with its own creator despite their framework as blockbuster productions with hundreds of developers.

To give some background, the concept of the auteur derives from the *auteur* theory which originated by the French film critics of *Cahiers du Cinema* during the 1950s to forward their general idea that "great filmmakers made great films" before it was solidified as a theoretical theory by the American film critic Andrew Sarris. The *auteur* theory was conceptualized in a time when films had yet to be recognized as a serious art form "[b]ecause it has not been firmly established that the cinema is an art at all" (Sarris 1962, para. 6). Similarly, questions regarding

whether video games are art has been contested by contemporary art critics like Jack Kroll (2000), Robert Ebert (2010) and Jonathan Jones (2012) who dispute their place in The Museum of Modern Art and general attribution as art. As such, game critics see the *auteur* theory as a gateway into the arts by recognizing video game auteurs like Kojima. This highlights my second research question: How can the *auteur* theory, a filmic concept, be applicable to video games?

Video game designers and studios alike are at the mercy of corporate politics and big publishers where the overarching objective is to maximize its profits. Game authorship is contested to the fact that video game productions, especially blockbuster or AAA-games, are expensive enterprises where there is little room for radical experimentations and risky artistic indulgences. Video game scholar Espen Aarseth inquires in his 2005 article "The Game and its Name: What is a game auteur?" that hypothetical game auteurs are "strong, independent artists who will not compromise their vision" (Aarseth 2004, 265) akin to indie game developers. However, he stresses that authorship "is a social category and not a technological one. As Focault claims, 'the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society'" (Aarseth 1997, 172). Simply stating that "Kojima is an auteur" would make this discussion rather limited where I again must emphasize that the idea of authorship is highly contested and ideologically motivated.

The significance of this research is to present an overview of the many facets of authorship, including the *auteur* theory, and how it is problematic and relates to video games and Kojima. The compiled research is based on a wide array of different sources ranging from scholarly articles, books and dissertations to journalistic interviews and articles to video essays and reviews. Even though there is a substantial amount of scholarly research papers on Kojima, most of the discourse around Kojima's games are generally scattered around various journalistic game sites like *IGN* and *Kotaku*. These sites have been instrumental to recount old interviews of Kojima where he clarifies his motivations and goals, and several reviews have been critical in order to understand how his games have been received over the years by players and critics alike.

Kojima is no stranger among scholars of game studies where there are many interdisciplinary research papers like "The Persuasive Aims of *Metal Gear Solid*: A Discourse Theoretical Approach to the Study of Argumentation in Video Games" (Stamenković et al. 2017) and "War and Will: A Multisemiotic Analysis of *Metal Gear Solid 4*" (Ng 2017) to mention a few. Even though much of the discourse around Kojima stems from interview and secondary

journalistic articles, I will extrapolate the more interesting observations of these aforementioned research papers among other to highlight Kojima's signature styles. Having finished most of the work on the present thesis, I was also made aware of a graduate thesis by Jules Patalita (2018) who already had explored Hideo Kojima as a video game auteur. However, I want to stress the complications that entails with recognizing video game auteurs which again is highly ideological and a disservice to game designers who have labored tirelessly and worked under the regime of their directors. I want to problematize authorship in video games and stress its complexity rather than simply recognizing Kojima as an auteur, but by no means do I claim to be the only one to have explored Kojima through the lens of the *auteur* theory.

My research questions are the following including the first two mentioned: How can one individual, be it self-proclaimed or attributed, take the main credit in a collaborative project where there are so many creative individuals involved with their own artistic imprint? How can the *auteur* theory, a filmic concept, be applicable to video games? Why is it important to recognize video games as art? Why is Hideo Kojima a rare case in the study of authorship?

My first research aim is to give an overview of the many facets of authorship including the current state of video game auteurs in relation to blockbuster productions and indie game productions. My second aim is to give a comprehensive analysis of Kojima's games by extrapolating his signature styles to illustrate how he is an emblematic case in the study of game authorship which will hopefully also function as a historical account of Kojima's career as a video game developer. Moreover, I hope to fill the gap with Kojima's 2019 title *Death Stranding* which will hopefully make this thesis the most updated analysis of Kojima's games.

My hypothesis is that Hideo Kojima is a *rare* case of a video game director who has achieved an auteur-like status for following his artistic integrity throughout his career within the framework of blockbuster productions. His games are more idiosyncratic with his personality and brand than the parent company Konami which was responsible for publishing the *Metal Gear* games. However, I also want to stress that video game productions are complex and multi-layered, and that it is important to recognize other less prolific roles beyond the director. Having said that, recognizing video game auteurs is significant in order to relinquish games as mere factory-produced entertainment and recognize games as works of art where artists can voice their concerns about the world and explore the human condition just like with literature and movies.

For chapter one, I will explore several aspects of authorship in the literature review where

there is a well of research ranging from a general inquiry of how authorship is problematic and functions, the difference between multiple authors and co-authors, filmic authorship (the *auteur* theory), and finally game authorship. To give a brief overview, the first section explores the basic notion of authorship through Roland Barthes' famous 1967 anti-author essay "The Death of the Author" and Michel Foucault's 1969 often cited "What Is an Author?". Although these essays may seem archaic in the discussion of authorship in video games, they are emblematic essays in the discussion of authorship where it is my intention to foreground how it is problematic even from a literary point of view. Moreover, I discuss Livingstone's emphasis that authorship predicates sufficient control in order for an intentional, communicative utterance to take place which is relevant to collaborative works where there can be more than one utterance.

The second section of the literature review recounts the historical development of how the *auteur* theory evolved from being a polemic weapon by Francois Truffaut and André Bazin against factory-like produced film during its formative years at the *Cahiers du Cinema* before it was solidified as a theoretical theory by Andrew Sarris. I present different views of central key figures of the *auteur* theory and compare them to each other in order to illustrate its haphazardly growth before it was solidified as a critical theory. This includes Pauline Kael who was a detractor of the *auteur* theory who heavily criticized Andrew Sarris, and André Bazin who was critical to his own colleague Francois Truffaut's narrow view that "only great directors make great films". Despite Pauline Kael's combative criticism of the *auteur* theory, Sarris clarified that the *auteur* theory validates as a critical tool of analysis that which can guide critics to recognize certain directorial patterns according to Sarris' three concentric circles or premises.

The third section of the literature review explores the idea of collective authorship where I clarify the difference between multiple authors and co-authors. The nuances between these two concepts will be discussed in light of: Sondra Bacharach and Deborah Tollefsen's line between genuine authors and contributors; Paisley Livingstone's notion of shared intentions/coauthorship; C. Paul Sellors' problematization of "we-intention" and how individual and collective intentions relate and functions; and Daren Hicks emphasis on power, responsibility and creation as the major forces behind authorship. The purpose of this section is to foreground the discussion of game authorship since video game productions are made by joint-collaborative effort. Moreover, I want to problematize that none of Kojima's games would have been realized with the efforts and skills of his teams, but a comprehensive understanding of co-authorship is critical in order to

recognize the collective intention to realize Kojima's auteur-like vision in his games.

The fourth section of the literature review problematizes game authorship in relation to corporate blockbuster productions and studio culture and why it is complicated to import filmic terms like the *auteur* theory. However, the *auteur* theory will have proved its utility "[i]f the term can help us to say something about the differences and similarities between different kinds of games" (Aarseth 2004, 261-262). In addition, I inquire into different candidates of hypothetical video game auteurs through the lens of Espen Aarseth's 2005 article "The Game and its name: What is a game auteur?" and the prominence of indie games during the mid-2000s. The ideal game auteurs according to Aarseth are "strong, independent artists who will not compromise their vision by merely delivering 'game content' to the distribution pipelines of the industry" (Aarseth 2004, 265) which is why it is worth inquiring into indie games as a phenomenon and its minutia in comparison to blockbuster productions. This is interesting considering that Kojima has been successful in making blockbuster games with the artistic independence akin to indie game developers. Moreover, it is relevant to our discussion of *Death Stranding* which directly employs avant-garde-like aesthetics, and indie game-like aesthetics by extension.

Finally, because video games is an interactive medium which is an amalgam of different artistic disciplines, it is important to recognize video games as a new kind of art with the emphasis on ludic aesthetics (gameplay). This is why the final section of the literature review will discuss aesthetics in relation to Grant Tavinor's 2009 article "Video games as Art" and its criticism in light of art critics like Jack Kroll (2000), Robert Ebert (2010) and Jonathan Jones (2012). The purpose of this final section of the literature review is to prepare the reader with some rudimentary knowledge of video game aesthetics since it is vital for our main analysis of Kojima where he often subverts player expectations by deconstructing preconceived notions of video games by breaking the fourth wall. Consequently, the discourse of video game authorship is tightly connected to the discussion of video games as art whereby Kojima's pioneering game design philosophy show us that video games can be much more than simply entertainment. The literature review will hopefully give the reader an overview of the many concepts of authorship and how it relates to video games. Combined these inquires with some rudimentary understanding of video game aesthetics will hopefully prepare the reader to discern why Kojima is such an emblematic case study of authorship in video games.

For chapter two, the goal of the main analysis is to give a comprehensive understanding

of Kojima's auteur-like signature styles where I analyze and compartmentalize reoccurring characteristics in the audiovisual-, narrative- and ludic aesthetics for the games in question. Because of Kojima's rather extensive catalogue of games, the main analysis will be limited to seven of the mainline *Metal Gear* titles which encompasses the first two progenitor games for the MSX2 system and every numbered title since, and compare them to *Death Stranding* (Kojima Productions, 2019) in order to give a wider understanding of his style and how his authorship has evolved so far. Kojima's games are very complex, story-driven games with dozens of characters where I will give just enough context to illustrate his broader intentions.

The methods I employ varies, but it is a mix between conceptual analysis, in-depth analysis, and comparative analyses of Kojima's selected games in order to discern his signature styles. The purpose of this approach is to give a historical account of his auteurism where each of his games symbolizes a stage in his growth as a video game auteur for good and ill. Distilling Kojima's essence and signatures can be equally gratifying as it can be infuriating since his games are often indulgent in its own minutia: narratively and gameplaywise. This is where the *auteur* theory becomes instrumental in the conclusion chapter where I make a more synthetic analysis of Kojima's signatures through the lens of Andrew Sarris' three premises of the auteur theory: "technical competence", "distinguishable personality" and "interior meaning" (Sarris 1962) in his games. These concepts will be explored in more details in the *auteur* theory section, but these premises can be briefly summarized as hierarchical, concentric circles. The outermost circle predicates the bare technical necessity to be considered an auteur whereby the inner most circle divulges a director's ability to explore complex meanings of the human condition which is "the ultimate glory of the cinema as an art" (Sarris 1962, para. 25).

Hopefully, this research can shed some light on why his games are emblematic in the discussion of authorship and why they are generally interesting as works of art. Having said that, my main objective is to highlight how authorship is problematic, ideological, and complex through its many facets. As unsatisfactory that may sound, it is more or less the most salient takeaway from this thesis: it is complicated. It is not my intention to perpetuate a cult-like glorification of video game directors, but to illustrate that Kojima is a *rare* case of someone who has managed to follow his artistic integrity to use the platform of blockbuster games to tell deep, meaningful stories which reflects his unique personality.

Chapter 1: The Many Facets of Authorship

An Inquiry into Authorship: In Search of a Definition

An author, in the broadest sense, is the creator or originator of any artistic work which is usually attributed but not exclusive to the preoccupation of writing. Andrew Bennet evokes the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition to clarify a "common-sense" idea of the author which is "an individual (singular) who is responsible for or who originates, who writes or composes, a (literary) text and who is thereby considered an inventor or founder" (Bennet 2005, 6). In other words, the work produced followed by the author's action and intention is supposedly sufficient and necessary in connecting a particular work with a particular author. "Authorship, then, amounts to performing certain kinds of actions, such as composing a song, writing the text of a poem or novel, and deciding when the work has been completed" (Livingstone 2016, 1).

There is an inherent desire to understand what certain texts means as human beings are complex creatures in constant search for understanding of themselves and culture at large, but since texts are made by human beings there is also a desire to understand the individuals and the intentions behind the writing. "When engaging a text, we aim to understand what someone intended to convey by producing that text in the way that they did and not just what the text means, either textually or intertextually" (Sellors 2007, 263). But where the idea of an author becomes increasingly complex is in the historical- and literary discourse. How do you position the author's intention and background to their respective works? And can meaning be extrapolated from the author's texts, if at all, without factoring in the author in question?

The author's intention and background in relation to their texts continues to be a focal point of problematization surrounding the discourse of authorship. Those who oppose the idea of the author as an authorial figure "share an anti-intentionalist core that locates meaning at the point of reception" (Sellors 2007, 263) such as Roland Barthes. "The *author* still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews… The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centered on the author" (Barthes 1967, 143). These notions have been extensively analyzed through the lens of Roland Barthes famous 1967 critical essay "The Death of the Author" and Michel Focault's 1969 often cited "What Is an Author?"

Barthes' core criticism in his famous anti-author essay is that the author should be factored out altogether of the interpretation of their text. Barthes was as such critical to traditional literary criticism which elevated the author to that of an Author-God status where he

argues against the idea that "a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning […] but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes 1967, 146). Barthes makes his case explicit: "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing… Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature" (Barthes 1967, 147-148).

Barthes stresses instead the role of the reader in tandem with a more active textual approach, to impart unique findings with modern perspectives by deciphering the text instead of merely regurgitating the author's original meaning and intention. "The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (Barthes 1967, 148).

In summary, according to Barthes there can be no final distilled signifier from the author nor from one reader for that matter since each reader has the capacity to add or distill interesting new aspects of an otherwise old text in light of their own history and culture. The apparent argument against Barthes' idea of the reader is that there is an infinite number of interpretations following an indefinite number of readers across time and cultures. If all interpretations are equally significant then how can one interpretation be more important than another? "[T]here are always an infinite number of possible interpretations available through the unique psychological and cultural matrices of each reader, regardless of the author's intention (Sellors 2007, 264). A hypothetical metric of analysis is still desirable even without the author in mind since it frames and distills value out of a text which is why it arguably helps to limit to some degree to the author's intention at least as a starting point of analysis.

The complexity surrounding the idea of the author, however, still remains prevalent even when Barthes' exclaims: "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes 1967, 148). While Barthes' essay was revolutionary for literary criticism at the time whereby he more or less succeeds in demystifying the hero status of the author, it also ironically brings attention to a subject matter which he with great scrutiny wanted to dispense with. This notion is perhaps best expressed in Michel Focault's essay "What Is an Author?" where he alludes to, and even subtly criticizes, Barthes' essay: "A certain number of notions that are intended to replace the privileged position of the author actually seem to preserve that privilege and suppress the real meaning of his disappearance" (Focault 1969, 207).

Focault's essay, originally delivered as a lecture, was a response and a follow-up to Barthes' anti-author essay. While Focault shares much of Barthes' sentiment that glorification of the author is equally unnatural as it is strange, he problematizes that "[t]he word *work* and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author's individuality" (Focault 1969, 208). Instead of rejecting the idea of the author from the onset, he elaborates that the author does have some role to play in what he coins as the "author function".

Focault problematizes that the author's name also functions as a proper name whereby "one cannot turn a proper name into a pure and simple reference. It has other than indicative functions: more than an indication [...] it is the equivalent of a description" (Focault 1969, 209). In essence, the author's name and the proper name should not be confused with each other where the former is used as a designation and the latter as a description where it becomes severely relevant if an author turned out not to have written a work previously associated with their name.

Furthermore, the author's name functions to classify works under a specific link which is a key function of any library which "permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others" (Focault 1969, 210). The works of J. R. R. Tolkien (*The Hobbit, The Lord of The Rings*) are logically sorted under the literature section of fantasy as opposed to the nonliterary sections of science and history but it also helps to differentiate them from similar fantasy books. But the main characteristic behind Focault's "author function" revolves around a set of beliefs or assumptions in relation to a text's surrounding discourse. "The author function is characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society" (Focault 1969, 211).

First, Focault elaborates that the prominence of the author correlated with the rise of the legal system in concurrence with the growth of the printing press. On the positive side "a system of ownership for texts came into being, author's rights, rights of reproduction, and related matters were enacted" but this also meant "the possibility of transgression attached to the act of writing took on, more and more, the form of an imperative peculiar to literature" (Focault 1969, 212). The printing system and the legal system ensured a symbiotic relation where an author was arguably positioned stronger and protected as copyright holders but could also face legal punitive consequences following transgressive statements against institutions like the Catholic Church.

Second, "[t]he author function does not affect all discourses in a universal and constant way" (Focault 1969, 212). Modern scientific discourse rarely if at all needs to enquire the author

of a textbook since there is an *a priori* notion that complex scientific theories are the product of a collective disciplinary mind, backed by a long tradition of science, where there is no definable author. Conversely, when approaching a literary text, there is a spectrum of questions which ranges from "who wrote it, when, under what circumstances, or beginning with what design? The meaning ascribed to it and the status or value according to it depend on the manner in which we answer these questions" (Focault 1969, 213).There is essentially a proclivity to understand the author's intentions as opposed to a scientific textbook which is not the result of spontaneity.

Third, the "author function" is not spontaneously attributed but "the result of a complex operation that constructs certain being of reason that we call 'author'" (Focault 1969, 213). The intention here is to differentiate between individuals who share the same name while simultaneously problematize whether a given text should be attributed to a particular author. Focault evokes Saint Jerome's four criteria for authentication (or rejection) to illustrate a potential solution which have been practiced by the Christian tradition (Focault 1969, 214):

1. The author is defined as a constant level of value.
2. The author is defined as a field of conceptual or theoretical coherence.
3. The author is conceived as a stylistic unity.
4. The author is seen as a historical figure at the crossroads of a certain number of events.

Fourthly, and finally, the term "author" does not necessarily refer to a single individual as the "author" in question could very well be the "narrator" or even an "alter ego". "[N]either the first-person pronoun nor the present indicative refers exactly to the writer or to the moment in which he writes but, rather, to an alter ego whose distance from the author varies, often changing in the course of the work" (Focault 1969, 215). It would be as such wrong to assume to equate the author with the real flesh and blood writer with the fictitious narrator.

Focault concludes more or less that "the author is not an indefinite source of significations that fill a work… [H]e is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses… The author is [..] the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning" (Focault 1969, 221-222). In essence, the "author function" vastly complicates and elaborates that the discourse surrounding the notions of an author is substantially more complex and nuanced than what Barthes' lays out in his essay whereby the author is ultimately a construction by the reader.

Both Barthes' and Focault's essay are emblematic in the discourse of authorship, but whereas Barthes singles out a relative direct but narrow argument for the rejection of the author, Focault exhaustively problematize the author through the four characteristic traits of the "author function". He even opens up that there could be more characteristics but limits himself to these four since "they seem both the most visible and the most important" (Focault 1969, 216). Paisley Livingstone, a more contemporary theorist of authorship, forwards some of Focault's notions by contrasting between "causal" and "attributionist" conceptions of authorship whereby he cites Focault as the most influential example of the attributions approach.

Livingstone argues that "[a]ccording to the attributionist conception, the writer's or speaker's contributions are insufficient to constitute authorship. Instead, something more – something on the side of the work's reception – is required, beginning with a system of authorial attributions" (Livingstone 2016, 2). This concept derives from the skepticism with regard to the general assumption introduced earlier that "authorship amounts to performing certain kinds of actions" as sufficient which detractors deem as inadequate and ideologically motivated. "The ideology of authorship, they claim, blinds people to the fact that different social formations have different conceptions and practices related to discourse" (Livingstone 2016, 2). Focault, for example, draws distinction between the writer and the author or "author function" which vary between time and what kind of discourse which reflects the idea of the attributionist.

The causal conception of authorship, in contrast, "is reducible to the actions that proximately cause a work to be created" (Livingstone 2016, 2). The main criteria for this concept predicates that there is an intentional action backed by sufficient control both internally and externally; one's intentional actions has be of his or her free will of a sound mind, and not imposed by external forces by one individual or a group of people for reasons outside the author's will. "The sufficient control requirement on authorship pertains to both the internal and external conditions under which actions and choices take place" (Livingstone 2016, 15).

Authorship, however, requires a certain kind of intentional action to take place – an utterance. Livingstone evokes the essays of Paul Grice (1989) and Wayne C. Davis (2002) to come to an approximation of what an "utterance" entail. According to Grice, an utterance "refers to anything that is a (plausible) candidate for non-natural meaning, which means anything that is the result of a certain complex kind of communicative intention" (Livingstone 2016, 15). On the other hand, Wayne C. Davis, a neo-Gricean account, argues that "the key, utterance-constitutive

intention is an *expressive* one aimed at indicating or manifesting the utterer's attitudes" (Livingstone 2016, 16).

The first account predicates that there is something original stemming from a complex communicative intention whereas the latter predicates the intention to be an *expressive* one which reflects the utterer's attitude which does not necessarily have to be original. The only apparent problem by predicting authorship solely on an "utterance" in a very broad sense "leaves it open whether one wishes to make additional claims about sub-categories of authorship" (Livingstone 2016, 16). Livingstone concludes in his 2016 essay that one should distinguish between everyday utterances and original works where the latter serves as a subset of authorship.

The authorship of a work is a requirement in many legal codes which echoes back to Focault's first aspect of the author functions where the author could face legal repercussions for utterances against the law, but who is also privileged to certain authorial rights followed by certain authorial achievements such as protection against plagiarism and unauthorized printing. These legal codes are as such predicated on a certain level of novelty or originality whereby "one must not only create a work, but the work has to be original" (Livingstone 2016, 17).

Lastly, the larger reason to close this section with a more common-sense idea of authorship in Livingstone's causal conception which predicates sufficient control and a complex communicative utterance, is the fact that there can be *more* than just one utterance in a production. While the discussion so far has extensively explored the idea of authorship as a singular entity there are other forms of authorship that is more collaboratively oriented such as co-authorship exemplified in film- and video game productions and multiple authorship.

To summarize, both Barthes and Focault may be archaic in relation to the modern discourse of video games, but these introductory thoughts on authorship helps us to foreground what the term authorship entails in a more nuanced manner since the term is so attached to a profession which seems exclusive to the occupation of writing. The problem of authorship is a complicated one that is not exclusive to one medium where Paul C. Sellors do offer some sense of universal utility in analyzing authorship across various mediums. "Looking at authorship across various media allows me to identify general components of authorship and communication… The properties of a medium will not dictate whether it can have authors, only how authorship can function within it" (Sellors 2007, 263-64). In other words, Authorship can be identified in other mediums like in films, and even more relevant, video games.

Filmic Authorship:
Classical Auteur Theory

The *auteur* theory of cinema evolved over the span of a decade beginning chiefly in the mid-1950s with the French film magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma.* The term was originally conceptualized by the film critics Francois Truffaut as *politique des auteurs* which was later elaborated and built upon by André Bazin and solidified by the American film critic Andrew Sarris who is credited for popularizing our modern understanding of the *auteur* theory.

They serve as the main proponents of the *auteur* theory which would become highly influential in the revitalization of Hollywood in the 1960s and 1970s. As King notes "[t]he issue [of authorship] is of particular relevance to New Hollywood because it was at the start of this era that it became a major influence on the study of popular cinema" (King 2002, 86). But the theory also had detractors very early on most notably by Pauline Kael who in her response article to Andrew Sarris criticized him for the privileging of the director instead of weighing in the collaborative efforts of screen writers, cinematographers, producers, composers, and even actors.

Whether you are a proponent of the *auteur* theory or a skeptical detractor like Pauline Kael, these film critics all serve as important historical precursors to our modern understanding of the evolution of the *auteur* theory. While these critics are primarily concerned with the study of cinema, the ideas presented in classical *auteur* theory can hopefully serve as acritical tool of analysis to the study of games. Whether the *auteur* theory is applicable, if at all, is not self-evident, but even contemporary game researchers like Espen Aarseth elaborates that "[i]f the term can help us say something about the differences and similarities between games and movies, and, more importantly, about different kinds of games, it will have proved its use even as we may have to reject it" (Aarseth 2004, 261-262).

Francois Truffaut coined the phrase *la politique des auteurs* ("the policy of the authors") which introduced the basic idea that "great directors made great films" by incorporating a signature style to their films which permeates across their entire repertoire. "The *politique des auteurs* consists, in short, of choosing the personal factor in artistic creation as a standard of reference, and then assuming that it continues and even progresses from one film to the next" (Bazin 1957, para. 26). In the same vein that Leonardo Da Vinci was a great painter or that William Shakespeare was a great author, the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* sought to elevate film directors like Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles to the same artistic status.

Truffaut's main argument in his controversial 1954 essay "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" is that a true *auteur* had a signature imprint in their films, a genealogy of themes and styles which were distinctly traceable and synonymous with the director even if the work was an adaption. "Truffaut defines a true film *auteur* as one who brings something genuinely personal to his subject instead of merely producing a tasteful, accurate but lifeless rendering of the original material" (Buscombe 1973, 75).

Truffaut criticized directors who adhered to the "Tradition of Quality" who adapted novels so faithfully to a fault that the only role left of the director was to add performers to their respective scenes without adding anything new to a supposedly untouchable script. "[I]t is necessary to invent *equivalent* scenes, that is to say, scenes as the novel's author would have written them for the cinema" (Truffaut 1954, 1). As such, he categorically separated between two types of filmmakers: *auteurs* and "metteur-en-scéne" (scene directors) where he argues that even the worst film of the former would always be better than the latter.

This notion was also a critic against the formulaic, industrial side of Hollywood prior to the 1950s where "the role of the director being only one of many and usually subordinated to the constraints of factory-style production" (King 2002, 86). Truffaut points out that this notion became more and more the norm for French cinema, hence the title of his article. Early Hollywood productions, however, rarely had film creators who had complete control in a commercial industry dominated by big corporate studios. "It sprang from the conviction that the American cinema was worth studying in depth, that masterpieces were made not only by a small upper crust of directors" (Wollen 1969, para. 1).

Only Charlie Chaplin had an *auteur*-like status where he was multi-credited as the director, producer, writer, composer, and of course starring in his own productions. "[Charlie Chaplin] is the only figure in the history of the cinema to have been able to make *all* his feature-length works exactly as he wanted to make them and to release them without interference or alteration to the finished product" (Petrie 1973, 32). In other words, it is important to take the historical context into account which Truffaut omits in his war cry for the *politique des auteurs*.

Despite this mild oversight, Truffaut's polemic intervention garnered a wide prominent following, especially among his younger colleagues, but this supposedly infallible concept that "only great directors could make great films" would ultimately be unfruitful in the larger discourse. The fact that Truffaut would later become a competent director himself with his own

signature style enforced this idea that *la politique des auteurs* was a desire for self-realization for critics who had yet to venture into filmmaking. "The theory can be seen as a kind of wish-fulfillment, a convincing of themselves that it was possible for *them* to make films, their own films on their own terms" (Petrie 1973, 29). It would need another critical eye to put Truffaut's *la politique des auteurs* to the test, and who better than his own colleague.

André Bazin is the one who would ultimately legitimize the *auteur* theory beyond the basic philosophy of the *politique des auteurs* by taking a more inwardly critical look at *Cahiers* but still very much in favor of the general idea of an *auteur*. "I beg to differ with those of my colleagues who are the most firmly convinced that the *politique des auteurs* is well founded… I do not see the role of the *auteur* the same as Francois Truffaut, it does not stop me from believing to a certain extent the in the concept of the *auteur*" (Bazin 1957, para. 3).

Bazin was first and foremost concerned that his fellow colleagues would stoop to a cult-like following of their favorite directors where fellow critics of less enthusiasm would hold their constructive criticism back in fear of a heated debate. "It follows that the strictest adherents of the *politique des auteurs* gets the best of it in the end, for, rightly or wrongly, they always see in their favorite directors the manifestation of the same specific qualities" (Bazin 1957, para. 2). Instead of inquiring whether the film was great or not regardless of the name attached, this culture of biased critics would praise the latest film of their favorite director as a superior film *a priori*. Andrew Sarris summarizes this idea in by saying that "we can all go home as soon as the directorial signature is flashed on the screen" (Sarris 1962, para. 1).

Bazin expressed his critique of this way of thinking by adding that "as soon as you state that the filmmaker and his films are one, there can be no minor films, as the worst of them will always be in the image of their creator" (Bazin 1957, para. 6). Bazin's main critique against the *politique des auteurs* is his notion that "the work transcends the director (they dispute this phenomenon, which they consider to be a critical contradiction). In other words, almost our only difference concerns the relationship between the work and its creator" (Bazin 1957, para. 4).

Bazin argues that the creator or auteur should be the final piece of appreciation when approaching a given work but not that the individual is above culture or a higher signifier than the work itself. A work of art should be judged on its own not by the signature at the bottom of a painting since culture is not based on names but of works of art. Every artist is in some way subjugated to the technological limitations and social circumstances of their times, and it is

precisely within those limitations where an artist can be at the forefront of what is technically available to him or her and dazzle an audience. "[E]very director is swept along by this power surge; his artistic course has to be plotted according to the currents" (Bazin 1957, para. 15).

Bazin does not neglect the fact that great artists do occasionally strike a "lightning in a bottle" once or even twice in the span of their careers but the inverse is also true which Bazin argues against Truffaut that "there is no reason why there should not exist flashes in the pan in the work of otherwise mediocre film-makers" (Bazin 1957, para. 18). Regardless of whether you are considered an auteur or a mediocre director in the eyes of the *Cahiers*, Bazin stresses that "[r]esults of a fortunate combination of circumstances in which there is a precarious moment of balance between talent and milieu, these fleeting brilliances do not prove all that much about personal creative qualities" (Bazin 1957, para. 18). But these fleeting brilliances prove that great works of art can emerge given the right time and the right circumstances.

The auteur theory should simply be the icing of appreciation regardless of the *a priori* status of the name attached. And this is perhaps Bazin's most grievous complaint of the *politique des auteurs* when "they systematically look down on anything in a film that comes from a common fund and which can sometimes be entirely admirable, just as it can be utterly detestable" (Bazin 1957, para. 30). This precedes and coincides with the sentiments of Pauline Kael who argued that films should be judged by its merits instead of how it relates to a director.

What Bazin also points out is the unprecedented evolutionary speed of cinema as an artform for the last fifty years preceding his article which Truffaut neglects in some capacity, and that it is paramount of a director to adapt *with* the medium in order to stay relevant. "[I]ts technical development has been of a kind that cannot compare with that of any traditional art within a comparable period… [I]t is hardly surprising that the genius will burn himself out ten times as fast" (Bazin 1957, 19).

This is no surprise considering the fact that an aging artist always tries to rekindle some of his or her success with modern tools, but often at times their ambitions and expectations clouds what made their original works so enchanting to begin with. Andrew Sarris sympathized with Bazin on his stance that the objective decline of a director is not due to the aging of the mind but of history. "What seems like senility is, in reality, a disharmony between the subjective inspiration of the director and the objective evolution of the medium" (Sarris 1962, para. 23).

Orson Welles was in many ways haunted by *Citizen Kane* (1941) partly because the film

was a technical marvel at the time where silent films were becoming rapidly outdated but as Welles grew older, he could never live up to the same sense of enchantment even when he had a greater creative control as in *Confidential Report* (1955). But for supporters of the *politique des auteurs*, the latter would be praised more highly simply because there is "more of Welles" in it as opposed to *Citizen Kane* (1941) which owes much to his co-writer. "[N]ot only would the supporters of the *politique des auteurs* refuse to agree that *Confidential Report* is an inferior film to *Citizen Kane*, they would be more eager to claim the contrary" (Bazin 1957, para. 22).

What Bazin ultimately achieves with his article is a more fruitful approach over the *politique des auteurs* by considering the rapid changes of cinema in the beginning of the 20th century, that great works of art can emerge from lesser-known *auteurs*, and that even supposedly great *auteurs* are prone to a "creative eclipse" which results in inferior films despite their reputation for making great films. "I feel that this useful and fruitful approach, quite apart from its polemic value, should be complimented by other approaches to the cinematic phenomenon which will restore to a film its quality as a work of art" (Bazin 1957, para. 33).

While it may seem that Bazin wanted to renounce the *politique des auteurs* altogether, he still gave credit for its efforts despite its inherent naïveté. "It is far from being my intention to deny the positive attitude and methodological qualities of this bias… [I]t has the great merit of treating the cinema as an adult art (Bazin 1957, para. 28). In the grand scheme of things, Bazin manages to elevate the *auteur* theory beyond the banal cry that "*auteurs* are infallible film makers". By restoring its integrity as a serious phenomenon in the study of cinema, it subsequently legitimized itself out of its initial stubborn position and closer to academia.

The French auteur theory was revolutionary for its time and still permeates film culture today, but it had yet to manifest a theoretical corpus as it never was a *theory* per se. "The *auteur* theory was never, in itself, a theory of cinema, though its originators never claim that it was.… [I]t was only loosely based upon a theoretical approach to the cinema which was never to be made fully explicit" (Buscombe 1973, para. 1-2). It is not until the American film critic Andrew Sarris picks up the theory by translating the *politique des auteurs* into our modern understanding.

Andrew Sarris was known for reviewing films with an *auteur* perspective, and his 1962 article "*Notes on the Auteur Theory"* gained him a lot of notoriety for introduced auteurism to North America. He especially rose in prominence for attempting to give auteurism a solid theoretical framework which his French colleagues had failed to solidify. "This looseness and

diffuseness of the theory has allowed flagrant misunderstanding to take root… Ignorance has been compounded by a vein of hostility to foreign ideas and a taste for travesty and caricature" (Wollen 1969, para. 2). This theoretical looseness caused critics of the *auteur* theory to split into two separate schools of critics: "those who insists on revealing a core of meanings, of thematic motifs, and those who stressed style and *mise en scene*" (Wollen 1969, para. 4).

This diffuseness is what reverts the *auteur* theory back to the same old charted steps of the *politique des auteurs,* and for either of these schools of critics the line is often blurred and without a clear distinction. This is what Andrew Sarris wanted to ameliorate by translating the French definition to simply *auteur* theory. "Henceforth, I will abbreviate *la politique des auteurs* as the *auteur* theory to avoid confusion" (Sarris 1962 para. 8). But he still acknowledged and gave "the *Cahiers* critics full credit for the original formulation of an idea that reshaped [his] thinking on the cinema" (Sarris 1962, para. 21).

Sarris laid out what he called "the premises of *auteur* theory" which can be viewed as a hierarchal structure or concentric circles divided into three distinctive premises. The director may identify with at least one of the respective premises where the inner most layer gravitates more towards an ideal auteur, the middle as a stylist and the outer layer as a competent technician. The director is not necessarily prescribed to a particular order as he or she may move up or down the scale depending on the director's ambitions, but Sarris implies that a director should check all of the three premises before he or she is bestowed the title of an ideal *auteur*.

1. "The first premise of the *auteur* theory is the technical competence of a director as a criterion of value… [I]f a director has no technical competence, no elementary flair for the cinema, then he is automatically cast out from the pantheon of directors.
2. The second premise of the *auteur* theory is the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value. Over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurring characteristics of style, which serves as his signature.
3. The third and ultimate premise of the *auteur* theory is concerned with interior meaning, the ultimate glory of the cinema as an art. Interior meaning is extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material"
   (Sarris 1962, para. 23, 24, 25).

The first premise of Sarris lays out the minimal requisite for even being considered an auteur. It demands that the director have some rudimentary technical competence of the camera in order to convey a certain feel and look; a sturdy foundation of technical proficiency is crucial so that a film can at least have some clarity and consistency. "[T]he critic can never assume that a bad director will always make a bad film… [A]fter a given number of films, a pattern is established" (Sarris 1962, para. 22, 27). As such their competence, or lack thereof, can only come to light after examining a certain kind of directorial pattern after examining a decent number of films.

The second premise of Sarris, "the distinguishable personality of the director", graduates the director into a stylist. "The way a film looks and moves should have some relationship to the way a director thinks and feels" (Sarris 1962, para. 24). The style of a film is arguably the most distinguishable aspect of any production, and it is also the first discernable characteristic of the director which becomes more and more apparent for each subsequent film they make.

Style may range from the overarching visuals to the subtlety of atmosphere to just a general vibe. Tim Burton's direction and atmosphere, for example, is so stylistically consistent and distinct that one could easily be fooled to believe that *Charlie and The Chocolate Factory* (2005) was of his own original making, and not based on the famous novel by Roald Dahl. "Because so much of the American cinema is commissioned, a director is forced to express his personality through the visual treatment of material" (Sarris 1962, para. 24).

The third and final premise "interior meaning" is what Sarris characterize as the ultimate glory of the cinema as an art. This notion is arguably the hardest to articulate since "[i]t is ambiguous, in any literary sense, because part of it is imbedded in the stuff of the cinema and cannot be rendered in noncinematic terms" (Sarris 1962, para. 25). But one approximation of analysis can be interpretated as the director's ability to explore subtle and complex themes of the human condition through a sophisticated use of *mise en scene* which reflects and reveals a director's unique perspectives on life and his or her general mode of being.

The previous premises are arguably more tangible because Sarris clearly categorize them as "criterions of value". These are qualitative properties that can infer *a priori* assumptions whether a film will pan out to be good or not, or at the very least give some sense of what to expect from the director. But the third premise is more elusive since it has to be "extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material" (Sarris 1962, para. 25). While the third premise comes off as grandiose and pretentious, it is this transcendent experience which

beckons casual viewers and connoisseurs alike back for more.

If successful, it is like coming into contact with the director's soul, or "*élan*" as Sarris calls it, which elevates cinema beyond the passive spectacles of entertainment. And in the rarest of cases, the viewer can experience a transcendent, euphoric-like experience which is usually associated with more senior art forms such as music and literature. While Michael Bay is certainly technically competent, his overt reliance on apocalyptic theatricalities makes it hard to discern anything approximating an interior meaning… but that is also perhaps the point.

Martin Scorsese, however, devoted a large part of his film career to make personal, character driven stories such as *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Godfellas* (1990) and *The Irishmen* (2019) which more or less tells the same archetypical story of an anti-hero who rises and falls victim to his own karma. This idea echoes back to Bazin's article: "[W]hatever the scenario, [the auteur] always tells the same story… [H]e has the same attitude and passes the same moral judgments on the action and on the characters" (Bazin 1957, para. 26). Martin Scorsese often explores characters who live a life of vice where every mobster awaits an ill-fated conclusion; this interior meaning is more or less extrapolated from all of the aforementioned films of Martin Scorsese.

To summarize Sarris' contributions, the three premises of auteur theory by Sarris elaborates that there is more to an auteur than simply being technically competent in conjunction with a personal style. For how can a director communicate complex meanings of the human condition without a comprehensive understanding of their own tools and an awareness for how to utilize his or her own style to the best of their ability? The practical function of the three premises is that it lays out measurable ideals which film critics can use as an analytical tool to present well-structured arguments for *why* a particular film is of a particular esteem.

While Sarris' premises are by no means as polemic as Truffaut, he still weighed in the inevitable detractors against his systematic ranking of artists. But to his defense, he wrote the article with the intention to strengthen the position of film as a serious art. "Because it has not been firmly established that the cinema is an art at all, it requires cultural audacity to establish a pantheon of film directors" (Sarris 1962, para. 6). Sarris did received criticism left and right, but the most outspoken renouncer of *auteurs* comes from fellow film critic Pauline Kael.

Kael did not hold back her criticism against Sarris' article in her rather tongue-and-cheek article titled "*Circles and Squares"* where she criticizes Sarris' hierarchical circles which privileges directors and undermines the collaborative process. "For Kael, such lists and

hierarchies were worthless; they smelled of dogma, and for her lacked the thrill of the hunt for new and exciting directors" (Ebert 2011, n.pag.). While it may be tempting to dismiss Kael since she does not advance the *auteur* theory in a conservative manner like her predecessors, there are still two interesting observations worth taking up in the larger discourse of auteurism.

The first critic against Sarris is the implicit trepidations of following a formulaic form of criticism onto modern films which could undermine the potential to illuminate new and interesting aspects which would otherwise be dismissed with a more conservative lens. "Criticism is an art, not a science, and a critic who follows rules will fail in one of his most important functions: perceiving what is original and important in *new* work and helping others to see" (Kael 1963, 14). Films should as such be judged by intuition and merit according to Kael. This is arguably Kael's most ominous warning where she implies that subjective intuition should be the driving compass for critics, and that films should be judged by its merits, not by how it relates to the director or his or her other works. "The director must be judged on the basis of what he produces… When a famous director makes a good movie, we look at the movie, we don't think about the director's personality" (Kael 1963, 14-15). This is her overarching message she wants to address in particular relation to the first two premises of Sarris.

Kael's second point touches on the inherent negligence of collaborative contributions such as a director-writer relation "who are in the *best* position to use the film medium for personal expression" (Kael 1963, 18). This notion is best expressed in her 1971 essay "*Raising Kane*" where she chronicles the turbulent process for co-writer Herman J. Mankiewicz in *Citizen Kane* (1941). Mankiewicz did share the Academy Award for Best Writing, Original Screenplay category of *Citizen Kane* (1941) but his limelight was partly overshadowed by Orson Welles but also for the fact that he was not an established writer prior to the films' release. "One reason that Herman Mankiewicz is so little-known today is, ironically, that he went to Hollywood so early, before he had gained a big enough reputation in the literary and theatrical worlds… Now that I have looked into Herman Mankiewicz's career it's apparent that he was a key linking figure in just the kind of movies my friends and I loved best." (Kael 1971, n.pag.).

The interesting observation here is that there is a growing interest particularly today to explore other angles of otherwise famous intellectual properties which supports Kael's notions that there are distinctive talents outside the director's role which attributes the success of a film. David Fincher's biography film titled *Mank* (Fincher, 2020) starring Gary Oldman does imply

that Mankiewicz' role was of significance and a story worth telling. Thinking about the importance of a co-writer will be relevant in the analysis of Hideo Kojima which is why Kael's contributions and criticism of the *auteur* theory is important to our discussion. But the challenge of incorporating Kael in the larger *auteur* discourse is her innate determination to dismiss virtually all of Sarris' arguments "[T]he premises were devised in a clumsy attempt to prop up the 'theory'. It's a good thing he stopped at three: a few more circles and we'd really be in hell" (Kael 1962, 22). But to be fair, Sarris never intended for his article to be the *be-all and end-all* of the auteur discourse, on the contrary.

Sarris never intended for his methods to be the final word on the matter even though his advancements towards a theoretical framework may incite the proclivity to reject ideas that may come off as radical. Especially in the arts which are heavily founded on subjective intuitions. "[T]he *auteur* theory, at least as I understand it and now intend to express it, claims neither the gift of prophecy nor the option of extracinematic perception… The task of validating the *auteur* theory is an enormous one, and the end will never be in sight" (Sarris 1962, para. 22, 28). These disclaimers redeems Sarris in some sense despite his rigorous approach whereas in Kael's critic there is a tendency to criticize the surrounding issues rather than the theory itself. "The auteur theory is an attempt by adult males to justify staying inside the small range of experience of their boyhood and adolescence" (Kael 1963, 26). This final statement, on top of an article already heavily skewed with an ideological bias, overshadows in many ways her good points but that is not to undermine her appeal for diversity in an industry dominated by men. But her brazen attacks on Sarris and her overt focus on the surrounding issues of the *auteur* theory does ironically strengthen his case.

Sarris responded to Kael in his own defense article "*The Auteur Theory and the Perils of Pauline"* (1963) where he makes his case clear that "[r]esearch and analysis are indispensable for sound *auteur* criticism" and that "[t]he *auteur* theory is ultimately a critical theory, and not a creative theory" (Sarris 1963, 28, 30). Sarris defines it purely as a critical *tool* so that the film critic can elaborate and convey more in-depth arguments beyond the simple plot reviews. Sarris evokes his original warning in his previous article that "[u]nfortunately, some critics have embraced the *auteur* theory as a short-cut to film scholarship… Without the necessary research and analysis, the *auteur* theory can degenerate into the kind of snobbish racker that is associated with the merchandising of paintings" (Sarris 1962, para. 7).

Sarris further elaborates that the *auteur* theory is in itself a "pattern theory in constant flux… the *auteur* habit of collecting random films in directorial bundles will serve posterity with at least a tentative classification" (Sarris 1963, 28-29). In other words, certain directors have a directorial pattern which is worth observing to understand the singular work in relation to a greater whole. Even though films can be analyzed in isolation, the research into a particular pattern of the director can only strengthen (or weaken) the position of a single film in relation to the director's body of work. When utilized properly as a tool for analysis, it becomes more apparent when a director's aim is off and when he or she go beyond expectations.

To summarize, the *auteur* theory evolved with rather ambivalent results due to its broad definitions since it was never presented as a rigorous manifesto nor as a collective statement. "As a result, it could be interpreted and applied on rather broad lines; different critics developed somewhat different methods within a loose framework of common attitudes" (Wollen 1969, para. 2). The public, borderline hostile, criticism between close critics like Francois Truffaut and André Bazin through their own magazine, and to a greater extent between Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael, does paint a rather bleak account of the overall discourse. Nonetheless, they prove that "each theory has its own validity – the validity being dependent upon and restricted by the position" (Wood 1977, 84). In other words, each position has the unique ability to illuminate different aspects of the same film in question. For what is the point of reading from different critics, from different perspectives, if everyone arrived at the same conclusion?

The *auteur* theory has proven to be a contentious one, like the discussion with the general idea of authorship through Barthes and Focault, but it is only when a theory has gone through the trials of critique and testing that there is some semblance of a solid theory. Regardless, there is evidently fidelity in the *auteur* theory with its own merits which can be utilized as a critical tool in understanding film and art in general like Sarris envisioned it, and for our intent and purpose as a tool to understand video games. Even hesitant scholars of game studies like Espen Aarseth vouch for its utility despite some general skepticism that "[i]f the term [*auteur* theory] can help us say something about the differences and similarities between different kinds of games, it will have proved its use even as we may have to reject it" (Aarseth 2004, 261-262). In other words, the theory will be useful in our analysis of Hideo Kojima since it can help us to distill reoccurring characteristics and point out similarities and differences in his games.

Collective Authorship:
Multiple Authors and Co-Authors

The discourse regarding authorship of collaborative productions like films was discussed primarily by film critics and theorists who were adamant to solidify film as a serious artform by pointing to a single author as means through the *auteur* theory. Fortunately, the discourse surrounding authorship, and multiple authorship by extension, has broadened beyond the ideological confines of the *auteur* theory. "Recently, a number of theorists, including Berys Gaut, Paisley Livingston, and C. Paul Sellors, have argued, contra auteur theory, that films (and many other artworks) are the product of multiple authors" (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, 23).

Bacharach and Tollefsen discuss Gaut's account to contextualize a central problem concerning the discourse of multiple authorship: the line between genuine authors and mere contributors. "We have seen the importance of actors to a film, and considerations for the importance of scriptwriters and for those producers who concern themselves with the actual making of the film could easily be advanced as well. So there is no reason to deny the potential artistic contribution and therefore coauthorship, of any of those mentioned" (Gaut 1997, 167).

Berys Gaut's account is an extensive one which we will not reiterate here since he repeats many of the same points which has already been discussed through Pauline Kael. Interestingly, Gaut does not reject the concept of authorship, or multiple authors by extension, just the notion of a *single* author which has become key characteristic of postmodernism. "A trend in postmodernism is to assert that each of these individuals is an author of the work in question or, alternatively that there is as such no one who deserves the title of author" (Hick 2014, 147).

Postmodernism is a problematic term and is hard to define without going into great specifics, but it can be generally described as a broad cultural movement during the mid- to late 20th Century, characterized by an attitude of skepticism and rejection of ideologies associated with modernism such as the privileging of individual authors. "Thanks to the postmodernists, much of the discussion of authorship in the last half century has focused on the medium of film" (Hick 2014, 147). If the *auteur* theory was contentious due to the vocal movement to forward individual *auteurs*, then the discourse of multiple authorship is contentious due to the inability to distinguish between mere contributors and genuine coauthors. Additionally, there is also a concern regarding the balance of coordination, or lack thereof, when it comes to coauthors. But first it is important to clarify the difference between co-authorship and multiple authorship.

Co-authorship follows naturally in deliberate collaborative works such as film productions and video game productions where there is an *a priori* shared intention to create a specific work jointly. This notion has also paved the way for the discourse of problematizing the single author/auteur idea. "[T]he dozens or hundreds of individuals involved in the making of a film collectively challenge the notion of films having a singular author—an auteur" (Hick 2014, 147). There is less disagreement on the existence of coauthorship (as opposed to a single author), but there are discoursal disputes regarding the precise nature of "genuine coauthorship".

Multiple authorship, not to be confused with "co-authorship", occurs in works where multiple authors are working independently, and who are solely credited and responsible for their contribution(s). A book collection or a scholarly journal can be comprised of multiple authors where there is virtually no relation besides a common theme, topic, or genre. Encyclopedias like Wikipedia also have many independent contributors without external inputs, but this idea is often more nuanced since there is an "implicit coauthorship" to build a community jointly.

The main difference between multiple authorship and co-authorship comes down to coordination and responsibility whereby an author is primarily responsible for their contribution and not the work as a whole. "Wikipedia is certainly authored by multiple people, but it does not qualify as coauthored because the authors are all working (for the most part) individually rather than working together" (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, 25). However, Darren Hick would argue that Wikipedia is not entirely disjointed since "there is at least an implicit joint understanding of commitment between users to build the encyclopedia" (Hick 2014, 152).

While the discussion of multiple authors is arguably less contentious than that of Barthes and Focault, or the *auteur* theory for that matter, there are still various views and disagreements among scholars of multiple authorship. Bacharach and Tollefsen are specifically vocal about the accounts of Livingstone and Sellors. "Some of the accounts are too weak, failing to distinguish between mere contributors and genuine coauthors, while others rely on a theory of shared intentions that does not adequately account for the range and complexity of artistic collaborations present in contemporary art" (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, 25).

Paisley Livingstone elaborated earlier that the "author" is someone who produces an utterance or a work with sufficient control, but if two or more people are working together to author a work or an utterance jointly there are some additional conditions that must be met. Livingstone builds upon Michael E. Bratman's notion of "shared intentions" to illustrate his

account on coauthorship. "[J]oint authorship (or coauthorship) is an uncoerced cooperative activity requiring shared intentions (as well as compatible subintentions) that are the object of mutual belief among those parties making the work" (Livingstone 2011, 221). In other words, artistic collaboration predicates a coordinated intention to make an utterance jointly where each contributor take equal credit and responsibility for their intentional actions:

1. A_1 intends to contribute to the making of utterance *U* as an expression of A_1's attitudes.
2. A_1 intends to realize (1) by acting on, and in accordance with sub-plans that mesh with those of the other contributors, including sub-plans relative to the manner in which the utterance is to be produced and to the utterance's expressive contents.
3. A_2 intends to contribute to the making of utterance *U* as an expression of A_2's attitudes.
4. A_2 intends to realize (3) by acting on, and in accordance with sub-plans that mesh with those of the other contributors, including sub-plans relative to the manner in which the utterance is to be produced and to the utterance's expressive contents (and so on for other contributors).
5. $A_1, \ldots, A_n$ mutually believe that they have the attitudes 1–4.
   (Livingstone 2005, 83-84).

Bacharach and Tollefsen argues that Livingstone's account is "psychologically implausible" in a complex machine such as a Hollywood production which require too much of coauthors, or in artforms where improvisation is central like in jazz or comedy skits with little prior planning. They argue that "genuine coauthorship" should ideally be no more than two people working in close proximity. They argue that "Livingstone's theory is an elegant one but is best suited for collaborations involving two people who are working together closely and interacting on a regular basis about the aesthetic properties of the work and for those collaborations that do not involve authority and institutional structures" (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, 26).

Livingstone responded to their criticisms by stressing that joint authorship *is* compatible with authoritarian institutions like the Swedish Film Industry, and that more than two people can count as coauthors as long as one of them has the executive decision making in terms of what to add and what to leave out of a given work. "[T]wo or more coauthors could share a plan specifying that one of them will exercise authority in the making of certain artistically relevant decisions, such as who will decide when the work is finished" (Livingstone 2011, 221).

Furthermore, with regards to the making of art, Livingstone distinguishes between various levels of commitments whereby two or more persons committing to making (Livingstone 2011, 222):

1. [A] specific work together 'as if' it had a single author.
2. [A] specific work jointly, while also committing to the individual authorship of separate parts or aspects of the work (as in an omnibus film).
3. [A]n unspecified number of future works together.
4. [O]nly works jointly and none separately.

Conversely, C. Paul Sellors takes a slightly different approach where he problematizes how individual and collective intentions relate and functions. "Whereas individual intentions rest in an individual mind, there is no equivalent in a collective, for there is no such thing as a collective mind or "superagent" (Sellors 2007, 268). The reasoning behind this is based on the idea that mental constructions (implied authors and author-functions) cannot have intentions in and of itself. Sellors clarifies that his view of authorship "endorses real individuals communicating ideas intentionally [whereby] "[a]utorship is [..] an *intentional action of an intending agent* that *causes* a text" (Sellors 2007, 263). Co-authorship, to complicate further, predicates a collective intentional action by multiple authors whereby Sellors invoke John Searle's idea of "we-intentions". "We-intentions, according to Searle, are a unique type of individual mental state having the form 'We intend to *j*'. Unlike Bratman's account [I intend that we *j*], [t]here is no requirement that participants in a joint action be aware of, or respond to, the we-intentions of others" (Bacharach and Tollefsen 2010, 27).

Sellors distinguishes between "we-intention" and "*I*-intention" whereby only those who participate from a "we-intention" counts as co-authors of a work whereas an "*I*-intention" does not necessarily have to be compatible with the "we-intention". An actor's individual intentional action to advance his career by acting in a prolific director's film is not necessarily acted from a "we-intention". "We can see why the collective intentional action in this case does not form part of the individual intentional action by applying the example to Searle's notion" (Sellors 2007, 269). Searle argues that an intentional action (i.a.) can be represented as: (Searle 1991, 412)

i.a. B by means of A
and collective intentional action as:
i.a. collective B by means of a singular A.

Lastly, Sellors argue that not all members of a collective intentional action can be members of its collective authorship. He uses filmic authorship as an example where he excludes caterers since they do not directly contribute to the film despite being part of the production team. “Although it is certainly true that a caterer is involved in the cooperative activity, he or she is not involved in the cooperative activity of producing an utterance” (Sellors 2007, 269). Furthermore, Sellors complicates even more that we need to identify “the number of authored components that contribute to the overall film” which begs the question where the line should be drawn between mere contributors and genuine coauthors due to the unreasonable increase of potential coauthors.

The problem with Searle’s “we-intention” is that it is realized by individual minds, predicated on intentions in actions (in the moment) which does not require the strict prior planning and coordination which Livingstone laid out. In contrary to Livingstone’s account, Sellors account may be more suitable for improvisation rather than complex creations. Interestingly, Sellors account is the opposite extreme of Livingstone which “conversely, allows all manner of individuals to qualify as co-authors on projects well beyond the limits of credulity, such as deluded caterers and saboteurs who believe themselves to be part of the artistic team creating a film” (Hick 2014, 150).

To summarize, Darren Hick emphasize responsibility, power, and creation as the major forces behind authorship who unlike passive contributors directly employs power to select and arrange elements so that the authors in question have ultimate responsibility of the work’s form and content. “Where a work has multiple authors, we need to ask who has responsibility for what, who has power and over what, and what did each party create. Answers to these questions will help us to determine whether we are dealing with multiple authorship or co-authorship” (Hick 2014, 153). But it is worth stressing that collective authorship is in constant flux due the long process of making a big project like a video game where there are many levels of influence both in terms of power and artistic responsibility. “It should, however, have become clear that a core problem that transmedial narratology has to address in some way lies in the observation that one not only has ‘to think of global [collective] authorship . . . as a matter of degree’ (Livingston 2011, 143) but also that one has to acknowledge that the distribution of production roles, decision power, and artistic responsibility is complex to begin with and often changes as a project develops” (Thon 2016, 137). This notion is true for video game productions which are multilayered in terms of power and influence where the idea of authorship is complicated.

Game Authorship:
Game Auteurs in a Studio World

Video games are complex creations made by dozens and hundreds of skilled programmers and specialized artists where some productions can take as long as up to five years before it reaches completion. In the extreme cases, according to this Gamespot article "*Grand Theft Auto V* was developed by more than 1,000 people across multiple Rockstar Games studios" (Makuch 2013, n.pag.). As such, the romanticization with game auteurs is problematic since video games are at its core a collaborative team effort backed by a diverse representation of artistic disciplines as opposed to the singular author of a book or even auteurs of expressive filmmaking. "[V]ideo games, even more so than film, are collaborative productions. Consequently, video games are often identified with entire studios and even publishers ahead of any single individuals who may have been responsible for a number of the critical creative decisions" (Hakimi 2012, 7).

Films are also collaborative at its core with hundreds of professional inputs, but since video games are byproducts of technological evolution and computer graphics it is not obvious that directors and writers outshines the inputs of animators and programmers let alone the studio they represent. "Although many game teams have a strong singular creative lead, there is less of an ethos of 'auteurship' than in other media" (Pearce 2001, 4). The *auteur* theory was in the broadest sense an ideological movement to affirm the film medium as a respectable art form parallel to the prestige of paintings and classical music by elevating a selection of ideal directors. The inherent difficulty of directly applying the *auteur* theory onto the discipline of video games is that the production process of its medium is not predicated on the success of a singular creative director but through team effort and more specifically the studio it represents.

> "Even if the auteur theory is unrealistically applied to videogame production, videogames have something of the studio set up that characterized the golden era of Hollywood… [I]f it is unrealistic to say that a videogame is an expressive effort of an individual person, we might say this individuality is so of a studio" (Tavinor 2009, 188).

Video game studios, let alone artistic directors, are however at the mercy of corporate politics and big publishers who safeguards their intellectual properties to sell their game products as their overall objective. "The romantic notion of the single author, whose work is preserved through property rights and whose enthusiasm for further creative contributions is fanned, seems to be

increasingly surpassed by authorship via corporate agents" (Taylor 2002, 229). The video game industry has grown into a multi-billion-dollar enterprise where in 2019 the global games market were "estimated to generate US$152.1 billion from 2.5 billion gamers around the world. By comparison, the global box office industry was worth US$41.7 billion" (Stewart 2019, n.pag.).

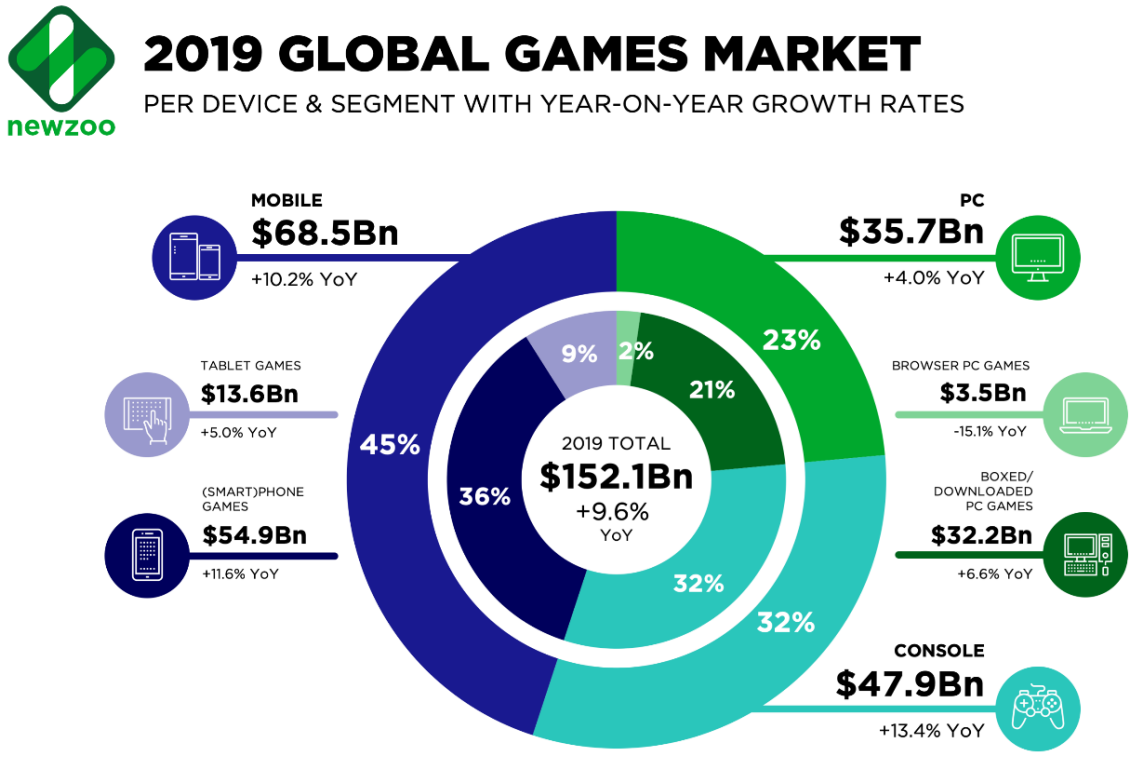

Figure 1: Newzoo is a research firm for games market insights and analytics.

The video game industry can roughly be bracketed into three main categories of mobile, PC and console gaming whereby the latter amounts to approximately one-third of the total global game revenue. "Console will be the fastest-growing segment this year, growing +13.4% year on year to $47.9 billion in 2019" (Wijman 2019, n.pag.). Only a handful of corporate publishers and established studios are behind some of the most financial and successful blockbuster AAA-games (or "triple-A") like Activision's *Call of Duty*, Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed*, and then there is of course Nintendo leading the children's demography with their *Mario* and *Pokémon* games.

Each of these household titles are placed at the very top tier of the fifty highest grossing video games franchises of all time with the minimal lifetime revenue of $1 billion. For example, *Mario* had a lifetime revenue of $32.4 billion (as of 2019). In comparison, Konami's *Metal Gear*

series had an estimated lifetime revenue of $2.513 billion (as of 2016) which also marks the same year when the series' director Hideo Kojima left the company. If there is such a thing as a game auteur today, then they are living in a studio world where revenue rules. Espen Aarseth enquires into the concept of game auteurs in his 2004 article "The Game and its Name: What is Game Auteur?" where he sets the tone by quoting David Jones:

> "Every game is a big team effort now. There is no single person that can take the credit. These names came from the past when this was not the case, when you could design and code most of the game yourself (...) It just does not happen now, even studio names are becoming academic. All that matters is the game and its name" (Aarseth 2004, 261).

David Jones alludes to the dichotomy between current trends in AAA games and the persistent idea of game authorship which seems less evident in an industrial studio age. "Video game development has become more systematic over the years, with large teams now employing interface and user experience designers, sophisticated testing, player metrics, and data scientists (Juul 2019, 150). Video game creation is an expensive enterprise where there is little room for financial risks in the name of artistic endeavors let alone the notion of a "video game auteur".

Despite this general skepticism, Aarseth proceeds "to not accept or reject the hypothetical category of game auteurs *a priori*, but to see what happens when we try to apply it as a critical perspective on games" (Aarseth 2004, 261). Aarseth addresses immediately one of the main concerns in directly applying narrative concepts of films onto a medium which primarily orients itself around game mechanics where the narrative is often secondary to the overall ludic aesthetics. "Narrative terms in game studies (e.g. story, plot, fiction, or even more general terms like text) are usually brought in, like the cane toad to Australia, to solve some difficulty that at first glance seems easy to fix, but soon brings more trouble than the original problem" (Aarseth 2004, 261).

There is as such inherent practical problems in adapting a discourse about video game auteurism. Not all video games are cut from the same cloth; there are many kinds of games that fundamentally changes the nature of its discourse where narrative elements are less present. "For one thing, video game productions come in all shapes and sizes, and assigning attribution is not simply a matter of identifying a single director" (Hakimi 2012, 2). But this also leads into

another potential trap where auteurism is not necessarily more evident in games that are more film oriented. “The most film-oriented and narratively ambitious games – typically, but not necessarily adaptions from Hollywood films – are seldom the work of a strong, identifiable individual, but rather a generic end-product of a highly specialized, industrial process where the story element is far from the top of the list of important game aspects” (Aarseth 2004, 262).

Activision’s *Call of Duty* games comes to mind which evokes the same over-the-top military action mayhem as in Michael Bay’s films like *The Rock* (Bay, 1996) and *Pearl Harbor* (Bay, 2001). Furthermore, *Call of Duty* games have since its inception in 2003 released yearly iterations (eighteen titles and still ongoing) which have been developed in cycles between three different game studios where there is no identifiable singular director: Infinity Ward, Treyarch and Sledgehammers Games. “Infinity Ward’s production personnel hyped the game’s aesthetic of military realism and its visceral game play, while promising gamers that Call of Duty 4 would remain faithful to the franchise’s successful design formula” (Payne 2012, 313).

Figure 2: *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (Infinity Ward, 2009) sticks to its formula.

These games are inherently cinematic and almost always at the high-end of photorealism, but the narrative aspects are almost always relegated to the same redundant formula of “good soldiers

against bad terrorists" where the commanding figure occasionally becomes victim of megalomania before the credits starts to roll. There is just enough context for the player avatar to shoot themselves through hordes of enemies where the cycle only repeats itself in a new area. Aarseth himself uses *Max Payne* (Remedy, 2001) to illustrate the same sentiments of generic Hollywood movie clichés where the titular character seeks vengeance for his dead family as the basic premise for running and gunning. "In Hollywood films, the purpose of generic protocols is to appeal to as wide an audience as possible by addressing sensibility and familiarity and thus soliciting affective responses of numerous kinds" (Bould et al. 2009, 92).

The studio dominance on top of generic action games riddled with movie gimmicks bars in some sense the potential presence of game auteurs, and this notion is arguably even more true when it comes to film-licensed games (or movie tie-in games). "The sheer cost of making commercial, film-licensed games, not to mention the close control, which the license holder normally has on the game-making process, dictate that the leeway for individual artists to make a personal impression on the final product is not very large" (Aarseth 2004, 262).

These were widely popular during the mid-2000s such as Activision's *Spider-Man 2* (2004) and the many *James Bond 007* games which often correlated with the release of a new 007 film. These productions have never been an ideal realm for artistic expressions; Aarseth suggests looking elsewhere for the ideal auteur, and proceeds to present a preliminary list of three criteria for the hypothetical game auteur which interestingly evokes similar criteria explored earlier by Focault and Sarris:

1. They must have made such an impression that the game is associated with their name, rather than that of the Development Company or publisher.
2. They must have made more than one game.
3. The games must stand out and be different from standard genre games.
   (Aarseth 2004, 262-263).

The hypothetical game auteur is as such someone whose contributions and overall impression stands out more than the game studio he or she is associated with; someone who has made more than one game where he or she helmed the directorial responsibilities in order to discern a certain distinguishable pattern; and finally, the games must be stylistically original from a genre perspective without falling back to formulaic familiarities. These notions, again, are reminiscent

of the schema of Focault's ideal author and Sarris's premises of the *auteur* theory.

Focault evoked Saint Jerome's four criteria for authentication whereby there are certain overlaps like being "constant level of value" and who is "conceived as a stylistic unity" (Focault 1969, 214). Sarris' premises of the *auteur* theory overlap with the "distinguishable personality" whereby there are reoccurring characteristic of style across a group of films, and "interior meaning" (Sarris 1962, para. 24, 25). which is arguably the most discernable criteria in terms of an making an impact where he or she is more associated with a game more than the company or publishers. These overlapping features are inherently qualitative properties based on a certain level of impact, consistency, and originality. These qualities generally evoke the ideal artist who is intellectually independent from the factory process of commercialization, whose artistic intentions is to break away from the mainstream and mundane to create something new and unique. But Aarseth proceeds to say that it "is not how their intellect shines through outside of their games, but how it is reflected in their game design" (Aarseth 2004, 263).

Aarseth presents a predefined list from the Hall of Fame of the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences (from 2004) as a basis for potential auteurs in the game industry: Shigeru Miyamoto, Hironobu Sakaguchi, Sid Meier, John Carmack, Will Wright, Yu Suzuki, and Peter Molyneux. These highly prolific game designers were all responsible for popularizing certain types of games which were genre defining in some manner or another, but Aarseth does not shy away from drawing into question some of the more prolific names. "Interestingly, despite the strong Hollywood/film academy look-and-feel of the selecting institution, only one of these seven game designers is working in a typical film-like tradition: Sakaguchi" (Aarseth 2004, 263).

Hironobu Sakaguchi is the creator of the highly successful *Final Fantasy* (1987-) series which helped popularizing "Japanese Role Playing-Games" (JRPG) in North America and Europe. These games are mainly story driven due to their inspiration drawn from role-playing traditions akin to *Dungeons & Dragons* but would gradually become more cinematic in conjunction with more advanced hardware. Despite his fame and legacy, Sakaguchi's ambitions to unite cinematic storytelling of film with interactive elements of video games prompted him to debut as a film director of the infamous *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (Sakaguchi, 2001).

The film was a historical box office bomb, losing the dire sum of $94 million to its $137 million budget which "compelled [Square] to scrap all plans to make further Final Fantasy movies and to withdraw from the film business altogether" (Monnet 2004, 97). Sakaguchi's

artistic endeavor serves in many ways as a warning for careless ventures into Hollywood territory where CGI-films were still relatively raw and new in a market where Disney Pixar still had near monopoly in the early 2000s. Consequently, Sakaguchi stepped down as an executive vice president at Square and subsequently left the company in 2003, and Square was economically forced to merge with Enix Corporations to recuperate economic losses from total financial ruin. Despite its popular namesake, the film's ultimate demise is largely based on its failure to appeal to core fans of the series and to pique the interest of a more general audience.

Figure 3: *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* was in 2001 the most expensive CGI-film ever made.

Sakaguchi proves to be a contentious example of an ideal game auteur despite being the closest semblance to a traditional Hollywood director let alone a filmic auteur in the eyes of Truffaut and Sarris. Even the legendary game designer Shigeru Miyamoto, the creator of both *Super Mario* and *The Legend of Zelda* series, is generally attributed as the most innovative game designer alive but is arguably perceived as an even less ideal game auteur. "Miyamoto's involvement in the game industry as a producer and designer is rich and many-sided, and his relationship to his creations is more like that of a Disney than a Truffaut" (Aarseth 2004, 265).

John Carmack is in an interesting position as a co-author for the original *Doom* games due to his creative skills as a brilliant programmer of game engines. However, Carmack "might

be compared to a camera-making, technical genius rather than to a master photographer, filmmaker or author. The innovative games he produced, *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992) and *Doom* (1993) were also the creation of his partner John Romero, a Dionysian complement to Carmack's Apollonian programmer intellect" (Aarseth 2004, 263). Both Carmack and Romero are generally perceived as "game auteurs" in the eyes of the gaming community for popularizing the first-person shooter genre where there are countless "Doom-clones" (games that mimic *Doom*'s distinct gameplay). While only Carmack made the entry into the Academy list for his programming skills it is not obvious that Carmack is an atypical auteur due to the co-joint credit.

Figure 4: *Doom* (id Software, 1993) is often credited for popularizing the FPS genre.

The overall credit still goes to the development team as opposed to just Carmack. Even the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences reaffirms this notion: "John Carmack and the development team at id Software can be credited with introducing a whole new perspective, literally, to interactive entertainment" (see *Interactive.org*). Aarseth, however, is still not entirely convinced that either Carmack or Sakaguchi are ideal game auteurs and directs the attention over to Will Wright and Peter Molyneux who popularized what has often been called "God games".

Will Wright is famous for creating *SimCity* (Maxis, 1989) and the ever popular *The Sims* (Maxis, 2000) which were both genre-breaking games that appeals to minds with creative urges.

"[T]he players are given a playground and some tools… There are no explicit messages or objective dominating the gameplay, only in the infrastructure laid down in the rules" (Aarseth 2004, 263-64). In a similar style, Peter Molyneux rose to fame for his *Populous* (Bullfrog, 1989) which is often considered as "the first explicit 'God game' in which the player's God-like position, interestingly, does not mean that they control everything, but rather that they try to influence the game as best they can" (Aarseth 2004, 264).

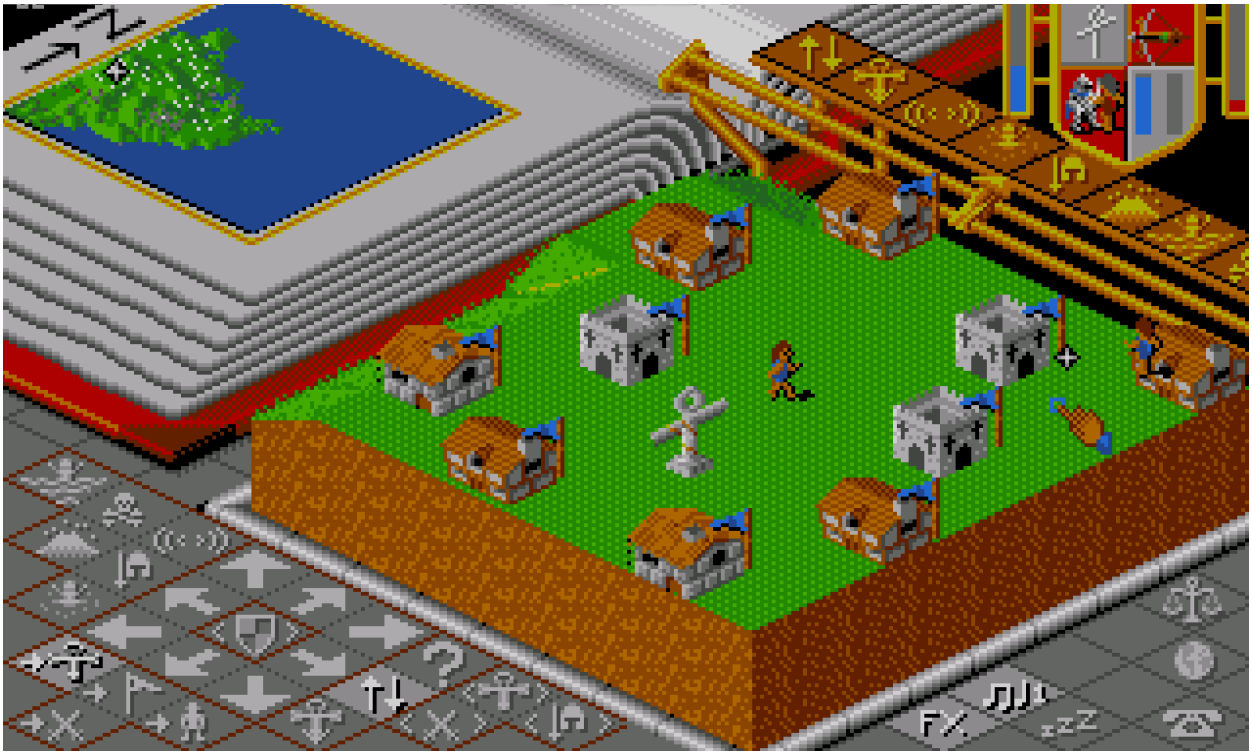

Figure 5: *Populous* (Bullfrog, 1989) is a "God game" played from an isometric perspective.

The technical term for "God game" is *real-time strategy* or RTS which are games that are generally more gameplay oriented where narrative elements are usually kept to a bare minimum. Instead of controlling a player avatar, the player can control the world from an isometric perspective or indeed from a "God-like perspective". "In the words of Molyneux, 'I have always found this an interesting mechanic, the idea that the game can continue without you is a concept that still fascinates me (Antoniades 2000)" (Aarseth 2004, 264).

The level of influence and freedom are more readily available in their games than in more narrative driven games where the director is more likely to disrupt the flow of gameplay with scripted events or cinematics. "[A] game maker is someone who creates stimulating tools and

situations for others to explore, rather than being a strict director of actors and events" (Aarseth 2004, 264). Both Wright and Molyneux were radical for its time, maybe even too original for their own good, which sometimes resulted in friction between their creative vision and the economic drive of corporate executives. "*The Sims* was a project initially rejected by the game publisher, and one which Wright had to finance and develop privately until he had a convincing demo… and Molyneux when his first game company, Bullfrog, was bought by the industry giant Electronic Arts" (Aarseth 2004, 263-64). Molyneux would subsequently leave Bullfrog to form his new company Lionheads to stay true to his artistic vision.

This idea evokes certain misconceptions between a feud that never really took place between ludologists and narrativism where Gonzalo Frasca clears up that "there is a serious misunderstanding on the fact that some scholars believe that ludologists hold a radical position that completely discards narrative from videogames" (Frasca 2003, n.pag.). Aarseth, who may give the impression that he writes from a fundamental ludological perspective, problematize this in his 1997 book *Cybertext*: "[T]o claim that there is no difference between games and narratives is to ignore essential qualities of both categories. And yet, as this study tries to show, the difference is not clear-cut, and there is significant overlap between the two" (Aarseth 1997, 5).

The search for game auteurs based on the predefined list of established of industry giants proves to be a complicated search after all. Aarseth's article is nearly two decades old while the Academy has steadily added a new name each year bringing the total names to twenty-four as of 2020. There are many new notable names added since Aarseth's writing such as Gabe Newell (*Half-Life*, *Counter-Strike)*, Ted Howard (*Skyrim*, *Fallout 4*) and finally Hideo Kojima (*Metal Gear Solid, Death Stranding)* in 2016. The Academy also explicitly paint Kojima as an auteur in their profile description: "a world-renowned game creator and auteur known for pushing the boundaries of the video game medium. Widely considered the father of the stealth genre, he is also credited with innovating story-telling and cinematic presentation in video games at large" (Academy 2016, n.pag.). Aarseth concludes more or less that it is not obvious that any of the well-established names is an ideal game auteur over another, but he highlights one distinctive quality in the case of Wright and Molyneux: the need to pursue and protect one's artistic integrity in the face of industrialized, corporate interests.

> "In an ultra-competitive industry very heavily dominated by very few and very powerful companies (Electronic Arts, Microsoft, Sony, Nintendo), Molyneux and Wright might be

> indicative of what might come later: strong, independent artists who will not compromise their vision by merely delivering 'game content' to the distribution pipelines of the industry" (Aarseth 2004, 265).

A game designers' integrity to pursue their own creative vision is as such a critical factor for the ideal game auteur even if it means walking away from the company they were previously strongly associated with. Many prolific game designers would subsequently form their own game studios to keep their creative integrity intact, to continue making signature games and spiritual successors to titles which players have attributed to them. "[I]f the notion of a game auteur implies an element of rebellion against the still ongoing industrialization, then the game auteur would be located at a certain time in the history of games" (Aarseth 2004, 265). An example of this is Hideki Kamiya who is often considered as one of the originators of the "hack-and-slash" genre for the creation of the first *Devil May Cry* (Capcom, 2001). He ultimately left Capcom in 2006 to co-form PlatinumGames Inc. in which their 2009 title *Bayonetta* shares many striking similarities of Kamiya's earlier games stylistically.

One reason for the mass migration of talented game designers is due to the unrelentless speed of the industry. "[T]he industry outpaces the personal development of many individuals. You get the feeling you're still on a bike while everyone else is on a high-speed trains" (Liu 2017, n.pag.). This describes the feeling evoked with the changes that the game industry has undergone these past ten to fifteen years where big publishers have been forced to rethink their financial priorities with the advent of mobile games, digital distribution and the ever-growing costs of making games. "[T]he coming years (say, 2005-2010) should see games that emerge from strong, talented individuals as a conscious reaction to an industry where production costs, 'sequelitis' and licenses dominate the field" (Aarseth 2004, 268). Aarseth was right to some degree especially with the coming of *indie games*.

Indie games are largely developed independently, often self-published and distributed at lower costs than normal retail prices of AAA titles by big publishers. "[I]ndependence generally refers to the possibility of financing, developing and releasing a video game independently of a mainstream publisher, that is, by marking the difference between oneself, or a relatively close group to which one belongs, and the broader digital entertainment industry" (Rufino 2019, 46). The rise of digital distribution meant that independent developers could develop and publish smaller but exceedingly more expressive games which is often a reflection of the game designer.

The visual aesthetics and overall gameplay reject mainstream conventions and evoke both nostalgia and the feel of older games which marks a return "to simpler times in video game history, rejecting complex, involved and, large-scale productions in favor of more immediate game experiences. As visual designs, they [often] reject both photorealistic aspirations of large productions and the attempted seriousness that can pervade such games (Juul 2019, 150). It is important to distinguish indie aesthetics from games that were genuinely made in the respective eras of 1980s and early 1990s that these indie developers grew up with due to hardware limitations at the time. Jesper Juul use the term *independent style* which "uses contemporary technology to emulate low-tech and usually cheap graphical materials and visual styles, signaling that a game with this style is more immediate, authentic, and honest" (Juul 2019, 38).

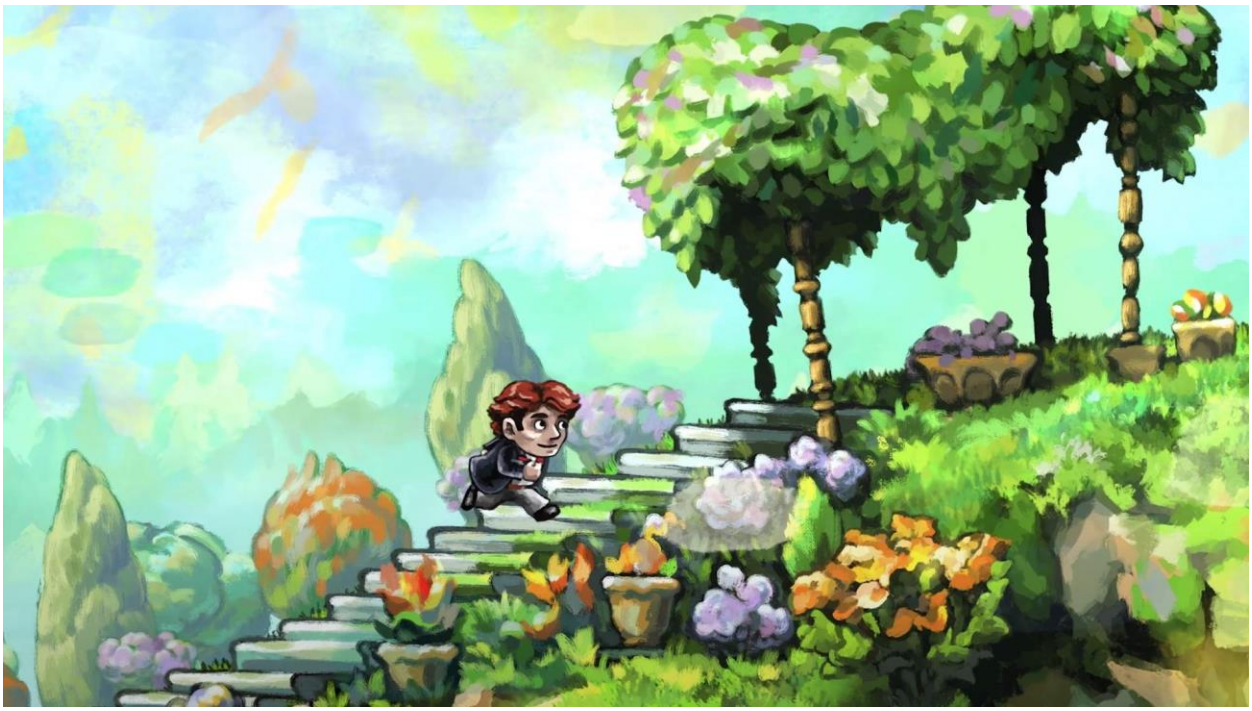

Figure 6: *Braid* (Number None, 2008) exemplifies the simple yet expressive indie aesthetics.

Authenticity is in many ways a buzzword for indie games as independent developers ideally want to separate themselves from the "mainstream" and "inauthentic" by proclaiming that their games are expressive works of art. "*Authenticity* usually refers to the absence of a range of ills: selling out, being unoriginal, being controlled by money, being superficial, or angling for fame" (Juul 2019, 9). The qualities of indie developers are arguably more compatible with Aarseth's criteria of being "strong, independent artists" than your archetypical AAA developer due to their vocal

distancing from mainstream games which they argue have become increasingly shallow.

This preoccupation with *indie-ness* in recent years is partly due to the recent surge of popular indie games like Jonathan Blow's *Braid* (Number None, 2008) and Phil Fish's *FEZ* (Polytron, 2012) which has propelled certain individuals into stardom of the indie scene. The rise of social medias also helped to garner even more media coverage through Twitter, YouTube, and platforms like Netflix's 2012's *Indie Game: The Movie* which "presented an image of independent games as centered on individual auteurial creators" (Juul 2019, 143). This film romanticizes the rebellious attitudes and the struggle of independent developers whereby "[t]he directors celebrate, through their interviews, the changes wrought by independent gaming and, in particular, the emotional attachment that independents have to their games" (Ruffino 2018, 50).

Figure 7: Phil Fish recounts his struggle as an independent developer in *Indie Game*: *The Movie*.

The first wave of indie games also introduced new types of discourses that reevaluates the relationship between video games and their respective developers. "[T]he game designer has been re-evaluated as an *author*, that is, as someone who is solely responsible for the conception, development and release of a video game. The justification for the appraisal of this new figure has often been centred on technological change" (Ruffino 2018, 45). Development tools like the Unreal Engine and Unity which was once reserved for AAA developers is now accessible for

independent, aspiring developers. However, independence is arguably too vague to describe indie games in general terms since it is not necessarily clear that independence equates to indie aesthetics or that independent style is an innate style representative for all indie games.

Publishers like Ubisoft and Ninja Theory have also joined the ranks of prolific indie games with the likes of *Child of Light* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2014) and *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (Ninja Theory, 2017) which fall somewhere between purely independent development and conventional AAA production. *Child of Light* is deceptive in its presentation since it utilizes the stylistic 2.D UbiArt Framework engine, previously used to design *Rayman Origins* (Ubisoft, 2010), which affords developers to directly insert concept art-like aesthetics into the game engine. Consequently, the visual aesthetics share many key characteristics with indie development that evokes Juul's *independent style*, but which was ultimately developed and published by Ubisoft, a big corporate publisher with millions to fund their games.

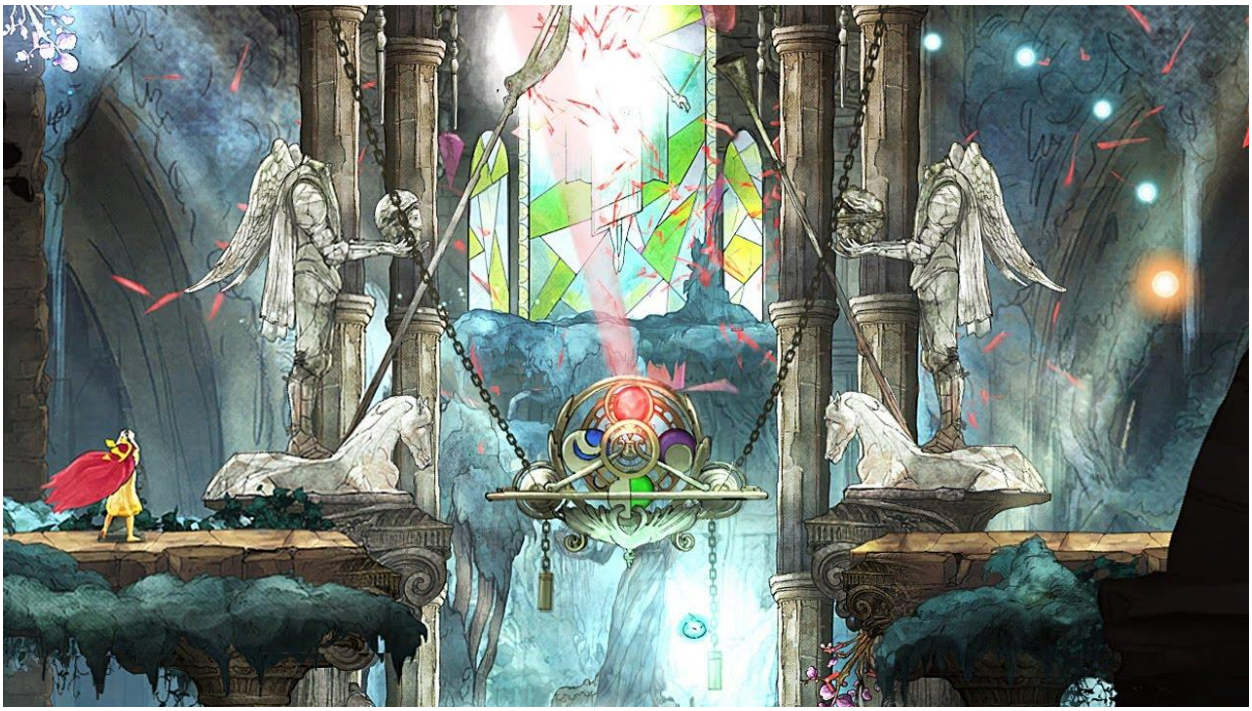

Figure 8: *Child of Light* shares many key characteristics of recent indie games.

Ninja Theory's *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* was developed and published independently but retains many key characteristics of AAA games in contrast to *Child of Light* such as elaborate lighting effects, photorealistic graphics, and high production value in general. Additionally, the game tells a personal story about Senua's grappling with illusions and psychological battles

which is also a trademark of indie games all told under the guise of AAA sensibilities. The team coined the term “Independent AAA” which connotes the middle ground between two extremes.

The commercial director Dominic Matthews of Ninja Theory elaborates that “there are ‘two extremes’ in the market – indies with huge creativity creating new genres, and huge publishers with ‘phenomenal production values’ that produced games in a narrow band of genres… There’s nothing that sits in the middle of those two… This is the space that we call independent triple-A” (Reynolds 2018, n.pag.). In both cases, the definition of an indie games is arguably too vague due to the blurred line between purely independent and AAA productions which is often subjectively attributed where a AAA stylistic game is not necessarily bad. “A game can be produced in the context of a multinational ‘triple-A’ publisher or a two-person garage studio and be equally engaging, equally meaningful or equally banal” (Simon 2013, 1-2).

Figure 9: *Hellblade: Senua’s Sacrifice* employs photorealistic graphics akin to AAA games.

Nadav Lipkin argues in his text “Examining Indie’s Independence” that “[i]t is impossible to provide a single motivation for the indie scene’s dependence on alternative production and distribution structures. On the one hand, it may be the explicit rejection of hegemony, an outlet of radical anti-authoritarianism […] and on the other hand, reliance on these alternatives could simply be the result of necessity in the absence of better tools” (Lipkin 2012, 12). The film

scholar Geoff King distinguishes between three types of independence or three strategies for signaling authenticity, which Jesper Juul has adapted in his book *Handmade Pixels* (2019):

1. Financially independent in terms of its "industrial location."
2. Aesthetically independent [Juul's term] in its "formal/aesthetic strategies."
3. Culturally independent [Juul's term] in its "relationship to the broad social, cultural, political or ideological landscape (Juul 2019, 12).

Trying to find a clear definition of what "independent game" entails is problematic and hard to define but these three categories serves to paint a more nuanced picture of what independence might entail. Indie games that do not veer from these three factors are arguably more authentic, but what Juul ultimately expresses is that these are ideological categories. "What Juul is trying to do is take the claims that are swirling around in culture and trying to walk them back to figure out not just what indie *is* but what that word *does* when we summon it up. Better yet, he's trying to explain what the indie label *does for a game*" (Kunzelman and Walters 2020, n.pag.).

To summarize, Aarseth may be more inclined to attribute indie developers the title of ideal game auteurs as many of them do check all of Aarseth's three initial boxes. But his first criteria do not exclude AAA developers as long as "the game is associated with their name, rather than that of the Development Company or publisher" (Aarseth 2004, 262). If there is one salient takeaway in this research of game auteurs, it is Aarseth's idea of holding on to one's creative integrity and vision over financial interests in a studio world. In the end, game authorship is ultimately a social construct at its core for better or worse. "Authorship, as always, depends on recognition of authorship; it is a social category and not a technological one. As Focault claims, 'the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society'" (Aarseth 1997, 172). Independent or triple A, the quest for game authorship is motivated by a desire to foster an idea of cultural respectability (see Hakimi 2012) in order for video games to be recognized as a serious art form much like Andrew Sarris wanted for films in the fifties with his work on the *auteur* theory.

Video Game Aesthetics:
Recognizing Video Games as Works of Art

The discourse behind game authorship is largely motivated by an ideological movement of critics to validate video games as a serious artform which is why "a number of video game critics see [the *auteur* theory] as strategy for achieving an air of cultural respectability for an entire medium consigned to oblivion" (Hakimi 2012, 3). Although it could seem like an antiquated approach, it is a means to use familiar filmic concepts in order to convince art critics that video games are art because video game critics have for a long time contested against film- and art critics who argue against video games as a serious artform.

The film critic of Newsweek Jack Kroll wrote that "[g]ames can be fun and rewarding in many ways, but they can't transmit the emotional complexity that is the root of art. Even the most advanced games lack the shimmering web of nuances that makes human life different from mechanical process" (Kroll 2000, n.pag.). Even more popular film critic Robert Ebert who wrote the infamous 2010 article "Video games are not art" has become an adversarial figure among video game critics. Ebert wrote that "[n]o one in or out of the field has ever been able to cite a game worthy of comparison with the great poets, filmmakers, novelists and poets" (Ebert 2010, n.pag.). Kroll's and Ebert's comments may be outdated exemplars considering the discourse has changed much since the early 2000s, but they nonetheless represent conservative, elitist voices against a medium which was still in its relative infancy especially in terms of academia.

Video games have grown to become increasingly complex which is reflected in the close interrelationship with different artforms: concept arts, animation, music, voice acting, motion capture and cinematics. A video game could then be analyzed through its three distinct symbiotically bound aesthetics which are that complements the whole: audiovisual-, ludic- and narrative aesthetics. Graeme Kirkpatrick in his text *The Aesthetic Approach* defines "aesthetic" as a term "often associated with visual properties of objects and it tends to be used we want to highlight the fact that something is pleasing to the eye" (Kirkpatrick 2011, 13). Video games are indeed preoccupied with such visual properties as they are products of computer graphics but simply analyzing the audiovisual aesthetics might be too narrow in framing video games as art.

Film critics tend to view games from a strict audiovisual perspective, and as such they tend to neglect ludic aesthetics and even use this aspect as a means of arguing against video games as art. As Ebert states "[o]ne obvious difference between art and game is that you can win

a game. It has rules, points, objectives, and an outcome. [W]ithout points or rules, […] it cease to be a game and becomes a representation of a story, a novel, a play, dance, a film" (Ebert 2010, n.pag.). Ebert appears to generalize the term "art" very broadly to a "common-sense" idea whereby he resorts to a black-or-white fallacy argument instead of elaborating how video games are a complex amalgamation of many different artforms. Ludic? Yes, but also audiovisual- and narrative aesthetics. Ebert, however, is right to point out that video games are often preoccupied with rules, even more specifically, "[v]ideogames have a property that is frequently not associated with art: competitive gameplay. [W]e may need to temper our conclusion about the art status of videogames and say that though they significantly align with art, videogames may count as a new and distinctive kind of art" (Tavinor 2009, 196). Some rudimentary understanding of ludic aesthetics (the gameplay) is critical to our understanding of video game's unique property which should not be taken for granted.

When it comes to video games, it is equally important to talk about how a game *feels* or more specifically how the *rules* of a game works. "By 'aesthetics' we are referring to all aspects of video games that are experienced by the player, whether directly (such as audio and graphics) or indirectly (such as rules)" (Egenfeldt-Nielsen 2020, 121). There is just a general reluctance to *play* games on part of film- and art critics in order to fully understand the nuances of what makes a particular video game great, but it is also hard not to blame them since many video games often require dozens of hours of play time just to get the gist of it as opposed to watching a movie.

Films and video games are after all two unique cultural worlds with their own semi-isolated cultural history which "is an important reason why we should approach videogames on their own terms, and not always judge them by more familiar forms of culture that philosophers of the arts and other theorists have typically dealt with" (Tavinor 2009, 179). It is perhaps not surprising that the term "gamers" have become somewhat of a misunderstood stereotype who "only play video games", essentially creating an artificial rift between "gamers" and "non-gamers" which bars the latter from truly appreciate video games on their own terms. But if video game critics cannot convince art critics, would they rethink their position if a well-established art museum began curating video games next to famous paintings and films?

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) began curating an initial list of fourteen iconic video games in 2012 including *Pac-Man* (1980), *Tetris* (1984), *SimCity 2000* (1994), *The Sims* (2000) and *Portal* (2007) to mention a few. "MoMa's venture provided what appeared to be an

indisputable signal that the gatekeepers of aesthetic taste and value had granted video games approval for critical admiration and recognition outside the confines of subculture, alongside revered works of art" (Hakimi 2012, 1). This initial list, much like the predefined list from the Hall of Fame of the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences, reaffirms more broadly that video games can stand on equal footing next to famous art pieces and films in the same museum.

The fact that MoMa began curating video games, a well-established and respectable art museum since 1929, marked a broader paradigm shift for art connoisseurs who would otherwise disregard video games as a serious artform. Equally important is the fact that MoMa acknowledges the more nuanced aspects of video games. "Are video games art? They sure are, but they are also design… The games are selected as outstanding examples of interaction design… Our criteria, therefore, emphasize not only the visual quality and aesthetic experience of each game, but also the many other aspects - from the elegance of the code to the design of the player's behavior - that pertain to interaction design" (Antonelli 2012, n.pag.).

Category	MoMA Example	Popularly Credited to	MoMA Film Collection Equivalent	Example Video Game from outside collection	Additional Examples in MoMA's Collection
Indie	*Another World* Éric Chahi, 1991	Individual/ Developer	*Poison* Todd Haynes, 1991	*Braid* Jonathon Blow, 2007	*Tetris* *Myst* *Vib-Ribbon* *Minecraft*
Art	*Passage* Jason Rohrer, 2007	Individual	*Transmission* Harun Farocki, 2007	*The Artist is Present* Pippen Barr, 2011	*flOw* *Long March Restart*[6]
Mainstream Studio	*Pac-Man* Toru Iwatani, 1980	N/A	*The Blues Brothers* John Landis, 1980	*Doom* Id Software, 1993	*Pong* *Space Invaders* *Street Fighter II* *Katamari Damacy*
Commercial Auteur[7]	*The Sims* Will Wright, 2000	Individual	*Gladiator* Ridley Scott, 2000	*The Legend of Zelda* Shigeru Miyamoto, 1986	*SimCity 2000*
Auteurist Studio	*Portal* Valve, 2007	Entire Studio	*Ratatouille* Pixar (Brad Bird), 2007	*Grand Theft Auto III* Rockstar Games, 2001	*EVE Online*

Figure 10: MoMa's list represent a wide array of different types of game development.

MoMa's decision to select games based on interaction design may not come as a surprise considering that it is curated by the Department of Architecture and Design. Video games are as such catalogued next to objects which has its roots in "Industrial Design" such as furniture and blueprints. "Effectively, then, MoMa's approach to video games places them within an established lineage of conveying artistic value and a formal appreciation to function objects" (Hakimi 2012, 2) which contrasts with more traditional fine arts but art, nonetheless.

Another takeaway from the list, similar to our previous discussion, is that indie games are not necessarily always considered works of an auteur, but that they are generally attributed due to their stylistic and sometimes vocal distance against commercial (AAA) games. "Just like 'indie films', it is assumed that indie games are more genuinely artful expressions because they are produced outside the mainstream studio system" (Newman 2016, 25). It is perhaps not surprising then that MoMa, much like the Academy, attach the original creator's name to elicit the same sense of respectability and admiration to that of great works of art. But as always, each game is attributed differently depending on which production category they tilt towards. Even though MoMa has been very vocal about inducting video games into the arts there is still this cloud of tribalism overhanging the discourse of art in relation to video games. Jonathan Jones of The Guardian wrote a 2012 article titled "Sorry MoMa, video games are not art" where he states:

> "The worlds created by electronic games are more like playgrounds where experience is created by the interaction between a player and a programme. The player cannot claim to impose a personal vision of life on the game, while the creator of the game has ceded that responsibility. No one 'owns' the game, so there is no artist, and therefore no work of art" (Jones 2012, n.pag.).

Interestingly, Will Wright is credited twice in the initial MoMa list for both *SimCity 2000* (1994) and *The Sims* (2000) which are arguably the closest game equivalent to what Jones refer to as "playgrounds" for its inherent emphasis on gameplay. In other words, some art critics are still hesitant to embrace video games like *Pacman* (1980) and *Tetris* (1984) into the same league as Leonardo DaVinci's paintings or Shakespeare's plays. Essentially there is a discoursal pull between two extremes of gameplay mechanics and cinematic storytelling. Video games were still relatively simplistic in their presentation in terms of graphics due to hardware limitation in the 1980s; conventional storytelling has never been a central part in games like *Pacman* (1980)

which were designed for the arcade market. Even Nintendo's original *Super Mario Bros.* (1985) share many of the same arcade elements of level progression with a score board albeit being a pastiche on the "princess and dragon" motif which serve as the generic premise (back story) for the player to move forward:

> "[I]t has been contended that simple games do not require extensive back stories and their use merely provides a basic method of contextualizing a game's objective (Myers, 2003; Rollings & Adams, 2003, p. 92). Myers (2003) further argues that despite the well-established role of back stories, the variability of their effectiveness when used in interactive games suggests that the game medium remains vastly different to other, more traditional forms of storytelling such as books, film, and theatre" (Ip 2011, 108).

This begs the question of whether a theoretical approach of art can be a better gateway for video games into the arts? Grant Tavinor argues in "Videogames as Art" that "[v]ideogames will count as art if they fit within an appropriate theoretical understanding of art… I take as my specific chosen model the *cluster* theory of art" (Tavinor 2019, 176). Tavinor does raise the difficulties of coming up with a definition of art but vouch for the cluster theories of art by echoing Wittgenstein's term of "family resemblances": "[A]rt can be characterized by a set of conditions which an object might meet in any number of ways" (Tavinor 2019, 177). Tavinor uses Berys Gaut's list to illustrate this idea of cluster theory that a comprehensive list of various properties is sufficient in terming whether an object is a work of art:

1. Possessing positive aesthetic properties, such as being beautiful, graceful, or elegant.
2. Being expressive of emotion.
3. Being intellectually challenging.
4. Being formally complex and coherent.
5. Having a capacity to convey complex meanings.
6. Exhibiting an individual point of view.
7. Being an exercise of creative imagination.
8. Being an artifact or performance which is the product of a high degree of skill.
9. Belonging to an established artistic form.
10. Being the product of an intention to make a work of art. (Tavinor 2019, 177)

In summary, video games generally check many of the boxes above regardless of the discourse of authorship, but it is interestingly to discern that Tavinor's list essentially indicates "an individual point of view" even though a team or a studio may serve the same role. It is perhaps not strange then that game critics tend to front game designers and independent developers since they often fit the description in Tavinor's list, but like its filmic counterpart, the list will likely foster "a 'cult of personality', providing elitist evaluative criteria, idealizing a romantic notion of the author, disregarding historical and socio-political forces, and snubbing other labor contributions" (Hakimi 2012, 3). If video game authorship was complicated, then the same can be said about its exigence in discourse as art. It is largely a cross-cultural issue where video games is still relatively new in the discourse of art while simultaneously have to deal with film- and art critics who may resort to a black-or-white fallacy argument instead of enquiring how video games can be perceived as art outside the critics normative perspective. As Tavinor states:

> "Modern culture seems increasingly splintered and compartmentalized. Though this is largely a result of the sheer number of people who are now able to take part in culture due to increasing levels of affluence, it is surely also because of the technological globalization of culture and the increasing ease with which cultural niches are able to communicate and connect their interests through modern means" (Tavinor 2009, 179).

Lastly, game critics are often used as marketing tools because their reviews can often fall into the category of *fanboy* level of writing which are generally not very well written but serve to garner a general hype among consumers. Most critical of all is arguably the lack of art literacy and the ability to connect video games to other art forms. "A failure to understand what is possible in film or graphical art can undermine the judgements that are made in videogaming critics… [Tavinor is] always suspicious to hear that a game has a compelling narrative, because […] the narratives presented by games are currently a poor shadow of their cousins in filmed and written fiction" (Tavinor 2009, 186). The games that Tavinor alludes to is the *Metal Gear Solid* series, created by the game auteur Hideo Kojima, which are frequently praised in games writing for having engrossing narratives. But for many, like Tavinor, they are "an exercise of frustration". With some rudimentary knowledge about video games aesthetics, it should hopefully help the reader to unpackage Kojima's unique way of designing games whereby he often holds a mirror towards the player while he deconstruct several preconceived notions of playing a video game.

Chapter 2: A Hideo Kojima Inquiry

The Origins of Hideo Kojima: *Metal Gear* (Konami, 1987)

Hideo Kojima's introductory years at the Japanese entertainment and gambling company Konami proved to be challenging without any programming skills in the orthodox Japanese institutional hierarchy in the face of his directorial ambitions. There is a general misconception that Hideo Kojima directed *Penguin Adventure* (Konami, 1986), the very first game he is credited, but which he had no creative control where his "involvement was quite minor, offering support for various ideas" (Kojima Productions 2021). Kojima would eventually be assigned his first official project with the working title *Lost Warld* but which was shortly "cancelled when it was found to be too complex to run on its host machine, the MSX" (Lambie 2015, n.pag).

Kojima nearly quit the video game industry following the cancellation of his first project after six months of hard work but on the positive side he learned how to coordinate a team of different talents where "[t]here's a range of different qualities. And you need to bring all these people together to make a game" (Kojima Productions 2021). The work experience would prepare him for future directorial responsibilities, and with the help of a senior staff member of Konami, he was finally entrusted with the company's next big project – *Metal Gear*.

Figure 11: The promotional art for *Metal Gear* (Konami, 1987).

Metal Gear (Konami, 1987) is a military action-adventure game which was originally only released in Japan for the MSX2 computer. *Metal Gear* marks the directorial debut of Hideo Kojima where he was responsible for the overall game design as well as the scripted story. Konami originally wanted a traditional action shooting game due to the rising popularity of war games, but Kojima was "thinking of ways in which [he] could subvert the genre… The idea was for a non-combat game" (Parkin 2012, n.pag.). Kojima pitched the idea for the board of Konami, and they agreed it was a revolutionary idea since the stealth genre was relatively new.

Kojima's decision to ultimately make *Metal Gear* a stealth game is a testament to his artistic integrity which is today "considered the first stealth-action video game [which] birthed a genre that's since spawned many of the industry's most popular titles and impacted other genres with stealth influence" (Sallee 2012, n.pag.). To be more precise, Hideo Kojima is arguably the first game designer to merge stealth elements in an action/adventure framework.

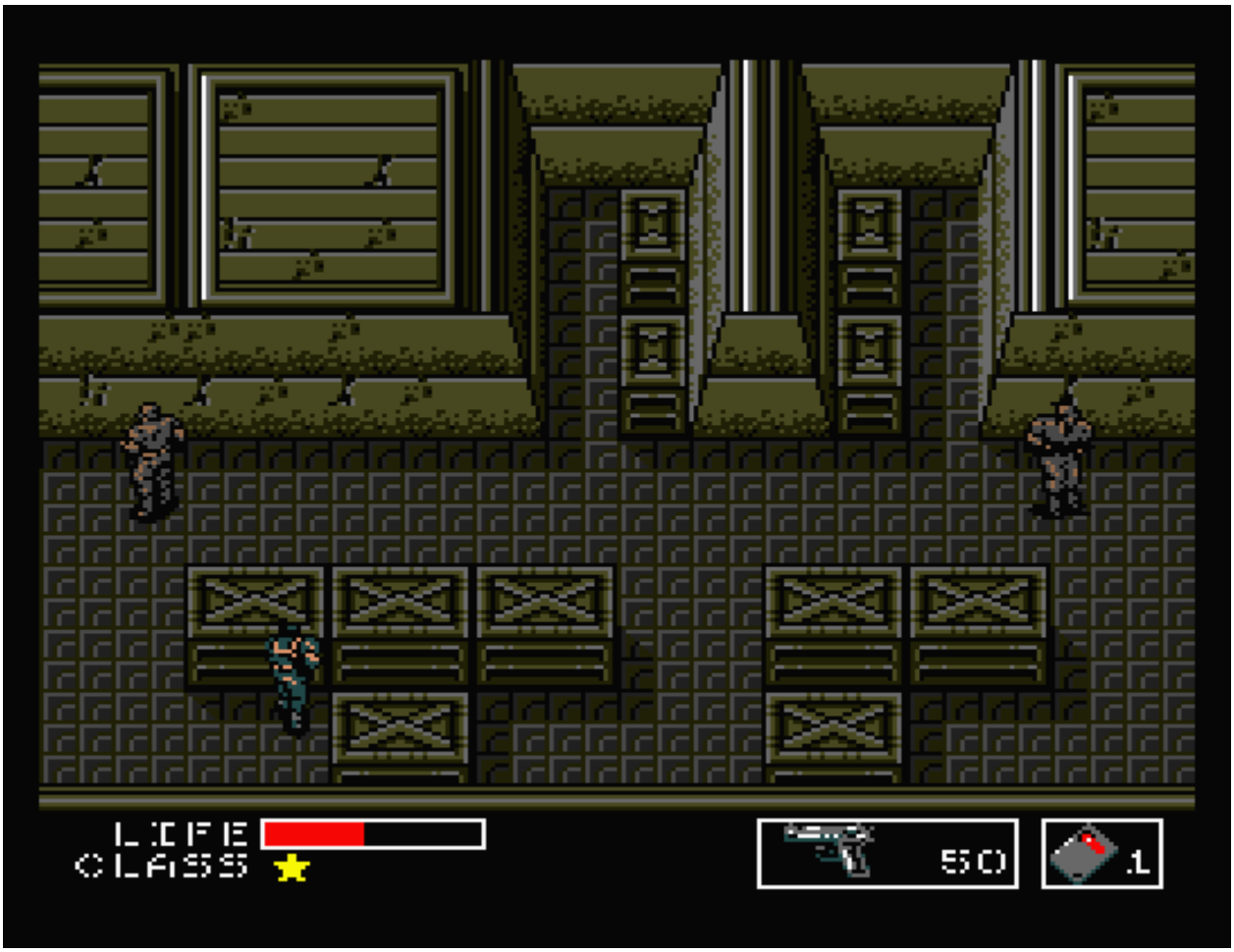

Figure 12: The player has to plan their route according to the enemies patrolling.

The gameplay focuses on tactical sneaking where the player has to progress from one area to the next without alerting the guards which would become an intricate part of Hideo Kojima's way of designing the layout of his games. The layout of each area forces the player to plan each route carefully by learning the patterns of the patrolling enemies in order to master each area (or "stages") which serves as the game's sub-goals. In terms of general progression, the player has a weapon slot and an item slot where they the player has to procure different key cards in order to access previously locked areas. With the exception of the occasional boss fights and puzzle rooms, the game is essentially divided between stealth gameplay and radio communication where the majority of the text-based narrative is conveyed with the exception of a few cutscenes.

Figure 13: The player is informed where to go next through radio communication.

The narrative in *Metal Gear* is split between in-game character interactions and text-based radio communication. The overall story of *Metal Gear* is rather straightforward compared to Kojima's later works, but it is surprisingly comprehensive for its time albeit echoing many archetypal

tropes from Hollywood action films. To contextualize, the player controls Solid Snake, a rookie soldier of the special forces unit FOXHOUD, sent by his commander Big Boss to infiltrate the enemy base Outer Heaven to rescue their lost agent Gray Fox and other POWs, defeat Outer Heaven's elite mercenary group and ultimately destroy the titular bipedal weapon Metal Gear.

In the broadest sense, *Metal Gear* is about an American rookie soldier on a sneaking mission to eliminate terrorists and destroy a walking nuclear robot to avert a nuclear incident. While the overall story may seem simple by modern standards, the characters of *Metal Gear* are presented with a sense of history preceding the game's setting, relationships change and there is even a plot twist towards the end. What ultimately brings the whole narrative together, however, is the relationship between Snake and his commander Big Boss who turns out to be the elusive leader of Outer Heaven who has been manipulating the player avatar from beginning.

Figure 14: Big Boss (top-left) debriefs Snake before the final fight of the game.

What is interesting about the original *Metal Gear* is that it tells a simple yet delicate story about deceit and misinformation which becomes an integral part of how Kojima explores new complex

themes in subsequent entries in the series. In addition, Kojima introduced his signature fourth-wall breaking meta jokes for the first time; it is unclear whether the game is addressing the player avatar or the player itself when Big Boss commands the player to "turn off the MSX" computer as a desperate attempt to prevent the player from beating the game. It is Kojima's way of communicating with the player in a similar way to Alfred Hitchcock who was famous for manipulating his audience members in ways "where they are included into the same world as the characters in the film" (Driscoll 2014, 11).

To summarize, *Metal Gear* may not be the most emblematic game of Kojima's repertoire, but it introduced a lot of signature elements which has now become synonymous with Hideo Kojima as an auteur and the series as a whole such as the emphasis on stealth, intricate storytelling and breaking the fourth wall. Even though *Metal Gear* was designed as an isolated titled, it is interesting to see how Kojima has evolved since the first title in the series. "Looking back, it's fascinating to see how many of the ideas which would become famous in later games… Kojima's now famous love for cinema is evident even in this early incarnation" (Lambie 2015, n.pag.). Even more relevant is that Kojima demonstrates that he has a stylistic way of designing video games which remained consistent and evident up to his latest title.

Kojima never intended to make a sequel to *Metal Gear* but little did he know that "Metal Gear would grow to become the creator's career-long project and would influence the design of games years in the future" (Sallee 2012, n.pag.). Kojima managed to push the technology with the MSX computer, but unfortunately the computer was not available in North America and Europe unlike the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). "Its failure to crack the American and British markets (already dominated by machines like the Commodore 64) is perhaps the main reason the system is largely unheralded in the English-speaking West" (Plunkett 2011, n.pag.).

Konami decided to port *Metal Gear* to the NES to broaden their market outside of Japan. However, the NES port of the original *Metal Gear* was handled by a different team who heavily altered the game such as the appearance of the titular weapon "due to the difficulties in displaying the sprite on the screen" (Hawkins 2011, n.pag.). The NES port would also have its own sequel titled *Snake's Revenge* (Konami, 1990) whereby one of the game's developer had a random encounter with Kojima where they discussed the game and urged Kojima to make a sequel more faithful to his original vision. This prompted Kojima to write a draft the very same day and submit the script to his superiors of what would become *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*.

Kojima Strikes Back:

Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake (Konami, 1990)

Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake (*MG2*) was released for the MSX in 1990 just two months after the release of *Snake's Revenge* for the NES. There were technically two different versions of the original *Metal Gear*, one for the MSX by Kojima and the ported version for the NES by Ultra Games, for two different markets. Ultra Games made their own sequel titled *Snake's Revenge* for the NES but deviated from the original game with less focus on stealth and the narrative; one of the developers even called *Snake's Revenge* "not the authentic Snake" (Heather 2019, n.pag.)

Hideo Kojima returned as director and writer where he and his team of MSX developers took the core design of the first game in new and interesting directions without losing the foundation of what made the original game so impactful. The overall presentation takes the next natural steps in terms of visual graphics, gameplay mechanics, music, the artificial intelligence of enemies and the scope of the narrative. While the original game introduced many characteristics of Kojima as an auteur today, *MG2* marks the focal point for the rest of the series in terms of its narrative, themes, and overall aesthetics which have become synonymous with Kojima.

Figure 15: The promotional art for *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* (Konami, 1990) for the MSX2.

MG2 retains the overhead perspective of its predecessor, but the gameplay, interface and visual graphics have undergone a noticeable overhaul. The most apparent difference is the addition of a 3x3 squared radar where the player can now orient themselves in relation to enemy placements and general direction. Enemies are more sophisticated as they can now intercept the player more spontaneously by rotating their heads, and they can now react to various noises from the player avatar which adds a new layer of tension and mindfulness in terms of general progression.

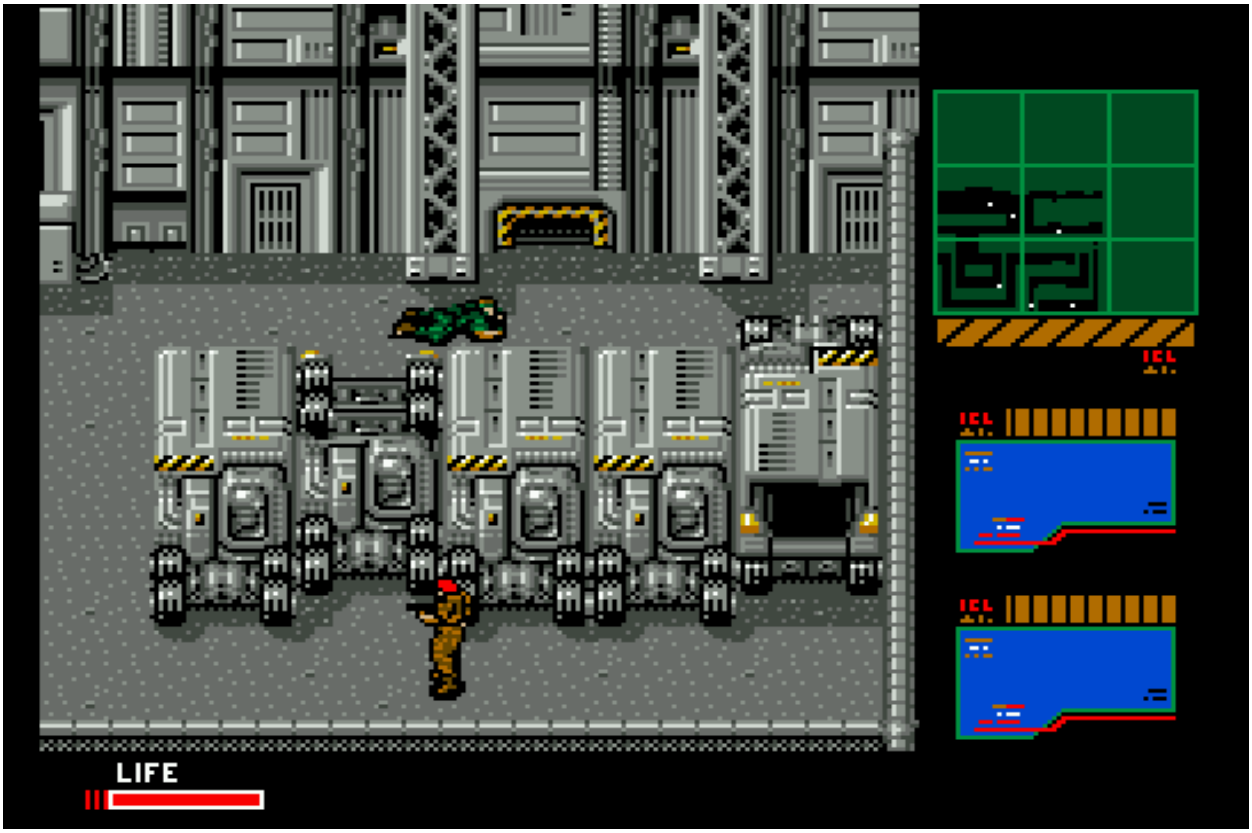

Figure 16: The interface is more elaborative with the addition of a dynamic radar.

Kojima implemented a new crawl mechanic where the player can now traverse through air ducts and hide underneath trucks which makes the game more dynamic while simultaneously opens up for more player exploration. The puzzles and fourth-wall breaking meta jokes also makes a return where the player avatar is asked by the commander to translate a tap code into a radio frequency from the physical manual in order to progress. Despite the overall praise, *MG2* still suffers from a lot of backtracking which artificially extends the game, but Kojima has succeeded in expanding and refining the original formula which is also reflected in the "story that places its action into a wider political and emotional context" (Alexandra 2019, n.pag.).

MG2 is set four years after the events of *Metal Gear* in Zanzibar Land where Big Boss returns as the maniacal leader who is now joined by Gray Fox, Snake's old comrade, who both serve as the central antagonists of the game. To summarize, Solid Snake must infiltrate the base under guidance of the new FOXHOUND commander Roy Cambell, rescue the kidnapped scientist Dr. Kio Marv who holds the secret to solve the worldwide oil crisis, and destroy the revised Metal Gear D from the new rogue military group who threatens nuclear deterrence. The premise remains largely the same from the previous title where deception and betrayals are returning themes, but it is Kojima's dynamic writing that showcases the growing game auteur.

Kojima has broadened the scope of his writing from the previous game by addressing more mature themes which would become synonymous with the series at large such as nuclear deterrence, orphans of war and the curse of veterans who cannot find meaning outside the battlefield. More noteworthy, is Kojima's early exploration of the shadow archetype which in Jungian psychology define "as the personification of certain aspects of the unconscious personality" (Conger 2005, 85). While Snake and Big Boss mirrors as student and mentor, Gray Fox serves as the equivalent opposite to Snake in terms of physical prowess and ideology. This notion is even more explicit in the later games when Snake must fight his own clone brother.

To summarize, *MG2* pushes the envelope of the action-stealth genre with more elaborative gameplay mechanics, visual graphics and more importantly the narrative which would become the focal point for the overarching story. Kojima did have some trouble making *MG2* since he still heavily relied on programmers to realize his vision. Kojima elaborates that "after the second Metal Gear launched, I developed my own scripting engine […] so that I could have complete control over when the animation played or when the music triggered" (Parkin 2012, n.pag.). Even so, Kojima clearly shows the early signs of the rising video game auteur he is today by holding on to his core game design philosophies of the first game but also for pushing narrativity in video games which was still in its infancy in terms of cinematic storytelling.

The original *Metal Gear* and *MG2* for the MSX would remain obscure in the Western market until the release of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* (Konami, 2005) for the PlayStation 2 where Hideo Kojima explores the origins of Big Boss. These titles were widely overlooked due to the absence of the MSX outside of Japan, and in the grand scheme of the series these games serve as progenitors of the *Metal Gear Solid* (Konami, 1998) which was a landmark for the industry, and for many, the first exposure to the series and Hideo Kojima as a creative force.

Solidifying Kojima:
Metal Gear Solid (Konami, 1998)

Metal Gear Solid (*MGS1*) signified a landmark for the industry for pushing the possibilities with 3D technology, but the most salient feature was its distinct cinematic style which was uniquely rendered entirely with in-game graphics where Kojima really began to be perceived as an *auteur*. *MGS1* was published by Konami for the Sony PlayStation in 1998 where the latest advancement in 3D technology afforded Kojima the necessary tools to realize a *Metal Gear* game which was more realistic and cinematic than the flat 2D sprites of the previous generation. "[A]n enormous amount of attention was paid to the graphics to ensure that everything from the buildings to the characters came across as realistic and believable" (Lebowitz et al. 2011, 25).

Figure 17: Snake can now explore the world in 3D for the first time.

The benefit from this new technology is Kojima's venture into cinematic storytelling in the form of scripted in-game cutscenes as opposed to utilizing Full Motion Video or FMV which "proved so popular and effective that many developers began incorporating them into their own games, starting a trend of highly cinematic game storytelling" (Lebowitz et al. 2011, 24). The disadvantage with FMV, however, was that the immersion can easily break due to the generic,

compressed video quality will often simply serve as a “reward for the player’s completion of a specific game objective” (Domsch 2013, 32) rather than an integral part of the gameplay.

Kojima distinguished himself from his contemporaries by strictly using the in-game aesthetics to move the polygonal characters in real-time while he direct and pan the camera to deliver a cinematic experience. “[In video games], how well the world and characters are conveyed really depends on how effectively the visual presentation is leveraged” (Biggs 2017, n.pag.). Even more interesting is that some of the cutscenes are interactive such as when the player avatar is captured where you can only see from a first-person perspective. But where Kojima really began to be creative is how he utilize the hardware and peripherals of the PlayStation itself as creative tools for player interactivity as a part of the story.

Figure 18: Solid Snake as rendered in real-time during the scripted cinematic cutscenes.

The *Metal Gear* universe is known for their colorful cast of villains where Kojima often use them to showcase specific weapons- and item mechanics through various boss encounters, but the most iconic battle against FOXHOUND’s Psycho Mantis involves the use of the hardware itself. Prior to the fight, he asks the player to lay down their controller on the floor so that he can demonstrates his “psychic powers” by moving the DualShock controller thanks to the vibration technology. Psycho Mantis will also make various comments depending on the player progress

on the respective Memory Card up to this point, and even point out specific save files from other Konami properties. It is a subtle hint that the player has to change the controller port from slot one to two in order to bypass his "mind reading". This concept is called a "metalepsis" which is a postmodern rhetorical technique in which "the narrated characters meet their narrator who interferes in their lives as if he or she could live both in the narrating and the narrated time. The narration is 'contaminated' by the narrator's presence" (Ryan 2004, 442).

Figure 19: Psycho Mantis breaks the fourth wall by reading the Memory Card of the console.

Psycho Mantis, or rather Kojima, challenges the player's perception and expectations by violating certain preconceived notions about the act of playing a video game such as the idea that the main controller has to be in slot one in order to play. "It is a hallmark of Kojima's work that he plays with this keying between worlds: the DualShock controller, the memory card, and even the controller ports, previously existing on the level of the Operative World, is upkeyed by Psycho Mantis into the Game World" (Conway et al. 2015, 88).

This encounter with Psycho Mantis is a testament to his signature style as a video game auteur which would become an integral part in subsequent releases in terms of minimizing the diegetic game world with the player's world. Moreover, it demonstrates that the player is

rewarded for critical thinking and planning as opposed to mindless shooting which fits with the underlying anti-war message of Kojima.

MGS1 is deceptive in its presentation from its all too familiar military-espionage setting to deliver at its core an anti-war message where its stealth gameplay fits the underlying pacifist message since the game rewards sneaking over direct killing. This idea is also perpetuated in another iconic boss encounter against the Cyborg Ninja where the player is forced to fight bare-handed and gets penalized for reverting to firearms (see figure 20). "The continual foregrounding of non-violent game mechanics and the limited usability of a wide arsenal of weapons at the player's disposal can therefore be said to be strategies of procedural rhetoric, employed in the game with the purposes of communicating a pacifist message" (Stamenković et al. 2017, 21).

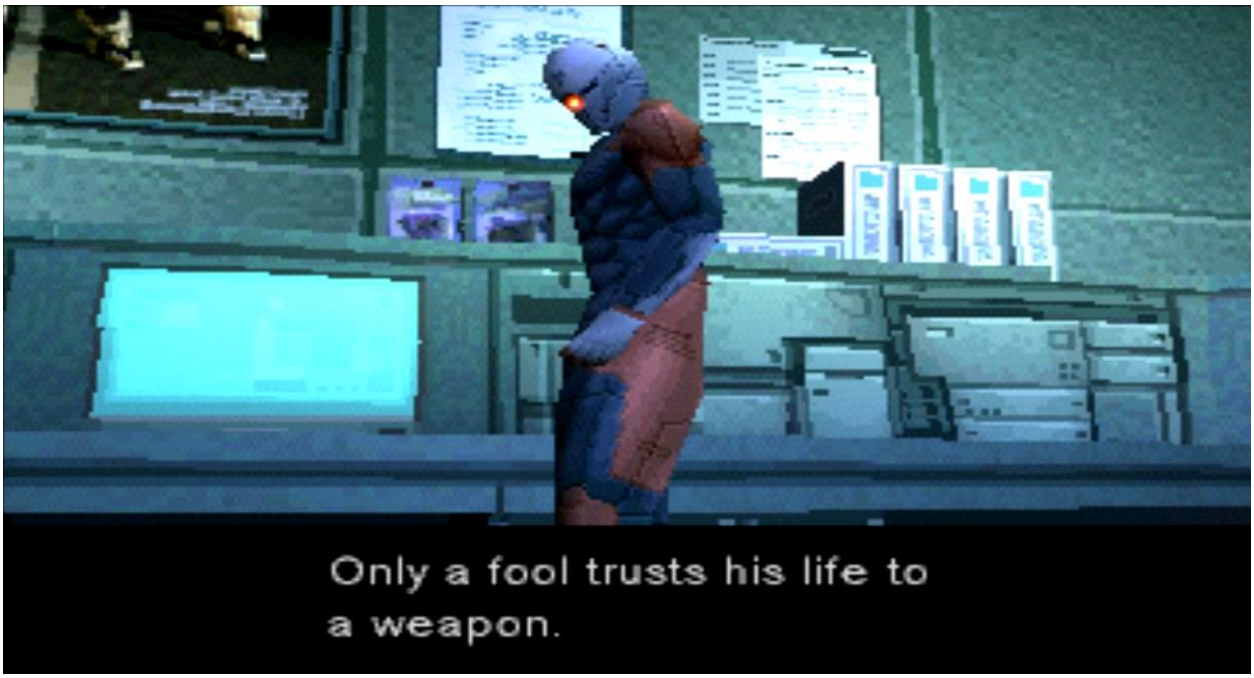

Figure 20: The Cyborg Ninja forces the player to use hand-to-hand combat.

The anti-war message permeates throughout the game's overarching structure which is especially reflected in the narrative where Kojima invites the player to contemplate various themes of the human condition through the lens of multiple character perspectives. "By expressing their own perspective, they encourage the player to think about his/her attitude in contrast or in comparison to the one reflected in the game" (Stamenković et al. 2017, 21).

Snake makes his views on war clearly that "[t]here are no heroes in war. All the heroes I know are either dead… or in prison. One or the other", whereas Meryl Silverburgh, coming from

the other side, reflect upon the glorification of war where she explicitly states at one point that "war is ugly… There's nothing glamorous about it" (*Metal Gear Solid*, 1998). FOXHOUND's rogue member Sniper Wolf later adds that she "watched the brutality… the stupidity of mankind through the scope of [her] rifle" (*Metal Gear Solid*, 1998). Both aides and adversaries express their negative attitudes towards war which aims to persuade the player to contemplate over the game's ethical discussions which aligns with the anti-war message of Kojima.

Figure 21: Meryl ruminates about her naïve reasons for joining the military.

The paradox, however, is that the player is entirely free to contradict this underlying pacifist message in the narrative by consciously killing soldiers on a broad scale during gameplay. This notion has been coined as "ludonarrative dissonance" by Clint Hocking which occurs when the game "seems to suffer from a powerful dissonance between what it is about as a game, and what it is about as a story" (Davidson 2018, 256). Kojima addresses this dichotomy when Snake's twin brother and main antagonist, Liquid Snake, confronts Snake, and the player by extension, about the unnecessary killing up to this point (see figure 22).

The first-person perspective, and the limited control, in this sequence invites the player to reflect upon whether the violence up to this point was justified. Solid Snake and Liquid Snake, both clones of their father Big Boss, represents polar opposites of each other, both in terms of ideology and philosophical perspectives where Kojima often intertwine real-world events with

the diegetic events to strengthen the plausibility of their arguments. "Exploratory language is at the center of many of the game's conspiratorial conversations, which drive the plot forward, contribute to worldbuilding, and serve as a tool for characterization by revealing the agendas of different characters" (Stamenković et al. 2017, 41).

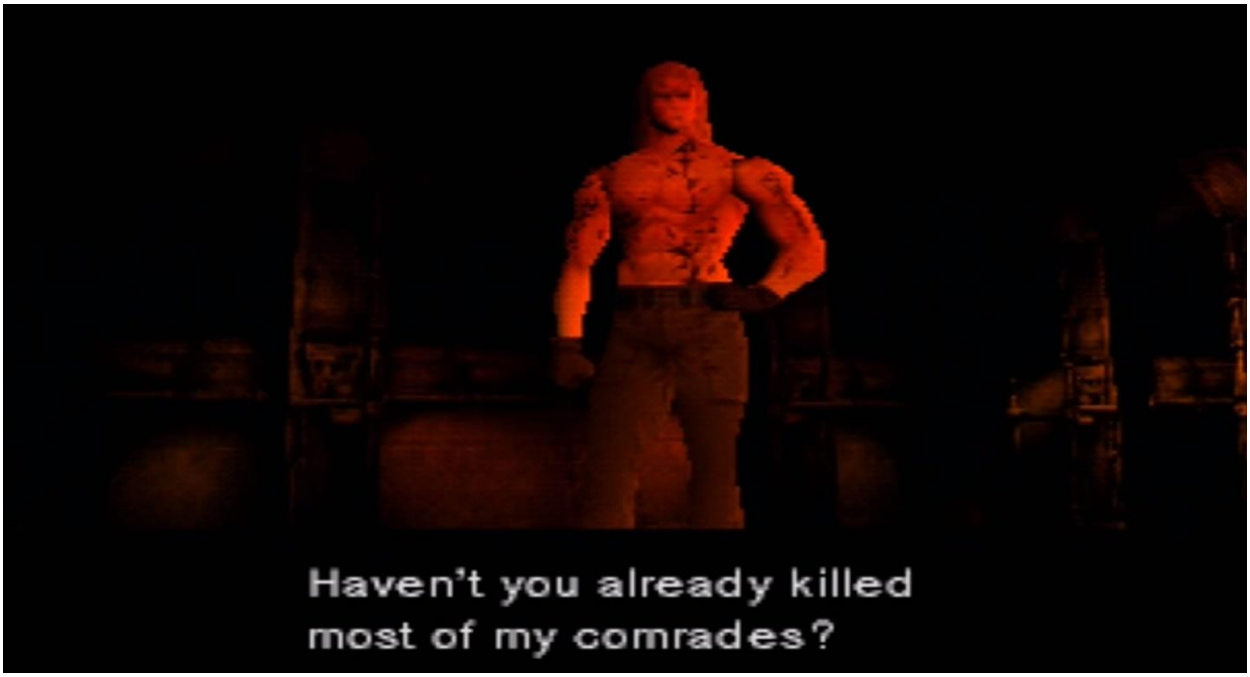

Figure 22: Liquid Snake challenges the morality of Snake and the player by extension.

To summarize, despite the general praise, the legacy of *MGS1* proves to be polarizing. On the one hand, it "formaliz[d] and popularize[d] 'Stealth' as a kind of genre" (Parkin 2017, 147) whereas detractors considered it as "an artistic failure" (Klevjer 2002, 194) due to the story-driven direction where active gameplay only accounts for one third as opposed to cinematics and codec calls. Having said that, *MGS* remains one of Kojima's most iconic entries in his entire repertoire which broadened the discourse of art in video games. It is Kojima's meticulous attention to details which makes the cutscenes so stylistically distinct akin to that of a film auteur which signified "an enormous leap forward in terms of what a story-driven game could be" (Parish 2018, n.pag.). From the stylistic and interactive cinematic cutscenes to the creative utilization of the hardware and the overarching narrative with its anti-war message, it demonstrates that Kojima commands great control over his craft like a true auteur where he and his team has put an enormous amount of attention to create a thought-provoking cinematic experience which was unprecedented at the time. A sequel was inevitable following its success.

The Meme of Kojima:
Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty (Konami, 2001)

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty (*MGS2*) is a postmodern achievement which aims to deconstruct its own medium while simultaneously subvert player expectations through the lens of misinformation in a digital age "that critiques motifs of control, social engineering, artificial intelligence, and existentialism" (Ng 2020, 33). But *MGS2* is not a postmodern game because of its self-awareness nor for the fourth wall breaking like the last title, but because it evokes and "embodies all the principles of literary postmodernism [such as] the focus on metanarrative and pastiche [and] the eventual collapse of reality and logic" (Holmes 2012, 142).

MGS2 was one of the most anticipated sequels for the Sony PlayStation 2 in 2001 where everything from a marketing standpoint (trailers, magazines, and even the final box art) indicated the return of Solid Snake in full galore. However, Kojima had other plans than simply retreading his old formula with a new coat of paint by deliberately going against fan expectations. Snake is presumed dead after just an hour of playtime where the player resumes control over a new silver haired rookie which presented more questions than answers. To elaborate, *MGS2* is divided into two different chapters where the first one serve as a prologue to set up and contextualize the bigger narrative point for the ending of the second main chapter.

Figure 23: Raiden is the central player avatar for the majority of *MGS2*.

The prologue mission, set two years after the events of *MGS1*, revolves around Solid Snake infiltrating a Tanker to take photographic evidence of the new amphibian Metal Gear RAY. Everything feels familiar from the interface to the gameplay mechanics with several improvements such as the ability to aim from a first-person perspective and peek around corners, but then the narrative takes a sudden turn at the climax of the prologue. The old antagonist Revolver Ocelot returns as one of the game's central villains, steals the new amphibian Metal Gear and leaves Snake presumably dead as the screen fades into uncertainty.

Figure 24: The prologue sets up as the ideal sequel with familiar characters and mechanics.

Kojima laid out the ideal sequel, but the Tanker mission was designed to be all a ploy to goat the player into thinking that Snake would be the main character for the duration of the game. When the main chapter begins, set two years after the Tanker incident, it is as if the game stars all over again. It completely ignores the fact that the player has already undergone an extensive number of the same tutorials during the prologue; the player suddenly resumes control over the new rookie Raiden whose boyish characteristics is the antithesis to Solid Snake's hardened persona.

The reason behind this controversial decision is that Raiden, and the player by extension, undergoes what essentially is a staged simulation of the events of the previous game. The beginning eerily echoes the past where Colonel Roy Cambell, Snake's former commander,

literally says word-for-word the instructions of the previous game, but not long before the ending it is revealed that Raiden has been talking to an AI, not the real Colonel. “With MGS2 eventually revealed to be simulated simulation, the most plausible explanation for the game creators’ choice of self-reflexivity is to elicit players’ critical awareness of what gaming is” (Ng 2017, 194).

Raiden is essentially analogues to the player who admires and wants to be like Snake where the broader story structures deliberately simulate the events of the previous game to toy with the emotions of the player. It is about past events but also how we process those events. “This change is distinctive because the game’s narration did heavily build on the identification between the player and rookie operative Raiden” (Stemmler 2020, 118). Raiden boasts that he has completed three hundred missions in VR, and even did a simulation of the Tanker mission just like the player, but when Raiden reunites with Solid Snake, he recounts a different version of the Tanker incident, essentially criticizing Raiden and the player by extension, for confusing VR with reality. By the time Raiden becomes aware that he has been subjected to what is known as the “S3 Plan” (Solid Snake Simulation), the narrative, and Kojima by extension, literally strips him naked and makes a mockery of him, and the player, for idolizing Snake (see figure 25).

Figure 25: Raiden is literally and psychologically naked.

Reality and logic comes crashing down towards the final segment when Raiden is captured and stripped naked to elicit frustration and confusion while the AI Colonel harass and taunts the player with fourth-wall breaking nonsense to exacerbate the situation. This confusion is also aesthetically represented in the gameplay space where codes are seemingly floating around for no reason where each room is named after digestive organs to denote that Raiden's reality is slowly breaking down. Raiden eventually reunites with Snake where he makes the most absurd but subtle fourth-wall breaking comment where he points to his bandana and says that he has "infinite ammo". Snake literally deconstruct himself as the ideal video game hero by equipping a cheat item, the infinite ammo bandana, right in front of the player (see figure 26).

Figure 26: Snake refer to the "infinite ammo" bandana item.

The following sequence is antithetical to the game as a stealth game where the player suddenly becomes empowered with a sword that can deflect bullets while Snake literally supplies the player with infinite ammo as they both run and gun through hordes of acrobatic sword and gun wielding soldiers. It simultaneously embraces and deconstructs ludonarrative dissonance right in front of the player all the while pointing to its own metanarrative for being the kind of virtual war game which Snake condemned in the first place. This sequence is further exacerbated when the interface starts to ludically take a life of its own by deliberately disorient the player with false "Mission Failed" (or "Fission Mailed") screens. "MGS2 features a crooked interface that mirrors

motifs in the game as a mise en abyme and metaphor of virtual war-conditioning that procedurally render players as complicit. As an interface envelope, it creates tension by framing players' temporal-spatial focus in connection to the technicality of videogames as computational and gameplay as simulation" (Ng 2017, 192).

Figure 27: The "Fission Mailed" screens were designed to break the flow of the gameplay.

The distorted interface disrupts gameplay expectations while it simultaneously reminds the player that war-games are disconcerting and demoralizing. Moreover, it foreshadows and contextualize the broader social commentary about artificial intelligence and digital censorship. The narrative becomes even more surrealistic when the supposedly destroyed GW, the artificial intelligence, contacts Raiden and begins spewing philosophical rhetoric for why the world needs to be socially controlled through memes, to create artificial context for a "sane society" in a digital world overflowing with junk data. Here is an excerpt to contextualize what they mean:

> "[I]n the current, digitized world, trivial information is accumulating every second, preserved in all its triteness. Never fading, always accessible. The untested truths spun by different interests continue to churn and accumulate in the sandbox of political correctness and value systems. Everyone withdraws into their own small-gated community, afraid of a larger forum. They stay inside their little ponds, leaking whatever

> ‘truth’ suits them into the growing cesspool of society at large. The different cardinal truths neither clash nor mesh. No one is invalidated, but nobody is right. Not even natural selection can take place here. The world is being engulfed in ‘truth’. And this is the way the world ends. Not with a bang, but a whimper” (*Metal Gear Solid 2*, 2001).

The AI is talking about media confirmation bias the American media outlets CNN and Fox News who heavily skew their information towards certain value systems. *MGS2* was released in 2001 well before the advent of social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter which heavily customize its media content through algorithms on an individual level. *MGS2*’s metanarrative is eerily clairvoyant and “applies itself very well as a critique of modern society saturated by algorithms, artificial intelligence, automation, and increasingly disorientating social or imagined realities” (Mróz 2018, 79). By the time Raiden defeats his godfather, the terrorist leader who wanted to free the American people from digital censorship, he does not know what to make of it all. Were the bad guys really that bad? Was anything real up to this point?

These are the questions that the game wants the player to reflect over whether they were real or not, the important issue is what you do with the experience of playing the game. Snake even makes this point explicit: “[D]on’t obsess over words so much. Find the meaning behind the words, then decide” (*Metal Gear Solid 2*, 2001). Raiden then tosses away his dog tag where the player could write down their name and date of birth in the beginning to signify that he is rejecting the controller of the player in order to become an autonomous person again.

To summarize, *MGS2* reinforces Kojima’s status as a creative genius by deliberately going against player expectations which at the time “clearly drove away a portion of the audience, [but] [i]t showed that games weren’t shackled to their analog roots, that video games could be more than the sum of its parts” (Holmes 2012, 144). *MGS2* was originally meant to be Kojima’s last title in the series which is why the ending is very open ended and vague to ultimately deliver a larger postmodern message. It is about enjoying subtext instead of obsessing over what is canon. It was a bold move by Kojima to follow his creative vision considering the bigger budget which could have been detrimental sales wise hence the extensive promotion of fan favorite Snake. Kojima adds that “[s]ince Metal Gear Solid sold very well, I had a bigger budget for MGS2… We were under a lot of pressure, but at the same time I enjoyed the creative freedom I had” (Grajales 2012, n.pag.). Even though *MGS2* is one of the most divisive titles in Kojima’s repertoire, it remains one of the most emblematic postmodern games of its generation.

From Kojima with Love:

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater (Konami, 2004)

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater (MGS3) explores and recontextualize the origins of Big Boss where Kojima could start with a clean slate without the pressure of continuity while also leave *MGS2* open to interpretations. If *MGS2* can be understood as a postmodern think piece about existentialism and subjective realities, then *MGS3* is a pastiche of 1960s spy films with its own twist. Kojima embraces its stylistic, comical minutiae for dramatic irony in order to accentuate the seriousness of the ending when the main character Naked Snake sets off on his path to become the series' antagonist Big Boss.

Figure 28: Naked Snake (Big Boss) is the central player avatar in *MGS3.*

Kojima's love for film permeates the game where the overarching narrative alludes to the film *Apocalypse Now!* (Coppola, 1979) where the main character must grapple philosophically with why their target, a decorated and a respected soldier, would defect from his country. To contextualize, the narrative is set during the 1960s Cold War era where a young Big Boss, Naked Snake, must prove the innocence of America by hunting down the rogue Cobra Unit and his maternal mentor, The Boss, who was forced to defect from her country to prevent a new war. Kojima deliberately chose the Cold War era as a backdrop to explore how human values change with the times through the lens of the xenophobic tensions between the USA and the USSR.

The most striking gameplay difference is the shift from the urban indoor environments to a more open jungle setting where the player must pay attention to a new camouflage meter (top-right) and adapt to the environment by applying the right combination of camouflage (see figure 29). Since the setting takes place during 1964, many of the futuristic tools like the omnipresent soliton radar is absent in favor of a more immersive experiences where the player must rely on more antiquated weapons and items in order to progress from one area to the next.

Figure 29: *MGS3* is primarily set around jungle environments.

The second noticeable gameplay change is the addition of a stamina meter underneath the life meter (top-left) which depletes over time and consequently affects gameplay performance such as the ability to aim steady and see clearly from a first-person perspective. This can be remedied by consuming various food items such as fruits and wild animals, but bullet wounds and bodily injuries must also be managed by various medical items to keep the stamina meter in check. While these new systems may seem overwhelming to the uninitiated, Kojima thought of "the right timing of when to give which game system to the player" (Lewis 2004, n.pag.) so that they can be more easily implemented later in the game for some creative gameplay.

Kojima has managed to evolve his formula from the urban settings of the previous games into a more dynamic stealth experience which encourages strategic item management, player exploration as well as player creativity. Trapped snakes and frogs can also be used to distract and

poison enemies which opens the game up for some emergent gameplay by "applying the vagaries of the game model and utilizing the emergent gameplay behaviors" (Newman 2008, 140). Clara Fernández-Vara uses the term *emergence* to illustrate this concept which "refers to the aspects of the game that relate to the player making decisions" (Fernández-Vara 2019, 177).

Even though the game is designed with a linear progression, each player will likely approach the game differently since there is a lot of strange little easter eggs. For example, food storage houses can be blown up which consequently makes all the soldiers complain and eat whatever the player throws at them – including poisonous mushrooms and frogs – which changes the stealth formula to be more dynamic from the normal point, aim and shoot gameplay. In other words, *MGS3* takes a step further where the player has a greater agency in terms of how certain events play out both ludically and narratively. Another interesting thing to note is that a certain scripted boss encounter can be entirely avoided, essentially rejecting the old video game convention that bosses can only be defeated according to a certain pattern.

Figure 30: The End can be avoided by assassinating him during a scripted sequence.

The one-hundred-year-old sniper specialist, The End, can be bypassed without actually having to confront him. There is a scripted sequence when the character is briefly introduced where there is a small window to assassinate him, essentially removing the tedium to fight him later on (see figure 30). Additionally, if the player save their game prior to the actual fight and come back

seven real-time days later, or tweak the internal console clock, The End will simply die of old age. Kojima elaborates that he "wanted to come up with totally different boss battles for *MGS3*… I just wanted to do things that you don't see in other games" (Lewis 2004, n.pag.). The Sorrow cannot be avoided, but it forces the player to think more critically and abstractly.

Figure 31: The player must confront the spirits of the dead.

The player must confront the ethereal boss, The Sorrow, in a linear river path where his life meter is depleted from the start, essentially suggesting that bullets are useless (see figure 31). The interesting aspect about this encounter is that it addresses the game's ludonarrative dissonance; all the soldiers killed by the player up to this point manifests as revenants in order to increase the difficulty by punishing the player for resorting to a lethal play style. Interestingly, there is no real way to kill The Sorrow except to resort to the lethal suicide pill which prompts the game into a cutscene where Snake wakes up from this nightmarish ordeal.

The members of the Cobra Unit were designed to be fantastical to highlight certain game mechanics, but also to subvert player expectations like the last game with postmodern subtext. However, it is not the crux of *MGS3* since Kojima aims for a more streamlined cinematic experience with more focus on gameplay and conventional storytelling. Kojima affirmed this notion in a PSM interview in 2003: "The structure of MGS3 will focus on the game's tempo and storytelling, instead of the unfolding of mysteries and multiple twists" (PSM 2003, n.pag.).

The biggest cinematic inspiration outside the striking likeness between Snake and the one-man army soldier John J. Rambo from the film *First Blood* (Ted Kotcheff, 1982) is the overarching allusion to Ian Fleming's James Bond whose fantastical spy setting shares many parallels with *MGS3*: The game opens with a stylistic Bondesque theme song "Snake Eater"; the villains are charismatic and have vivid characterizations; and the soundtrack and the general vibe of the setting evokes a lot of characteristics of 1960s spy films. Even Snake's superior, Major Zero, explicitly draws parallel between Snake and James Bond as a joke. However, where Kojima transcends being too cliché in a video game format is his commitment to "hyperrealism".

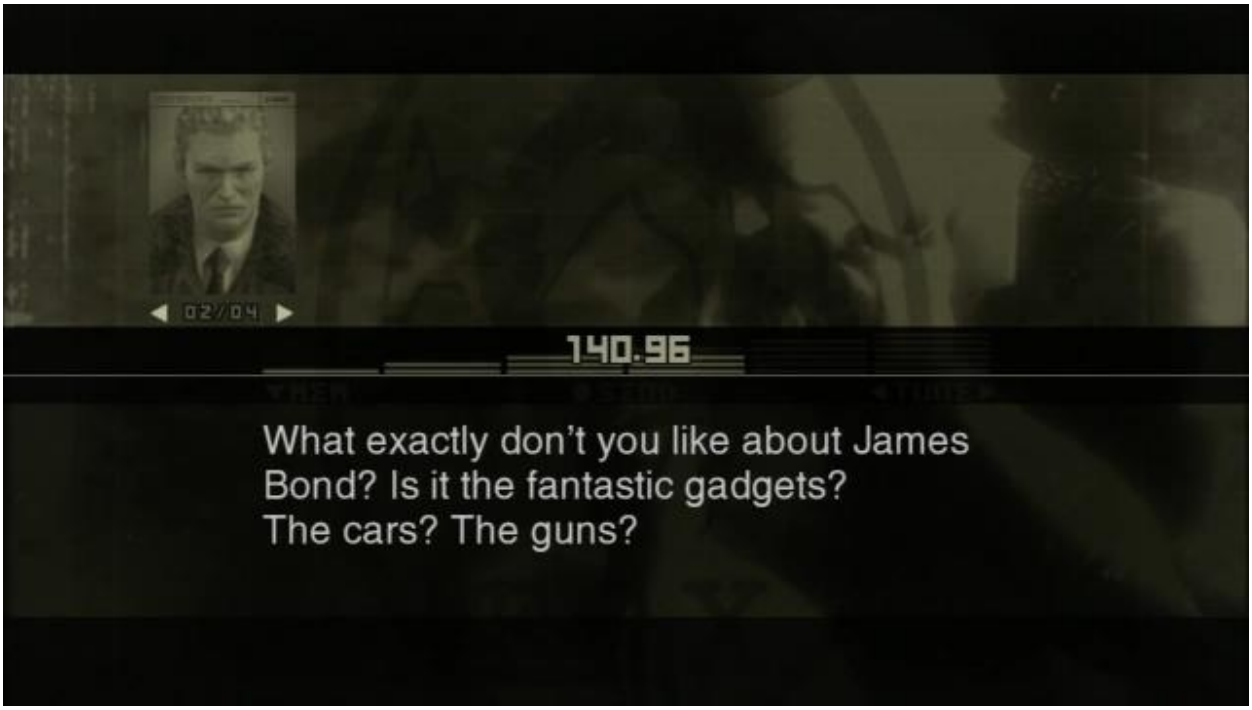

Figure 32: The similarities with James Bond is addressed in the game itself.

"Hyperreality" (or "hyperrealism") intermix real facts with fictional information to the point they become interchangeable and hard to distinguish from one another. "Fictional information in *Snake Eater* is presented by the characters with the same amount of conviction as historical fact, and the two are often so interwoven that any effort in unraveling them becomes a task in and of itself" (Cunningham 2010, n.pag.). Even the character Eva coyly points out this aspect to Snake: "Half of what I'd been told was a complete and utter lie… the other a half was a conveniently constructed lie. Where is the truth then? It's hidden in the lies" (*Metal Gear Solid 3*, 2004). It is a characteristic of the postmodern which is why *MGS3* is more subtle than in *MGS2* where Kojima explored extensively the dichotomy between simulation and reality.

The use of "hyperreality" has become a staple of Kojima where he is known for injecting real world events and politics as early as in *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* (Konami, 1990) where he used the oil crisis of the 1970s as a backdrop for the narrative, and the Cold War setting in *MGS3* is no exception thanks to its complex political history. Whether it be the Cuban missile crisis or the appearance of President Lyndon B. Johnson, the historical and the fictional are interwoven to strengthen the philosophical discussion in the game where Kojima refrains from presenting definitive answers or sides with any particular ideology. This is the crux of the pivotal character The Boss who on multiple encounters provokes her former pupil Snake, and the player by extension, to think more introspectively akin to the underlying anti-war message in *MGS1*.

The final section subverts the rest of the game as a simple pastiche of classic spy films by shifting its fast-paced adventurous direction into a more subdued introspective tone. The Boss reflects over how this Cold War is nothing but a passing game of power where "there is no such thing as an absolute timeless enemy" and that "[t]he foibles of politics and the march of time can turn friends into enemies just as easily as the wind changes" (*Metal Gear Solid 3,* 2004). The sign of an auteur is that they attempt to communicate complex meanings through their artform, which is what Kojima does when he taps into and brings his philosophical side into the games. "As is characteristic of Kojima's work, *Snake Eater* begs the question as to whether games are just escapist entertainment or active forms of engagement with the potential to say something significant" (Cunningham 2010, n.pag.).

Figure 33: The game lingers until the player decides to kill The Boss.

The Boss is not just a pivotal character in *MGS3* but also represent as a major turning point for the rest of the series as signified in a pseudo ludic-cinematic sequence after you defeat her. The game just lingers and waits for the player to press the fire button, essentially rendering the player as a complicit for killing The Boss and setting in motion the events which would spiral Naked Snake down the path into becoming the warmongering anti-hero Big Boss (see figure 33).

To summarize, *MGS3* feels like the perfect amalgam of both of its predecessors where Kojima skillfully combines hyperrealism with the pastiche of the spy genre to create a well-balanced cinematic experience which was paced well with the gameplay. Originally, Kojima wanted to pass the directorial torch after *MGS2* by embodying its "theme of passing knowledge on to the next generation [where he] might do the initial planning for the next game" (Keighley 2001, n.pag.) as opposed to the full auteur role of directing, writing, and producing. However, due to production complications he reluctantly embraced his auteur role once more to deliver what is arguably the most definitive "Metal Gear experience" to date.

MGS3 represents a high-point for the series where Kojima really gets to demonstrate the signature style of his cinematic storytelling in an entirely new timeframe while still pushing the Stealth genre despite its vintage setting. Kojima also came up with his personal theming of his games: "Gene" (*MGS1*), "Meme" (*MGS2*) and "Scene" (*MGS3)* (Kojima 2013, n.pag.). The latter simply refers to the Cold War setting where Kojima simply wanted to test himself to see if he could make a classic action-oriented spy thriller just like the movies which inspired him. While Kojima's personal theming does not retroactively make these three games more profound, it does enforce a feeling that Kojima had exhausted his best ideas across these three games.

Sadly, the word "high-point" has a double meaning since *MGS3* marks the second time when Kojima was planning to leave the series for another generation of game creators where the mysteries of *MGS2* was intended to be left in the dark. "Once again I'd intended for MGS3 to wrap up the series, but so many people wanted to know what happened after '2'. Things like the identity of the Patriots and so forth. I had planned on leaving those mysteries as mysteries" (Schreier 2015, n.pag.). *MGS1*, *2*, and *3* are all coherent story driven games that eloquently explore complex themes through Kojima's auteur-like direction which complements each other but also works perfectly as an isolated experience. However, both death threats from fans and corporate pressure (see *Engadget* 2005) instigated Kojima to make a sequel that is arguably too indulgent in its own lore, essentially detracting from the more interesting, esoteric substance.

Growing Old with Kojima:

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots (Kojima Productions, 2008)

MGS4 is at its core about growing old where Kojima deliberately chose to age Solid Snake to signify the culmination of the series where every major character from the mainline series comes together in what is perhaps the series' biggest cinematic overload which ultimately detracts from the overall gameplay. Ironically, it also reflects on Kojima's long and strenuous relationship with the series where he has on several occasions expressed his desire to move on to other projects. "PR-wise, I really don't want to say that this the final game or this is the wrap up, but if I don't say it, people will make me create MGS again!" (Haynes 2008, n.pag.).

Figure 34: Solid Snake is old to signify the culmination of the series.

MGS4 is where the first signs of franchise fatigue begins to show where every major character from the last three games are conveniently woven into the plot with lengthy expositions for fanservice reasons which "burrows deeper into what fans love and detractors hate than ever before, and it will make few converts" (Welsh 2008, n.pag.). It is an amplified amalgamation of all of Kojima's tropes where the auteur is too preoccupied about its own characters and lore to explore more interesting aspects like the focus on metanarrative and a postmodern message like in *MGS2*. Despite being the most photorealistic representation at the time, it comes at the cost

where even “its style overwhelms its gaming aspects” (Tavinor 2009, 185) Gameplaywise, *MGS4* is a more refined version of *MGS3* with several minor quality-of-life improvements such as the ability to sneak from a crouched position, and the ability to change the camouflage pattern automatically to the environment, eliminating the tedium of having to manually go in-and-out of the game menu. Despite being narratively a sequel to *MGS2*, Old Snake plays and feels more like Naked Snake in *MGS3* where he now retroactively can use the same combat techniques of CQC (Close-Quarters Combat). Instead of hunting for various flora and fauna, however, the player must maintain Old Snake’s stress level which affects the psyche meter (top-left) which by extension affects gameplay performance similar to that of *MGS3*.

Figure 35: *MGS4*’s gameplay design builds upon the innovation of *MGS3*.

It is less innovative than its predecessors, but it is also a testament to how innovative *MGS3* was which is now optimally presented thanks to the new hardware technology of the PlayStation 3. If anything, it demonstrates that Kojima sticks to his signature formula which has more or less peaked since adapting to new hardware technology which is a major task in and of itself. *MGS4* does introduce a new stress mechanic which fits with the game’s overarching theme of mental health. It is a staple of Kojima to connect the gameplay to the game’s overarching theme, but its commitment to mental health issues is undermined by its indulgent narrative of self-reflexivity.

To contextualize, the narrative is set five years after the events of *MGS2* where Solid Snake suffers from accelerated aging where private military companies (PMCs) fight proxy wars for economic purposes. Liquid Snake now inhibits the body of his former right-hand man Revolver Ocelot who seeks control of the A. I. "Sons of Patriots" system which controls the PMCs and the war economy. It is up to "Old Snake" with the help of aides across the series to prevent "Liquid Ocelot" from seizing control of the illuminati-like A. I. system.

The overarching narrative is not too complex to follow, but where the narrative becomes somewhat indulgent is the need to over explicate everything with lengthy cutscenes where the longest sequence lasts for a whole seventy-one minutes, just twenty minutes short from being a full feature film in and of itself. Kojima is no stranger to lengthy cutscenes as it is an integral part of the series, but *MGS4* takes it to a whole other level where each fan favorite character of the last three games are seemingly brought back into their old archetypes for fanservice reasons.

Figure 36: The ending debriefing by Big Boss (right) lasts for twenty-seven minutes.

It is a classic case where the *auteur* becomes too enveloped in their own minutia which translates to misrepresentations of what made their previous works so memorable to begin with such as the extensive time devoted to explicating the nature of the Patriots, the illuminati-like organization which ties the series together which Big Boss debriefs extensively. It is antithetical to Kojima,

and *MGS2* which was about subverting fan expectations, where the auteur rarely if at all compromises their artistic integrity in order to please their fanbase by excessively combining references with a forced closure for each fan favorite character. Having said this, *MGS4* is evidently less about exploring uncharted territory, and more about deliberately celebrating its own history, and Kojima as the series' long-lasting director.

This idea is best exemplified when the narrative forces Old Snake to revisit Shadow Moses Island, the setting of *MGS1*, emphasizing both how far video game technology has evolved and how the diegetic world is slowly decaying. Preceding this sequence, Kojima reminds the player of its own graphical evolution by implementing the opening section of the original 1998 *MGS1* within *MGS4* before Old Snake wakes up and explores the exact same area but with the graphical representation of the PlayStation 3 hardware (see figure 37).

Figure 37: *MGS4* revisits its roots of *Metal Gear Solid* (Konami, 1998).

The audiovisual presentation evokes nostalgia where the main theme song of *MGS1* is played in the background ("The Best Is Yet To Come") while the player can trigger various nostalgic voice lines by exploring the area. It is arguably one of the better self-referential sequences because it is rooted in gameplay exploration where most of it is entirely optional and easily missable as opposed to the long cinematic sequences where the player is relegated to a passive observer.

Kojima's desire to integrate cinematics into the video games has never been more indulgent than in *MGS4,* and it is speculated that its extensive self-reflexivity is due to poor writing, or the absence of a competent co-writer, especially compared to *MGS2* which deliberately rejected the idea of canon to tell a compelling postmodern story which was greater than the sum of its parts. Anthony Burch summed up this point in his book by stating that "[y]ou get a sense, for good or ill, that nobody ever told Kojima 'no'. That any idea, no matter how seemingly dissonant or irrelevant, was ever shot down" (Burch 2015, n.pag.). Tomokazu Fukushima is one of the unsung heroes of the series who served as Kojima's co-writer for *MGS1, MGS2* and *MGS3,* amongst others. He still remains anonymous and sheltered from the public's eye with the exception of a few words in "The Document of *Metal Gear Solid 2*" where he expressed a strong artistic vision, one that could arguably rival Kojima (see figure 38).

Figure 38: "The Document of *Metal Gear Solid 2*" contains profiles of Kojima's team.

The reason for bringing up Fukushima is his sudden exit from the company in 2006 which coincided with the early production phase of *MGS4* where "most hardcore fans cannot deny that something changed in *MGS* after *Snake Eater*: themes, storytelling, even the style of the cinematics and the representation of women" (Perdomo 2019, n.pag.). This is of course just speculation, and it does not discredit Kojima's writing or influence, but it does present a more

nuanced picture where co-writers and artist easily gets intermixed with the more prolific director even if it is a joint authorship under Kojima's direction. However, it does highlight what Pauline Kael's problematized when she wrote that "auteur critics tend to downgrade writer-directors – who are in the *best* position to use the film medium for personal expression" (Kael 1963, 18). Reviewers rarely, if at all, include Kojima's co-writers let alone other roles in this joint effort.

While its lengthy cutscenes and indulgent self-reflexivity detracts *MGS4* from being greater than the sum of its parts, it ironically reinforces the perception of Kojima as an auteur for better or worse, especially in the eyes of the fans since "their favorite developers can do no wrong" (Fernándes-Vara 2019, 69). The followers of *politique de auteurs* would probably argue that *MGS4* is a "better game" than its predecessors simply because there is "more of Kojima" just as there is "more of Welles" in *Confidential Report* (Welles, 1995). This problem harkens back to Pauline Kael's argument that it is important to acknowledge other contributors besides the director such as screen writers because director-writers collaborations are best situated to tell personal stories. As stated by Fernández-Vara, "[m]aking an argument to disprove the sole authorship of an individual may be a productive exercise to counter the marketing strategies of singling out personalities as authors, similar to how Pauline Kael did when she claimed that the screenwriter Herman J. Mankiewicz was the real author of *Citizen Kane* and not Orson Welles, the director" (Fernández-Vara 2019, 70).

To summarize, despite all this criticism, the signature styles of Kojima is evidently present just in a hyperbolic state even if it potentially reveals the flaws of Kojima's writing. Its stilted legacy is largely due to its extensive pandering towards fans, but Kojima's desire to move on to other projects, and his obsession about wrapping up the series, remains a dire reminder for why big companies rarely center their projects around a single individual, even though it has served to Konami's financial interests up to this point. Moreover, *MGS4* is a good example of what Bazin argued that even great auteurs are prone to a "creative eclipse" which results in inferior films despite their reputation for making great films, and this was certainly the case with *MGS4*. For all intents and purposes, it failed to wrap up the series eloquently which is evident in the two subsequent sequels which attempt to retcon not just the ending of *MGS4* but also the original *Metal Gear* (Konami, 1987).

Kojima and Goliath:

Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain (Kojima Productions, 2015)

The circumstances surrounding Kojima's fifth title in the *Metal Gear* series was a mystery as it was teased in a trailer only by its subtitle *The Phantom Pain* which was supposedly in development by an unknown Swedish company named "Moby Dick Studio". Kojima is no stranger to cryptic messages, and it did not take long before fans of the series began to piece the similarities between the elusive project with the *Metal Gear* series. "Kojima, a master of misdirection, confirmed months later that it had all been an elaborate ruse he had planned for two years" (Sarkar 2015, n.pag.). What was originally simply a marketing stunt to garner hype is also inadvertently a testament to Kojima's auteurship since his style and aesthetics are very recognizable even without his name attached.

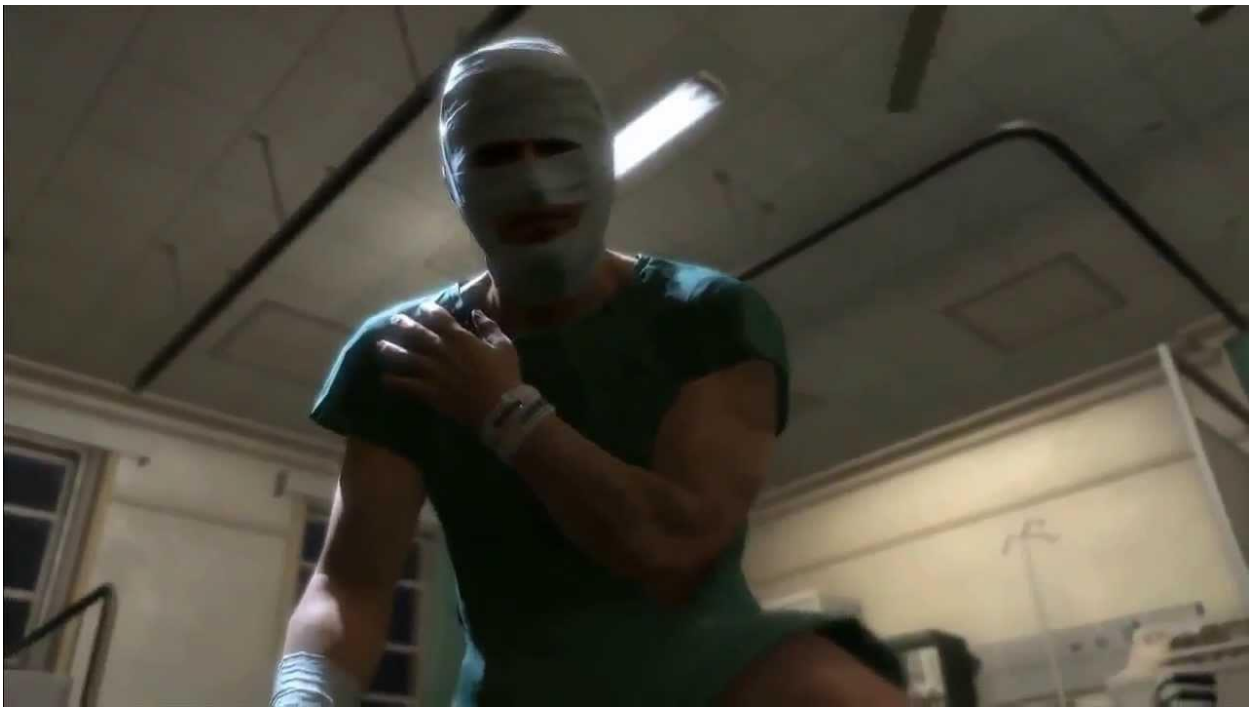

Figure 39: The teaser trailer was made as a marketing stunt to garner hype.

Kojima's fifth installment is equally interesting from an auteur perspective as it is controversial for its tumultuous development process (see Sarkar 2015) from publishing the prologue section as a standalone title, to cut content from the final product and Konami's extensive efforts to disassociate Kojima from the franchise during its publication. But what is interesting from an auteur perspective is Kojima's commitment to his artistic integrity under corporate scrutiny.

Kojima addresses a lot of criticism in *MGS4* for its long-winded cutscenes and linearity. The most noticeable difference is its sprawling open world setting which presents the player with a greater level of freedom, ranging from a plethora of assorted weapons and gear to the exact point of extraction when the job is done. Kojima clarifies that "[i]t's not that linear games are bad […] but really, it'd be fun if you were the one thinking about how and where to infiltrate, what sort of equipment to bring, and how to get out of there" (Gifford 2013, n.pag.). This level of freedom harkens back to *MGS3* where the game opened up for unique gameplay creativity, but *MGSV* is arguably a better example of *emergent* form of gameplay since the player is encouraged to test out different strategies in order to get the highest possible rank ("S").

Figure 40: *MGSV* is the first title in the series to have an open world setting.

The long cutscenes have been noticeably trimmed down for a quality over quantity approach where the majority of Kojima's heavy lore exposition is instead conveyed through audio-cassette tapes which can be casually listened to in the background during each mission. Most of these cassette tapes are entirely optional which contains esoteric fun-facts and references which adds an extra incentive to explore every nook and cranny of Kojima's sprawling open world. But most importantly, it does not detract from the overall gameplay experience as it did in *MGS4*.

Figure 41: The cassette tapes can be listened to in the game menu or during gameplay.

The cinematic presentation has also benefited from Kojima's cinematic maturity over the years by implementing various subtle but sophisticated camera techniques. These includes the use of a dynamic camera which adds an extra level of documentary-like feeling, but the most subtle effective film technique is the prevalent use of the "long take" (not to be confused with "long shot" which refers to the distance between its objects). These types of shots are longer than conventional editing pace such as in the opening sequence of *Touch of Evil* (Welles, 1956) and the infamous corridor fight in *Oldboy* (Chan-Wook, 2003) to mention a few popular examples.

Kojima elaborated in a tweet that he was inspired by Alfred Hitchcock's 1948 "*Rope*" in that "MGSV uses almost 1 camera shot b/w cutscene & gameplay. 'Rope' was experimental movie created 65 years ago. W/o digital technology back then, instead used close-ups of the back or lid in every 10 min" (Kojima 2014, n.pag.). This technique is admittedly much easier to manipulate in a video game production, but it does maintain the feeling of a singular consistent world which is not that different from Kojima's philosophy in *MGS1* where he wanted to mitigate the gap between gameplay aesthetics and the cinematic cutscenes as little as possible.

The narrative continues the story of Big Boss after *MGS3* where Kojima intends to disclose "the missing link" leading up to the setting of the original *Metal Gear* (Konami, 1987).

To contextualize, the game is divided into two settings: the first one centers around Big Boss against the elusive XOF unit who sends our hero into an untimely nine-year long coma, and the second one revolves around "Big Boss" rebuilding his unit with the help of Revolver Ocelot and seeking revenge for his fallen comrades. The plot twist of the game is that the generated player avatar is the second "Big Boss" who eventually builds the Outer Heaven base in the original game. This bait and switch twist harkens back to *MGS2*'s postmodern deconstruction of identity where Raiden was analogues to the player until the character renounced the player's control. In *MGSV*, "Big Boss" is literally meant to be a digital representation of the player as evident in the beginning where you customize your own pre-surgery face and type your date of birth (see figure 42). This idea also fits well with the narrative direction where Venom Snake is less talkative in comparison to previous iterations of Snake in order to sell this idea that *you* are "Big Boss".

Figure 42: One of many possible generated player avatars.

Kojima utilizes symbolism and metacommunication where he references and repurpose preexisting novels and songs to convey this idea that the player avatar is "Big Boss". Firstly, there is a lot of symbolic meanings derived from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* novel: from the name of the fake studio; the real Big Boss calling himself "Ishmael" to signify the bait and switch; and the overarching theme of revenge where the player avatar is called and plays the

leading role of "Ahab" who sends his crew on a suicide mission to hunt down the XOF group.

Secondly, the most subtle but arguably the biggest hint to this bait and switch is the use and reference of David Bowie's 1971 album and title track "The Man Who Sold the World" which is played during the opening sequence and finally given to the player as a cassette tape from the real Big Boss. The song references David Bowies' alter ego "Ziggy Stardust" and the title itself denotes the idea that the real Big Boss left his private military company in the hands of the player avatar, hence the title of the cassette tape: "From the Man Who Sold the World".

The main point is to deconstruct the legacy of Big Boss as the glorified figure of the series, which was never built by one person, and that anyone can be this "legendary hero" according to Big Boss's final message to the player. Big Boss's cassette debriefing can also be interpreted as a metacommunicative message from Kojima to the player: "[T]hanks to you, I've left my mark. I'm Big Boss, and you are, too... No... He's the two of us. Together. Where we are, today? We built it. This story - this "legend" - it's ours" (*Metal Gear Solid V*, 2015). This is one way of interpretating this sequence, but it remains at least plausible that this is just a subtle way of thanking the player for supporting the series after all these years. But more relevant is that it demonstrates Kojima's auteurism by conveying complex meanings through symbolism and metacommunication.

Figure 43: The player avatar is the body double of the real Big Boss.

The discourse of Kojima's final entry in this long-spanning series is largely overshadowed by the strenuous relationship between Kojima and Konami where the company's financial interests outweighs the individuals artistic vision. What was once a thriving enterprise between Kojima and Konami stagnated as a consequence of rapid market changes and a shift from expensive blockbuster AAA-games productions to "focusing instead on arcade amusements and gambling machines" (Birch 2021, n.pag.). Konami's restructuring is a symptom of a larger paradigm which led to cut content and the cancelation of Kojima's anticipated *Silent Hills* (*P.T.*).

What ultimately garnered Konami an online frenzy of angry fans, however, was their corporate directive to disassociate Kojima's name from their intellectual property by omitting the "Kojima Productions" label and the iconic "A Hideo Kojima Game" line from promotional related materials (Schreier 2015, n.pag.). Even if it is a mutual joint effort to realize Kojima's auteur-like ambitions, the removing of the self-congratulatory line is arguably long overdue, considering it does a disservice to all the programmers and artists directly involved. However, the tagline does perpetuate our bigger discussion that authorship is a "culturally constructed category, fiercely contested and deeply ideological" (Jennings 2016, 124).

Figure 44: The before and after box art of *Metal Gear Solid V* (see *Mackey* 2015) .

This dichotomy harkens back to what Aarseth argued that the video game *auteur* "are in the grip of a powerful industrial system, where the vision of the individual has little weight, and where big decisions are taken in board rooms" (Aarseth 2004, 268). Much of the *auteur* discourse of French cinema originated as a reaction to the factory-like formula of Hollywood where the artist is contractually tied to heed the financial interests first, but "[a]cknowledging the human factors in [a game] production is a first step in relinquishing the concept of games as a factory product and towards their status as an art form" (Fernándes-Vara 2019, 69).

Lastly, Kojima's anti-war warning of nuclear proliferation is realized through a social experiment where each player gets the ability to build their own nuclear weapon through the game's base-building aspect which opens the player to be vulnerable to other player who also have built a nuke. Kojima explains that "it illustrates the cycle of nuclear weapons, what inspires people and nations to enter into that system. It's something that you can only really do in video games" (Parkin 2014, n.pag.). If every player on a respective platform comes together to disarm their nuclear weapons, it triggers a secret nuclear disarmament event which congratulates the player for creating world peace however brief that may be. It is a stable of Kojima that he uses his medium as a podium to create awareness of bigger issues outside his own games where he leaves with an excerpt from President Barack Obama: "Our efforts to contain these dangers are centered on a global non-proliferation regime, but as more people and nations break the rules, we could reach the point where the center cannot hold" (*Metal Gear Solid V*, 2015).

To summarize, *MGSV* addresses several of the issues in *MGS4* while and simultaneously harken back to its more interesting predecessor *MGS2* by recontextualizing the legacy of Big Boss through the bait and switch with the player avatar. For all its intent and purpose to be the most definitive *Metal Gear* experience, it is ironically criticized for having too little cinematic exposition partly due to criticism from *MGS4* on part of Kojima and partly due to Konami's incentive to release the game earlier which unfortunately led to cut content. It is important to note that both Kojima and Konami has, and arguably never will, disclose the exact details of their separation, but both "fans and sympathetic bloggers filled in the gaps with a narrative that cast Kojima as the victim of a corporation's soulless quest for profit, only further solidifying his reputation as an auteur" (Chen 2020, n.pag.). It remains a controversial piece of work stilted by its strenuous production circumstances, but which remains an interesting case study of Kojima as an auteur where he stayed true to his artistic vision in the face of great corporate scrutiny.

Distilling Kojima:

Death Stranding (Kojima Productions, 2019)

Death Stranding is a critical title for our analysis of Kojima as an auteur as it gives us a condensed, distilled understanding of his auteurism where the auteur explores new frontiers and original ideas in contrast to his long-spanning *Metal Gear* series, void of any direct references to his older work. The *Metal Gear* series remains one of the most popular franchises of all time, but the series was arguably long overdue for retirement as early as in *MGS2* when the director expressed for the first time his desires to "do something totally different" (Schreier 2015, n.pag.).

One salient quality of an auteur is their unwavering artistic integrity where they generally have a clear idea of what they want to express by breaking conventions through original ideas and concepts. As such, there is a lot of expectations when a renowned director-auteur embarks on a radical new journey; Kojima promised during a partnership announcement with Sony Interactive Entertainment that the next big project would be "a new and innovative gaming experience" (*PlayStation* 2015). The first impression of Kojima's new and elusive game can be equally mesmerizing as it can be puzzling to discern its exact gameplay features let alone how the narrative will play out based on the avant-garde-like tone of the first reveal trailer.

Figure 45: *Death Stranding* evokes avant-garde aesthetics.

Death Stranding evokes a lot of ambiguity through avant-garde-like aesthetics by juxtaposing realism with surrealism in conjunction with novel gameplay mechanics in order to elicit a particular art discourse more commonly found in experimental indie games but still wrapped in Kojima's particular blockbuster style. As such, the auteur has adopted a new indie-blockbuster model where he can experiment freely without compromises in the same vein as the avant-garde by "breaking apart and expanding how we make, think and play with games" (Schrank 2014, 3). Konami would likely disapprove of such an indulgent direction, but this is contrary to Sony who recognizes Kojima's talents and openly marketed the game as "avant-garde" and "experimental".

The core gameplay loop revolves around completing courier objectives by traversing vast distances where the player must optimally pack their load, balance and be mindful of their surroundings as efficient as possible. This dynamic interplay between item management and careful orientation of their surroundings evokes a lot of Kojima's signature stealth action gameplay, but the player must contend with mother nature's rocks, hills, rivers, and rain instead of patrolling soldiers. Kojima has in other words managed to gamify a marathon where the player is rewarded for patient, strategic maneuvering over foreboding distances, but its avant-garde-like mechanics has led to some miscommunication due to its emphasis on "walking".

Figure 46: The environment is the true adversary of the player.

Kojima clarifies that "it is a new genre – same as stealth the first time, there will be people who don't get it. It will take some time for the real evaluations to come in" (Juba 2019, n.pag.). It may be tempting to dismiss *Death Stranding* as a glorified "walking simulator", an oft-misunderstood term, to denote the absence of gratifying gameplay. "The emphasis on walking implies a lack of gameplay and evokes the banality of the act of walking, and thereby disregards the experience of the game world and of the plot inscribed within it" (Zimmermann 2019, 30). Moreover, it disregards the game's unique social features and undermines Kojima's avant-garde approach "to distinguished from mainstream once because they show how the medium can manifest a greater diversity of gameplay" (Schrank 2014, 3). In other words, the auteur has an intentional vision beyond its mere function to simply entertain which is reflected in the manifesto-like message of the newly reformed, independent Kojima Productions:

> "Playing is not simply a pastime, it is the primordial basis of imagination and creation. Truth be told, Homo Ludens (Those who Play) are simultaneously Homo Faber (Those who Create). Even if the earth were stripped of life and reduced to a barren wasteland, our imagination and desire to create would persevere beyond survival, it would provide hope that flowers may one day bloom again. Through the invention of play, our new evolution awaits" (*Kojima Productions* 2019, n.pag.).

Under Kojima Production's new slogan, "From Sapiens to Ludens", it is clear that Kojima pays homage to Johan Huizinga's concept of "Homo Ludens" (literally "man the player") where he stressed the importance of free play as an intrinsic part of society and human evolution. "For Huizinga (1950), play is the natural state of the human being; it exists *a priori* to society and culture. It is a free and voluntary activity" (House 2020, 296). Although somewhat hyperbolic, Kojima's manifesto-like message is simultaneously a declaration of intention as it is a subtle declaration of independence from Konami's factory-like productions. Interestingly, the message also foreshadows the setting of *Death Stranding* which does take place in a "barren wasteland".

To contextualize, the player controls Sam Porter Bridges (Norman Reedus) in a post-apocalyptic America where the world suffers from a cataclysmic event known as the "Death Stranding" where invisible creatures known as "BTs" ("Beached Things") roams free. The world has become a hazardous place of otherworldly rain and snow which causes temporal acceleration of time with everything it comes into contact with. Consequentially, it corroded the country's

infrastructure and divided the remaining cities, in essence "the goal of the player is to reconnect isolated cities and a fragmented society. It is created so that all elements, including the story and gameplay, are bound together by the theme of the 'Strand' or connection" (Bull 2019, n.pag.)

Kojima's goal with *Death Stranding* is to address a personal "habit of feeling lonely" (*BBC* 2019) and by extension modern societies growing tendency towards online isolation by *bridging* players with each other in order to create new bonds. Kojima is particularly directing towards individuals who "don't feel like they fit into society or their community. So, when those people play this game, they realize people like them exist all over the world" (*BBC* 2019). Even though players never directly interact with each other, they can build various items and structures which can be shared, developed, and maintained by other players. This idea also affects the player's specific game world where different connections equates to different structure placements which opens the game up for some unique form of *emergent* gameplay thanks to the social system.

Figure 47: Bridges built by the player can be utilized by other players as well.

Egenfeldt-Nielsen states that "[e]mergence is a phenomenon whereby the interaction of simple principles on one level creates complex results on another, high level" (Egenfeldt-Nielsen 2020, 149). This is interesting because the multiplayer element is a critical part of the single player

experience as opposed to being a separate mode or feature since “protagonist-centered games the entire game system revolves around the protagonist; nothing noteworthy takes place beyond the radius of the protagonist’s action” (Egenfeldt-Nielsen 2020, 149). But here there is a dynamic element interplay where your “Sam” (the protagonist) affects and connects with another player’s “Sam”. Story-driven games are inherently very solitary experiences which Kojima wanted to ameliorate by incorporating social elements as critical key component in order to reach your objectives, and by extension address the isolated feeling of playing a single player campaign.

The social system actively encourages players to cultivate a positive online community where players share resources and cheer each other with “likes” in order to disincentivize online toxicity and harassment. “Communication channels might be abused to harass and verbally assault other players […] by creating a toxic player-community”(Märtens et al. 2015, 1). In contrast, there are no means to manipulate the communication channels in order to be malicious in the game itself. However, some people have reached out to other players via the PSN messenger application which a reddit user named “HaraDoon” did as a gesture of appreciation which exemplifies that there is credibility to Kojima’s ambitions (*Reddit* 2019, n.pag.).

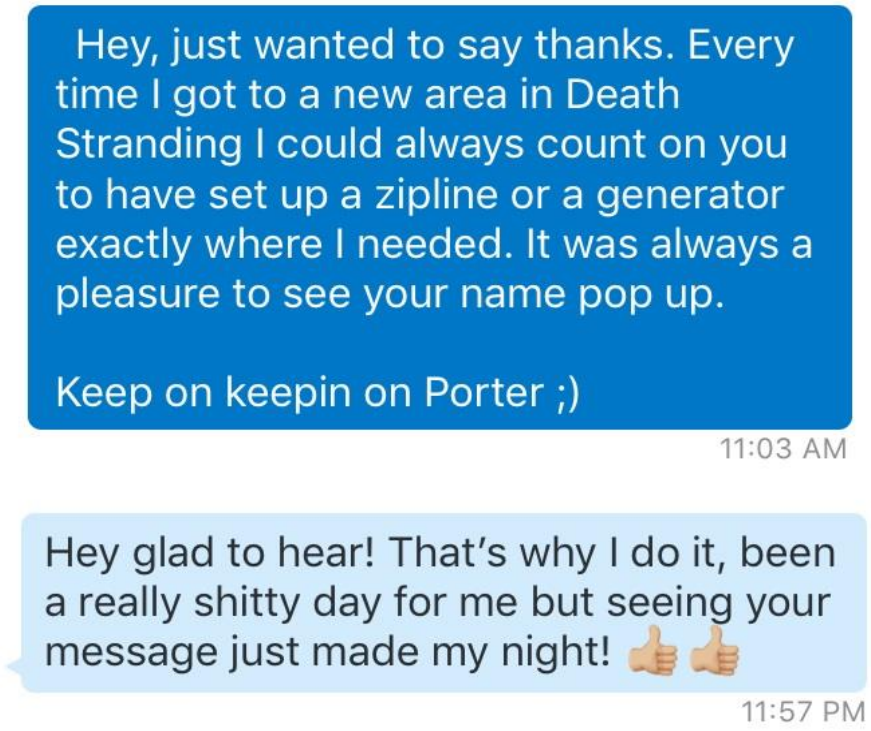

Figure 0: Screenshot by reddit user “Haradoon” via a reddit thread.

This anti-toxic agenda applies especially towards younger players who may be extra prone to unsolicited toxic behaviors where Kojima "want them to think about how we could use [social media] to be better" (Park 2019, n.pag.). It is clear that Kojima is intentional both on a micro level of the game's aesthetics and on a macro level with the theme of "connection", but what is more interesting from an auteur analytical perspective is how much of Kojima's signature styles permeates across *Death Stranding* such as the cinematic style, leitmotifs and archetypes, fourth wall breaks and its anti-war message on a broader scale.

Death Stranding pushes the envelope of photorealistic representation in video games with the uncanny likeness of Hollywood stars like Norman Reedus (*The Walking Dead*), Mads Mikkelsen (*Hannibal*) and Léa Seydoux (*Spectre*) to mention a few. The latest advancements in motion capture technology encapsulates the minutia of human performances which is complimented by the prevalent use of the extreme close-ups shots which showcases the tinniest little facial hair to the melodramatic tear drop. "For amplifying emotional intensity, the extreme close-up puts the camera right in the actor's face, making even their smallest emotional cues huge and raises the intensity of the problems behind them" (Heiderich 2012, 9).

Figure 48: Léa Seydoux's performance exemplifies the status quo of modern motion capture.

While it may seem indulgent of Kojima, *Death Stranding* attempts to set a new benchmark for photorealism in video games just like *MGS1* did with 3D-technology nearly twenty years ago.

Kojima's fixation with cinematics is one of the many aspects which attributes him as an auteur, but what is more interesting in relation to the *auteur* theory is how the director through reoccurring motifs "always tells the same story… [The auteur] has the same attitude and passes the same moral judgments on the action and on the characters" (Bazin 1957, para. 26).

Even though *Death Stranding* is separated from the *Metal Gear* universes due to copyright issues, there are interesting parallels on a structural level. Kojima revisits many of his archetypes of charismatic characters who are flamboyant in their design with names that embodies their core characteristic. Sam Porter Bridges (Norman Reedus) is a "legendary porter" whose objective is to "bridge" the isolated cities back together, and Higgs Monaghan (Troy Baker) embodies the same eccentric personality of Revolver Ocelot. Even one of the final fight sequences is an obvious meme of the final fight sequence between Snake and Ocelot in *MGS4*.

Figure 49: The fight sequence breaks the fourth wall by utilizing a familiar interface.

Death Stranding employs a lot of fourth wall breaking on a micro- and a macro level like in the aforementioned fight sequence by utilizing a stylistic, parodic interface akin to Namco's popular fighting game series *Tekken* (see figure 49). The fight sequence juxtaposes the gritty seriousness of the game with Kojima's abstract sense of humor of self-awareness to heighten the climax of the game. This is also pointed out by Higgins prior to the fight where he breaks the fourth-wall

by pointing out the game's pretentious complexity and multiple endings: "No BTs, no voidouts, no bullshit. Just a good old-fashioned boss fight. One more ending before the end… One last game over" (*Death Stranding*, 2019). Additionally, there are subtle little winks and nudges concerning fourth wall breaking such as when the player is casually lingering in their private room between missions where Sam, or Norman Reedus, literally winks at the player.

Figure 50: Sam breaks the fourth wall through various subtle gestures.

On a macro level, the entire game can be viewed as one big fourth wall breaking where Kojima wants the player "to take a step back and by connecting, relearn how to be kind to others" (*BBC* 2019). This notion harkens back to *MGS2* where Kojima wanted the player to worry less about canon and forging their own path and identity instead of becoming someone else's meme. This is also one of the cruxes of Kojima's messages, where he wants the player to reflect and think critically in order to extrapolate some shred of wisdom however small that may be from Kojima's narratives, and by extension, take that wisdom into the real world.

Death Stranding is at its core a non-violent game with its own anti-war message where Kojima, on a broader scale, wants to address the current political climate in America and the United Kingdom. "Trump is building a wall, and the UK is leaving the EU. In this game, we use bridges to connect things. But destroying those bridges can instantly turn them into walls. So,

bridges and walls are almost synonymous" (*BBC* 2019). In other words, Kojima stresses the importance of "connection" during these strange political times, and perhaps even more strange, is that the game's isolated settings eerily mirrors the current pandemic situation with COVID-19. "Kojima deals with the politics of isolation – both political polarization, and literal, physical isolation [where he] predicated that a worldwide disaster would cause us to become more isolated and more dependent on social media and delivery services" (Schnabel 2020, n.pag.).

To summarize, *Death Stranding* can be seen as both a continuation and the final stage of his auteurship which harkens back to Bazin's notion that "[a] great talent matures but does not grow old" (Bazin 1968, para. 23). Even though *Death Stranding* is experimental both visually and mechanically, it is still keenly similar to Kojima's older work once you distill the essence of Kojima's signatures: the emphasis on strategic (passive) gameplay, sophisticated cinematic presentation and the distinguishable, artistic personality extrapolated from the narrative, fourth wall breaking, and, most important, its anti-war themes. The theme of "connection" would arguably not be as effective without its unique avant-garde/experimental direction even though it can easily detract players from finishing let alone trying the game based on its esoteric mechanics and sometimes long-winded cutscenes. But that is the beauty of art, each player will likely interpret the game differently which Kojima affirms as well: "Art lives off its interpretation. When I stand in front of a painting, I might end up seeing totally different things in it than another person. It's fine when [*Death Stranding*] is a little bit confusing. [P]eople love to do their very own interpretations […] [t]hat's the fun part" (Kratsch 2016, n.pag.). Regardless of how one may feel towards his games, the player is meant reflect upon what they have played even though it can be equally perplexing as it can be rewarding.

Conclusion

The idea of authorship in video games proves to be a contentious and challenging to rationalize considering the innate complex process to create a modern blockbuster game without the meticulous effort of hundreds of specialized programmers and designers alike. If there is one salient takeaway from all of these discussions in the literature review, it is that the concept of authorship in video games is a highly contested, multifaceted problem with no easy answer.

This notion was highlighted in the introduction section with Barthes and Focault whose emblematic essays foregrounds how the basic interpretation of authorship is problematic even from a literature point of view. Livingstone stressed further that authorship necessitates sufficient control in order for an intentional, communicative utterance to take place. This is an important observation since video games are products of collaborative effort, and it is as such important to distinguish the individual utterance from another since Kojima's intentional, communicative utterances pervades in all of his games.

The *auteur* theory section recounted the historical development of how the theory evolved from being a polemic weapon against factory-like produced film during its formative years at the *Cahiers du Cinema* before it was solidified as a theoretical framework by Andrew Sarris. Despite Pauline Kael's combative criticism of the *auteur* theory and her emphasis on co-writers and contributors, Sarris clarified that the *auteur* theory validates as a critical tool of analysis which can guide critics to recognize certain directorial patterns according to Sarris' three concentric circles or premises. The *auteur* theory was conceptualized for the purpose of forwarding films as art, but for our purpose it served as a critical tool to highlight Kojima's technical competence, distinguishable personality, and interior meanings in his games while simultaneously recognizing that strong authorship does occur in collaborative, blockbuster video game productions.

The discourse of authorship has broadened since the inception of the *auteur* theory in the 1950s where there is a difference between multiple authors and co-authors. Whereas the former work independently from one another, the latter predicates a joint, collaborative effort whereby it is worth inquiring who employs power and responsibility in a work's final form and content. Livingstone elaborated that co-authorship, or joint authorship, predicates a coordinated intention to make an utterance jointly whereas Sellors argued further that not all members of a collective intentional action can be members of its collective authorship. Video game productions are

multilayered in terms of power and influences whereby investors and promoters may be part of the process of releasing a particular game, but they cannot be said to be part of the collective authorship as Sellors elaborated. Having said that, video games rarely if at all credit its labor to only one person which is why many game companies use a studio name to represent a collective authorship over a single individual. A comprehensive understanding of co-authorship is critical in order to recognize that even though there is a collective intention to realize Kojima's auteur-like vision, none of his games would have been realized without the efforts of his team members.

The notion of video game auteurs remains a controversial idea considering that most game developers prior to the advent of indie games made games under great corporate scrutiny where the default credit is attributed to its respective game studio. "Hideo Kojima is another game designer people are eager to stick the label of an auteur to, especially now that his development studio bears his name" (Hetfeld 2018, n.pag.). The quest for the video game auteur is not only hampered by corporate agendas, but it is also worth inquiring into what criteria we should follow for the hypothetical video game auteur if the *auteur* theory is applicable to video game designers at all. Aarseth extensively inquired into both of these ideas where he more or less concluded that there is one distinctive quality of the hypothetical game auteur: the need to pursue and protect one's artistic integrity in the face of industrialized, corporate interests.

The rise of indie games developers during the mid-2000s embodies Aarseth's hypothetical game auteur whereby they are ideologically driven to follow their artistic pursuits over trends and financial gains like big corporations. The fact that most Japanese corporations operate within the framework of an orthodox institutional hierarchy makes Kojima an interesting case study. His artistic and groundbreaking design philosophy remained consistent throughout all of his titles even when his relationship with Konami grew more strenuous as it happened with the last *Metal Gear* title. However, analyzing Kojima's games purely through the lens of the *auteur* theory is too narrow without some rudimentary knowledge about video game aesthetics.

The discussion of authorship in video games is tightly connected to the discussion of video games as works of art where popular art critics like Robert Ebert dispute this notion. Coming from their interest in audiovisual storytelling, it is perhaps not surprising that a lack of interest to play negates their ability to appreciate the interactive feature of video games which is an intrinsic component in order to fully comprehend what a game tries to achieve. Tavinor did clarify that coming up with a definition of art is problematic, but "video games will count as art

if they fit within an appropriate theoretical understanding of art" (Tavinor 2019, 176). The purpose of this section was to give some context to why critics and fans are so infatuated with Kojima since his games are often used as exemplars as works of art, but more importantly it was to stress the significance of ludic aesthetics, the gameplay aspects, when analyzing video games.

The purpose of the main analysis was to give a historical account of Kojima's evolution as a video game auteur who is a rare case in terms of freedom and artistic integrity compared to many directors in the gaming industry. By analyzing and extrapolating his signature styles in each of the seven *Metal Gear* titles and compare them to *Death Stranding*, it gave us a more nuanced, distilled understanding of his auteurism today. Hideo Kojima is one of the most recognizable directors in the video game industry today, certainly a polarizing figure in the eyes of both fans and critics who "describe him as prophetic, subversive, and ground-breaking while some critics find his games to be pretentious and overindulgent" (Simelane 2020, n.pag.).

Kojima has long been criticized for his indulgent, long cutscenes, but it is important to stress how he uses cinematic tools as a means for interactive innovation. As such it is equally important to recognize how a game *feels* mechanically (ludically) not just how it looks visually, but an auteur would also inquire how they can utilize the video game medium in new and meaningful ways in order to convey complex meanings. Kojima does emphasize video games' unique interactive element first and foremost with how he thinks "about ways that [he] can use the game systems to reinforce [his] story or do things that simply aren't possible in other media" (Parkin 2014, n.pag.). In other words, Kojima stresses the uniqueness of ludic aesthetics as a critical tool to enhance the narrative through innovative ideas which pushes the limits of its medium. "Kojima's own influences have helped introduce gamers to important forms of media they may not have heard of otherwise" (Ombler 2016, n.pag.). Kojima explains:

> "When I first came up with the idea for *Metal Gear*, people told me 'storytelling won't work in action games'. So, I set out to prove the world that action games could be a valid storytelling medium. This led me to craft *Metal Gear Solid*, using storytelling tools like cinematic effects, cutscenes, radio calls and staged gimmicks. In today's game industry, these types of linear storytelling methods have now become commonplace. However, that was never the ultimate goal. As an interactive medium, I believe games have the potential to break away from movies and convey a story while also giving players the freedom to play as they like" (*IGN* 2015).

Kojima is one of those rare cases where a video game designer in a big company has achieved an auteur-like status who has followed his artistic integrity almost to a fault, even under great corporate scrutiny which was the case with *MGSV*. This aligns with Aarseth's argument that the hypothetical video game auteur is a strong, independent artist "who will not compromise their vision by merely delivering game content to the distribution pipelines of the industry" (Aarseth 2004, 265). Moreover, it becomes evident that Kojima is an emblematic exemplar of Andrew Sarris' three fundamental premises of the *auteur* theory: "technical competence", "distinguishable personality" and "interior meaning" respectively (Sarris 1962).

First, Kojima's pioneering take on the action military genre with the emphasis on *stealth* and strategic thinking demonstrates that his "technical competence" commands both "clarity and coherence" (Sarris 1968 para. 27) mechanically which continued to evolve in complexity throughout his career. The fact that he continues to break certain conventions of video games without stumbling in the process is a testament itself that he not only has a comprehensive understanding of video games on a mechanical level, but that he can also hold a mirror towards the player while he demonstrates that video games can be more beyond the limitations of its hardware. "[Kojima's] focus is constantly on the future, as he continues to push the boundaries of the gaming medium with his philosophy of game designs" (Academy 2016, n.pag.).

Second, Kojima's "distinguishable personality" is present both in his writing and in his stylistic, seamless cinematic presentation which permeates across his repertoire where he exhibits "reoccurring characteristics of style, which serve as his signature " (Sarris 1969 para. 24). The exclusive use of in-game graphics with a dose of interactivity in the cinematic cutscenes and radio calls exemplifies reoccurring characteristics which helps the player to immerse themselves into Kojima's games which reflects how he "thinks and feels" (Sarris 1969, para. 24).

Third, and final, Kojima's games all have a profound, personal "interior meaning" which is extrapolated from the various themes he explores which often correlates to his anti-war message. To reiterate, interior meaning reveals an auteur's unique perspectives on life and the human condition which is "extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material" (Sarris 1969, para. 26). Kojima adds that "[i]t's important to me that my games aren't only 'fun'. I want them to carry a message or kernel of something that players can take and use" (Parkin 2016, n.pag.). Kojima often juxtaposes comical elements with the more serious, darker atmosphere in order to enhance the effectiveness of his messages, and the likeliness of practical

implementation in the real world. “Kojima asks the player to seriously reflect on the issues raised in the games… A thread running through a number of Kojima’s works […] contemplates the ties that bind human beings, whether for good or ill” (Green 2017, 5-6). As banal as it may sound, Kojima wants to impart the player with some wisdom, to become a better person. Kojima has throughout his career from the inception of the *Metal Gear* series deconstructed several preconceived notions of video games by breaking the fourth wall and inviting the player to reflect what they are playing and what the narrative tries to communicate.

The challenge of validating the *auteur* theory in relation to Kojima’s games is contested by the fact that video games are fundamentally a collaborative team effort, represented by a wide range of artistic disciplinaries such as co-authors and art directors who directly influence the game’s narrative and visual design. The inputs of former co-author Tomokazu Fukushima disputes Kojima’s credibility as a competent writer especially in relation to *MGS4* and after which lacked the more balanced narrative direction in the previous games. Moreover, the contribution of Kojima’s long running art director, Yoji Shinkawa, has undoubtably affected how the characters looks visually, even though the basic idea was conceptualized by Kojima.

Figure 51: Yoji Shinkawa art is distinctly stylistic and expressive.

Even if it is a "joint authorship" with a shared intention to realize Kojima's vision, it is worth reiterating Hick's emphasis that "we need to ask who has responsibility for what, who has power and over what, and what did each party create" (Hick 2014, 153) in relation to our discussion of co-authorship. Kojima does not dispute the contributions of his team on the contrary, he stresses stresses the importance of implementing diverse ideas from his team in order to stimulate and strengthen the final product. Kojima adds that "I work with people who have different sensibilities than I that I'm able to make the game more interesting and more stimulating. My main job is to share my vision" (*Bridgestone* 2019, n.pag.).

Many journalists reinforce his visionary-like personality by ascribing him as an auteur (Biggs 2017; Chen 2020) to characterize and distinguish the types of games he is making in order to establish "clear relationships with certain creative approaches" (Fernández-Vara 2019, 70)". Consequently, these types of articles have over the years perpetuated a certain fascination, borderline cult-like following, with Kojima in the eyes of both fans and industry personalities. Kojima even made a cameo appearance as an eccentric director ("Oshima") in *Cyberpunk* (CD Project Red, 2020). Albeit hyperbolic, it incentivizes a particular romanticization with game directors even if the intendent effect is to satirize the image of Kojima as an eccentric director which fans and critics have perpetuated.

Figure 52: "Oshima" is an eccentric director in *Cyberpunk* (CD Project Red, 2020).

Even if it is hard to relinquish the idea of the director as the primary artistic force behind a game production, recognizing other key roles such as level designers and concept artists is a healthy step towards a more comprehensive understanding that video games need more than just a director and a handful of programmers. Even Truffaut, who was dedicated to front certain directors through the *politique des auteurs*, eventually "acknowledged the collaborative nature of film production" (Ashcraft 2010, n.pag.). Even though the *auteur* theory may seem like an alien concept in relation to video games, it is "ultimately a critical theory" (Sarris 1963, 30) in order to encourage recognition of video games as works of art just like what Sarris wanted in a time when films had yet to be recognized as works of art. However, video games faced resistance by art critics like Jack Kroll (2000), Robert Ebert (2010) and Jonathan Jones (2012) who dispute video games' place in The Museum of Modern Art and general attribution as art.

Even though video games have come a long way since, it remains a contested field for skeptical art critics. Recognizing video game auteurs, and authorship in video games by extension (individuals and studios alike), is a step towards recognizing video games as works of art with artistic intentions as opposed to being factory products purely for entertainment. "[T]he considerations of who is creating a video game, how they are creating, and *why* have major implications for how we play, receive, and understand games" (Jennings 2016, 124). Works of art are after all not just objects for artistic consumption, but they are also historical objects which carries the mimetic legacy of humanity with their own codes of how human beings lived in a particular time or era. This notion is the crux of what Kojima wanted to communicate in *MGS2*:

> "Life isn't just about passing on your genes. We can leave behind much more than just DNA. Through speech, music, literature and movies... what we've seen, heard, felt... anger, joy and sorrow... these are the things I will pass on. That's what I live for. We need to pass the torch, and let our children read our messy and sad history by its light. We have all the magic of the digital age to do that with. The human race will probably come to an end some time, and new species may rule over this planet. Earth may not be forever, but we still have the responsibility to leave what traces of life we can.
>
> Building the future and keeping the past alive are one and the same thing"
> (*Metal Gear Solid 2*, 2001).

My hope with this thesis is to showcase why Hideo Kojima is not only emblematic in our discussion of authorship and video games as art, but that his work is genuinely for the betterment of humanity. By the time I write these final thoughts, tensions are escalating again in the Gaza-Israel conflict whereby the BBC reports "the UN fearing a 'full-scale war'" (*BBC* 2021, n.pag.). It is a dire reminder of Kojima's anti-war message that "[t]here's nothing glamorous about [war]" (*Metal Gear Solid*, 1998). Whether it be the dangers of nuclear proliferation or the importance of connection in a time where technology ironically makes us less connected, not to mention the current pandemic situation as of 2021, Kojima's games are healthy reminders that there are profound, topical meanings to be found in story-driven games which transcends the medium beyond its mere function to simply entertain. Moreover, Kojima's innovative design philosophy recognizes that video games are in a unique position to do things that can only be done in an interactive medium.

Blockbuster games can be equally dazzling for its detailed production value as it can be cynical in its quest to be the next biggest, record breaking selling game of all time, but Kojima is an example that even blockbuster games can be a place to voice ones concerns about the current state of the world. I have tried to be as critical to Kojima as possible, to remind the reader that no one can achieve greatness without the effort, support, and good will of your colleagues, friends, and family. Not just in video game productions, but in all aspects of life. Moreover, I hope this research have been beneficial in either illuminating the many facets of authorship or why Kojima's games are emblematic in the discussion of authorship in video games.

Authorship and meaning are symbiotically bound where this thesis' long list of references (journalists and scholars alike) is a testament to their intentions to communicate and illuminate meaningful ideas and observations which was previously obscured or unexplored. Whether it be Barthes's and Focault's problematization of the author, Livingstone's or Sellors' notions of joint authorship and multiple authors, the proponents and detractors of the *auteur* theory, Aarseth's problematization of the video game auteur, or Tavinor's inquiry into video games as art. Regardless of their position, their inputs are crucial in our discussion and understanding of authorship and video game auteurs like Kojima, and hopefully there are some sprouts of curiosity to explore and recognize other potential video game auteurs who have more to say beyond the tutorial section. Acknowledging authorship in video games may not be the only gateway into artistic respectability, but it is certainly a start.

Bibliography

Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences. 2016. “Special Awards: Hideo Kojima, Game Designer, Kojima Productions.” Accessed May 2, 2021. https://www.interactive.org/special_awards/details.asp?idSpecialAwards=35

Antonelli, Paola. 2012. “MoMA: Video Games: 14 In The Collection, For Starters.” *InsideOut*, 29th of November. Accessed January 6, 2021. https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2012/11/29/video-games-14-in-the-collection-for-starters/.

Alecpogi. 2019. “r/DeathStranding – This Is What It’s All about (And Those Likes Ofc).” *Reddit*, 7th of December. Accessed April 26, 2021. https://www.reddit.com/r/DeathStranding/comments/e7h65e/this_is_what_its_all_about_and_those_likes_ofc/.

Aarseth, Espen. 1997. *Cybertext. Perspectives On Ergodic Literature.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. https://books.google.no/books?id=qx_-zj0-TwoC&source=gbs_navlinks_s

Aarseth, Espen. 2005. “The Game And Its Name: What Is A Game Auteur?” In *Visual Authorship: Creativity And Intentionality In Media*, edited by Grodal, Torben Kragh, Larsen, Bente and Laursen, Iben Thorving. Copenhagen: M Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen,pp. 261 – 269. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292716275_The_game_and_its_name_What_is_a_game_auteur

Ashcraft, Brian. 2010. “The Search For The Video Game Auteurs.” *Kotaku*, 22nd of February. Accessed December 9, 2020. https://kotaku.com/the-search-for-the-video-game-auteurs-5477174

Alexandra, Heather. 2019. “Metal Gear 2 Retrospective: The World Spins Without Snake.” *Kotaku*, 1st of November. Accessed March 2, 2021. https://kotaku.com/metal-gear-2-retrospective-the-world-spins-without-sna-1831544759

Bacharach, Sondra and Tollefsen, Deborah. 2010. "'We' Did It: From Mere Contributors And Coauthors", The Journal Of Aesthetics And Art Criticism, Winter, 2010, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Winter, 2010), pp. 23-32. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25622120

Barthes, Roland. 1967. "The Death Of The Author." In *Auteurs And Authorship: A Film Reader*, edited by Grant, Barry Keith. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp. 97 – 100. http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/608484489

Bazin, André. 1957. "De La Politique Des Auteurs." In *Auteurs And Authorship: A Film Reader*, edited by Grant, Barry Keith. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp. 19 – 28. http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/608484489

BBC News. 2021. "Israel-Gaza: Fears Of War As Violence Escalates." *BBC*, 12th of May. Accessed May 13, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-57083595

BBC Radio 1 Newsbeat. 2019. "Death Stranding: Hideo Kojima Says His New Game Is A Reaction To 'Trump's Wall And Brexit'." *BBC*, 4th of November. Accessed April 26, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/av/newsbeat-50269587

Bennet, Andrew. 2005. *The Author*. London and New York: Routledge.

Biggs, Tim. 2017. "Famed Designer Hideo Kojima On Auteur Video Games and going independent." *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2nd of February. Accessed April 3, 2021. https://www.smh.com.au/technology/famed-designer-hideo-kojima-on-auteur-video-games-and-going-independent-20170202-gu3n22.html

Birch, Nathan. 2021. "Konami Insists They're Not Abandoning Gaming Despite Dissolving Internal Development Teams". *Wccftech*, 25th of January. Accessed April 12, 2021. https://wccftech.com/konami-not-shutting-down-gaming-internal-development-teams-dissolved/

Bould, Mark, Glitre, Kathrina, and Tuck, Greg. 2009. *Neo-noir*. New York: Wallflower Press. http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/908671166

Buscombe, Edward. 1973. “Ideas Of Authorship.” In *Auteurs And Authorship: A Film Reader*, edited by Grant, Barry Keith. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp. 75 – 83. http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/608484489

Bridgestone. 2019. “A Broken Dream Is Not The End: Game Creator Hideo Kojima.” *Bridgestone*, YouTube, 11:23, 12th of December. Accessed May 1, 2021. https://youtu.be/oQoZV13m4yc

Burch, Anthony and Burch, Ashley. 2015. *Metal Gear Solid: Boss Fight Books #9*. Boss Fight Books, 17th of August. Accessed May 3, 2021.

Chen, Adrian. 2020. “Hideo Kojima’s Strange, Unforgettable Video-Game Worlds.” *The New York Times Magazine*, 3rd of March. Accessed April 19, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/03/magazine/hideo-kojima-death-stranding-video-game.html?

Conger, John. 2005. *Jung and Reich: The Body As Shadow*. Berkley, California: North Atlantic Books. https://books.google.no/books?id=384opauD6YwC

Conway, Steven and Trevillian, Andrew. 2015. “’Blackout!’ Unpacking The Black Box Of The Game Event.” In *Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association: Vol. 2, No. 1,* pp. 1-34. DOI: 10.26503/todigra.v2i1.42

Cunningham, Zoran. 2010. “What Metal Gear Solid 3 Teaches Us About Hyperreality.” *ResearchGate*, July. Accessed April 28, 2021. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326586187_What_Metal_Gear_Solid_3_Teaches_Us_About_Hyperreality

Davidson, Drew (2018): “Well Played 1.0: Video Games, Value And Meaning.” Carnegie Mellon University, Journal contribution, 30th of June. Accessed April 28, 2021. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1184/R1/6687044.v1

Driscoll, Paige. 2014. "'The Hitchcock Touch': Visual Techniques In The Work Of Alfred Hitchcock." *International ResearchScape Journal: Vol. 1, Article 4.* https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/irj/vol1/iss1/4

Ebert, Robert. 2011. "Knockedup At The Movies." *Robert Ebert*, 22nd of October. Accessed December 9, 2020. https://www.rogerebert.com/roger-ebert/knocked-up-at-the-movies

Ebert, Robert. 2010. "Video Games Can Never Be Art." *Robert Ebert*, 16th of April. Accessed December 9, 2020. https://www.rogerebert.com/roger-ebert/video-games-can-never-be-art

Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Simon, Smith, Jonas, and Tosca, Susana. 2020. *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction* (4th ed.). New York: Routledge.

Focault, Michel. 1969. "What is an Author?" In *Aesthetics, Method, And Epistemology*, edited by Faubion, James D. New York: The New Press, 1998, pp. 205 – 222. http://www.english.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Foucault_Author.pdf

Frasca, Gonzalo. 2003. "Ludologists Love Stories, Too: Notes From A Debate That Never Took Place." *Digital Game Research Conference*, 4-6th of November. Accessed February 2, 2021. https://ludology.typepad.com/weblog/articles/frasca_levelUP2003.pdf

Gaut, Berys. 1997. "Film Authorship and Collaboration." In *Film Theory and Philosophy*, edited by Allen, Richard and Smith, Murray. Oxford University Press, pp. 149 – 172.

Gifford, Kevin. 2013. "Kojima Discusses Metal Gear Solid 5, Open Worlds And The Need For The Ground Zeroes Prologue." *Polygon*, 23rd of October. Accessed April 10, 2021. https://www.polygon.com/2013/10/23/4946718/kojima-discusses-metal-gear-solid-5-open-worlds-and-the-need-for-the

Grajales, Lorenzo. 2012. "Hideo Kojima Reflects On 25 Years Of Metal Gear." *Playstation.Blog*, 23rd of July. Accessed March 13, 2021. https://blog.playstation.com/2012/07/23/hideo-kojima-reflects-on-25-years-of-metal-gear/

Green, Amy M. 2017. *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Trauma, And History in Metal Gear Solid V*. Palgrave Macmillan, January 2017. Accessed May 5, 2021. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62749-6

Hakimi, Jedd. 2017. "Designing Auteurs: Video Games, Authorship, and MoMa." Écrans – Politiques Des Auteurs/Auteur Theory. Lectures Contemporaines 2 (6), pp. 207 - 225. https://classiques-garnier.com/ecrans-2016-2-n-6-politique-des-auteurs-auteur-theory-lectures-contemporaines-designing-auteurs.html

Hawkins, Matthew. 2011. "Kojima Loves To Joke Around, But Deadly Serious About Disdain For NES *Metal Gear*." *Nintendo Power* via *Game Set Watch*, 13rd of June. Accessed February 25, 2021. http://www.gamesetwatch.com/2011/06/kojima_loves_to_joke_around_but_deadly_serious_about_disdain_for_nes_metal_gear.php#more%20

Haynes, Jeff. 2008. "MGS4 Hideo Kojima Interview." *IGN*, 2nd of April, updated 12th of May 2012. Accessed March 26, 2021. https://www.ign.com/articles/2008/04/02/mgs4-hideo-kojima-interview

Heiderich, Timothy. 2012. "Cinematography Techniques: The Different Types Of Shots In Film." *Videomakers.* Accessed September 22, 2020. http://www.oma.on.ca/en/contestpages/resources/free-report-cinematography.pdf

Hetfeld, Malindy. 2018. "Auteur Theory And Games." *Unwinnable*, 20th of August. Accessed September 9, 2020. https://unwinnable.com/2018/08/20/auteur-theory-and-games

Holmes, Dylan. 2012. *A Mind Forever Voyaging: A History Of Storytelling In Video Games*. CreateSpace Publishing, 7th of November.

House, Ryan. 2020. "Likers Get Liked: Platform Capitalism And The Precariat In Death Stranding." *Gamevironments* (13), 21st of December. Accessed April 26, 2021. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.26092/elib/408

IGN. 2015. “Hideo Kojima Answers Out Metal Gear Solid 5 Questions.” YouTube, 7:11, 4th of March. Accessed May 2, 2021. https://youtu.be/6yOuGmZ0THk

Ip, Barry. 2010. “Narrative Structures In Computer And Video Games: Part 1: Context, Definitions, And Initial Findings.” *Games And Culture* Vol 6, Issue 2 (March 2011), pp. 103 – 34. Accessed April 29, 2021. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412010364982

Jennings, Stephanie C. “Co-Creation And The Distributed Authorship of Video Games.” In *Examining The Evolution Of Gaming And Its Impact On Social, Cultural, and Political Perspectives.* Edited by Keri Duncan Valentine, and Lucas John Jensen, pp. 123-146. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2016. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-0261-6.ch006

Jones, Jonathan. 2012. “Sorry MoMa, Video Games Are Not Art.” *The Guardian*, 30th of November. Accessed January 6, 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2012/nov/30/moma-video-games-art

Juba, Joe. 2019. “Hideo Kojima Answers Our Questions About Death Stranding.” *Gameinformer*, 16th of September. Accessed April 25, 2021. https://www.gameinformer.com/interview/2019/09/16/hideo-kojima-answers-our-questions-about-death-stranding

Juul, Jesper. 2019. *Handmade Pixels: Independent Video Games And The Quest for Authenticity.* London, England: The MIT Press.

Kael, Pauline. 1963. “Circles And Squares.” In *Film Quarterly* 16, No. 3, pp. 12-26 DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/1210726

Kael, Pauline. 1972. “Raising Kane – 1.” In *The New Yorker*: *Onwards And Upward with the Arts*, 12th of February 20, 1971 Issue. Accessed December 1, 2020. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1971/02/20/raising-kane-i

Keighley, Geoff. 2001. “The Final Hours Of *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*.” *GameSpot*, 28th of September, updated 16th of May 2012. Accessed March 18, 2021. https://www.gamespot.com/articles/the-final-hours-of-metal-gear-solid-2-sons-of-liberty/1100-6376810/

Kirkpatrick, Graeme. 2011. “The Aesthetic Approach.” In: *Aesthetic Theory And The Video Game*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 12–47. DOI: 10.15340/2148188111997

King, Geoff. 2002. *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Kojima, Hideo. 2013. Twitter post, 7th of June. Accessed May 19, 2021. https://twitter.com/HIDEO_KOJIMA_EN/status/342798547168686080

Kojima, Hideo. 2014. Twitter post, 29th of January. Accessed April 9, 2021. https://twitter.com/HIDEO_KOJIMA_EN/status/428403574154854400

Kojima Productions. 2021. “NYGame Awards – 小島監督 Legend Award受賞インタビュー.” YouTube, 15:17, 28th of January. Accessed February 4, 2021. https://youtu.be/fZ1oqByJTf4

Kratsch, Benjamin. 2016. “Hideo Kojima On The Birth Of Death Stranding: It’s Not Metal Gear, But As The Gaming Auteur Reveals, His New PS4 Is Still Pure Kojima.” *RedBull*, 9th of December. Accessed April 30, 2021. https://www.redbull.com/int-en/death-stranding-hideo-kojima-interview

Kroll, Jack. 2000. “’Emotion Engine’? I Don’t Think So.” *Newsweek*, 3rd of May. Accessed December 9, 2020. https://www.newsweek.com/emotion-engine-i-I-think-so-156675

Kunzelman, Cameron and Walters, Greg. 2020. “What Does It Really Mean to be an Indie Game?” *Vice*, 15th of January. Accessed December 8, 2020. https://www.vice.com/en/article/epgnjn/jesper-juul-handmade-pixels-review

Lambie, Ryan. 2015. “Why 1987’s Metal Gear Is Still Important.” *Den of Geek*, 1st of September. Accessed February 10, 2021. https://www.denofgeek.com/games/why-1987-s-metal-gear-is-still-important/

Lewis, Ed. 2004. “The Snake Eater Interview: Chatting With Kojima And Shinkawa About Food, Fighting, And The Camera System.” *IGN*, 2nd of December, updated 20th of May 2012. Accessed March 16, 2021. https://www.ign.com/articles/2004/12/01/the-snake-eater-interview

Lipkin, Nadav. 2012. “Examining Indie’s Independence: The Meaning of ‘Indie’ Games, The Politics Of Production And Mainstream Co-optation.” In *Loading… The Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Assosciation*, 7 (11), pp. 8-24. https://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/view/122/149

Liu, Patrick. 2017. “So You Want To Leave The Games Industry?” *Gamesindustry.bz*, 16th of February. Accessed December 4, 2020. https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2017-02-16-so-you-want-to-leave-the-games-industry

Livingston, Paisley Nathan. 2011. “On Authorship And Collaboration.” In *Journal Of Aesthetics And Art Criticism* Volume 69, Issue 2, 2nd of May, pp. 221-225. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6245.2011.01463.x

Livingstone, Paisley. 2005. *Art And Intention: A Philosophical Stud.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 83-84. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9213.2007.476_9.x

Livingstone, Paisley. 2016. “Authorship”. In *The Routledge Companion To Philosophy of Literature* (1st ed.), edited by Nöel Carrol and John Gibson. London: Routledge, pp. 173-183. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315708935

Lebowitz, Josiah and Klug, Chris. 2001. *Interactive Storytelling For Video Games: A Player-Centered Approach To Creating Memorable Characters And Stories.* New York: Routledge, 5th of April. DOI: 10.4324/9780240817187

Mackey, Bob. 2015. “The Phantom Pain’s Official Box Art Complete the Konami/Kojima Drama.” *USG*, 15th of July. Accessed April 19, 2021.

https://www.usgamer.net/articles/the-phantom-pains-official-box-art-completes-the-konamikojima-drama

Makuch, Eddie. 2013. “Rockstar: More than 1,000 people made GTAV.” *Gamespot*, 7th of October. Accessed May 20, 2021. https://www.gamespot.com/articles/rockstar-more-than-1000-people-made-gtav/1100-6415330/

Märtens, Marcus, Shen, Siwi, Iosup, Alexandru and Kuipers, Fernando. 2015. ”Toxicity Detection In Multiplayer Online Games.” In *International Workshop On Network And Systems Support For Games (NetGames)*, December, pp. 1-6. DOI: 10.1109/NetGames.2015.7382991

Monnet, Livia. 2004. “A-Life And The Uncanny In ‘Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within’.” In *Science Fiction Studies* 31, no. 1. SF-TH, pp. 97-121. Accessed December 3, 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4241231

Mróz, Adrian. 2018. ”Filtration Failure: On Selection For Societal Sanity.” In *Kultur I Historia* nr 34 (2). Accessed April 29, 2021. https://philpapers.org/archive/MRZFFO.pdf

Newman, James. 2008. *Playing With Videogames*. Oxford: Routledge.

Newman, Michael. 2016. “Indie Film as Indie Culture.” In *A Companion to American Indie Film*, 2016, edited by Geoff King. Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 23 – 41. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118758359.ch1

Ng, Carman. 2017. “War And Will: A Multisemiotic Analysis Of *Metal Gear Solid 4*.”, Ph D diss., Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 2017. Polyu Electronic Theses https://theses.lib.polyu.edu.hk/handle/200/9297

Ng, Carman. 2020. “Interfacing Comics And Games: A Socio-Affective Multimodal Approach.” In *Comics And Videogames: From Hybrid Medialities To Transmedia Expansions*, edited by Andreas Rauscher, Daniel Stein, and Jan-Noël Thon (1st ed.). Routledge, p. 33. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003035466

Ombler, Mat. 2016. Game Designers Every Highsnobiety Reader Should Know: Hideo Kojima. Accessed May 15, 2021. https://www.highsnobiety.com/p/hideo-kojima-metal-gear/

Patalita, Jules. 2018. "Auteur Theory in Video Games: Recognizing Hideo Kojima And Thatgamecompany As Auteurs In The Video Game Medium." Master diss. Ball State University, July 2018. https://core.ac.uk/display/159995845

Payne, Matthew Thomas. 2012. "Marketing Military Realism In Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare" In *Games and Culture*, Vol. 7, Issue 4, pp. 305–327. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412012454220

Park, Gene. 2019. "We Are Living In Hideo Kojima's Dystopian Nightmare. Can He Save Us?" *The Washington Post*, 8th of November. Accessed April 24, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/video-games/2019/11/08/we-are-living-hideo-kojimas-dystopian-nightmare-can-he-save-us/

Parkin, Simon. 2012. "Hideo Kojima: Video Game Drop- Out: Interview Part 1." *The Guardian*, 24th of March. Accessed November 11, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/gamesblog/2012/may/23/hideo-kojima-interview-part-1

Parkin, Simon. 2014. "Hideo Kojima: 'Metal Gear Questions US Dominance Of The World'." *The Guardian*, 18th of July. Accessed April 30, 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jul/18/hideo-kojima-interview-metal-gear-solid-phantom-pain

Parkin, Simon. 2016. "An Audience With Hideo Kojima: Life after Metal Gear: the Japanese auteur on games versus films, and new beginnings." *Edge Magazine*, Issue 297, 18th of August. Accessed May 3, 2021. http://www.pressreader.com/australia/edge/20160818/282376923987139

Parkin, Simon. 2017. *An Illustrated History of 151 Video Games*. London: Lorenz Books.

Petrie, Graham. 1973. “Alternatives To Auteurs.” In *Film Quarterly 26*, no. 3, pp. 27-35 https://www.jstor.org/stable/1211342

PlayStation. 2015. “Announcing a new partnership with one of the most celebrated game developers in history.” YouTube, 1:23, 16th of December. Accessed April 17, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=annuTcmB1rw&ab_channel=PlayStation

Plunkett, Luke. 2011. “*Metal Gear* Was Born On Microsoft’s Great Japanese Success.” *Kotaku*, 2nd of February. Accessed February 26, 2021. https://kotaku.com/metal-gear-was-born-on-microsofts-great-japanese-succes-5797534

Perdomo, Alex. 2019. “Kojima, Fukushima, Murata And Whatever Happened To MGS After Snake Eater.” *Medium.com*, 30th of March. Accessed March 20, 2021. https://medium.com/@sleepingfoggy6/kojima-fukushima-murata-and-whatever-happened-to-mgs-after-snake-eater-1c3c851dff45

Ruffino, Paul. 2018. “Independent Gaming: Taking Care Of Your Own Video Game.” In *Future Gaming: Creative Interventions in Video Game Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 45–68.

Reynolds, Matthew. 2018. “How Hellblade: Senua’s Sacrifice Was Made As An ‘Indie Triple-A’ Game On A Tight Budget.” *Eurogamer*, 29th of March. Accessed December 12, 2020. https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2018-03-29-ninja-theory-hellblade-indie-triple-a

Ryan, Marie-Laure. 2004. “Metaleptic Machines.” In *Semiorica* January 2004 (150), p. 442. DOI: 10.1515/semi.2004.055

Sarkar, Samit. 2015. “Konami’s Bitter, Yearlong Breakup With Hideo Kojima, Explained.” *Polygon*, 16th of December. Accessed May 19, 2021. https://www.polygon.com/2015/12/16/10220356/hideo-kojima-konami-explainer-metal-gear-solid-silent-hills

Sarris, Andrew. 1962. “Notes On The Auteur Theory in 1962.” In *Auteurs And Authorship: A Film Reader*, edited by Grant, Barry Keith. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp. 35-45. http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/608484489

Sarris, Andrew. 1963. "The Auteur Theory And The Perils Of Pauline." *Film Quarterly* Vol. 16, No. 4 (Summer, 1963), pp. 26-33. Accessed October 30, 2020. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/3185951

Salle, Mark Ryan. 2006. "Kojima's Legacy: We Reflect On The Influence Of Hideo Kojima's 20 Years In Gaming." *IGN*, 30th of June. Accessed February 18, 2021. https://www.ign.com/articles/2006/06/29/kojimas-legacy

Schrank, Brian (2014): "Videogames As Avant-Garde Art." In: *Avant-Garde Videogames: Playing With Technoculture.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 1-26. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/8132.001.0001

Schreier, Jason. 2015. "A List Of Times Hideo Kojima Has Said He's Done Making *Metal Gear*." *Kotaku*, 3rd of May. Accessed March 28, 2021. https://kotaku.com/a-list-of-times-hideo-kojima-has-said-hes-done-making-m-1689707939

Schreier, Jason. 2015. "It's Official: No Kojima on *Metal Gear Solid V*'s Box." *Kotaku*, 14th of July. Accessed April 17, 2021. https://kotaku.com/its-official-no-kojima-on-metal-gear-solid-vs-box-1717704237

Searle, John. 1991 "Collective Intentions and Actions." In *Intentions In Communication*, edited by Philip R. Cohen, Jerry Morgan, and Martha E. Pollack. London: MIT Press, p. 412

Sellors, C. Paul. 2007. "Collective Authorship In Film." In *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 65, Issue 3, pp. 263-271. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4622239

Simon, Bart. 2013. "Indie Eh? Some Kind Of Game Studies." In *Loading… The Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association*, 7 (11), pp. 1 – 7. https://journals.sfu.ca/loading/index.php/loading/article/view/129/148

Simelane, Smangaliso. 2020. "A Brief History Of Hideo Kojima: The Making Of Homo Ludens." *Keengamer*, 8th of November. Accessed May 1, 2021. https://www.keengamer.com/articles/features/opinion-pieces/a-brief-history-of-hideo-kojima-the-making-of-homo-ludens/

Stewart, Samuel. 2019. “Video Game Industry Silently Taking Over Entertainment World.” *Ejinsight*, 22nd of October. Accessed November 30, 2020. https://www.ejinsight.com/eji/article/id/2280405/20191022-video-game-industry-silently-taking-over-entertainment-world

Stamenković, Dušan, Jaćević, Milan, and Wildfeuer, Janina. 2017. “The Persuasive Aims Of *Metal Gear Solid*: A Discourse Theoretical Approach To The Study Of Argumentation In Video Games.” Volume 15, pp. 11-23. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2016.12.002

Stemmler, Claudius. 2020. “*Metal Gear Solid* And Its Comics Adaptions.” In *Comics and Videogames: From Hybrid Medialities To Transmedia Expansions*, edited by Andreas Rauscher, Daniel Stein, and Jan-Noël Thon (1st ed.). Routledge, pp.113 – 125. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003035466

Tavinor, Grant. 2009. “Videogames as Art.” In *The Art of Videogames*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 172–196.

Taylor, T. L. 2002. “’Whose Game Is This Anyways?’ Negotiating Corporate Ownership In A Virtual World.” In *Conference: Proceedings Of The Computer Games and Digital Cultures Conference*, June 6-8, Tampere, Finland. http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.190.2088&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Thon, Jan-Noël. 2016. *Transmedial Narratology And Contemporary Media Culture*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1d8h8vn

Truffaut, Francois. 1954. “A Certain Tendency Of The French Cinema.” In *Auteurs And Authorship: A Film Reader*, edited by Grant, Barry Keith. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp. 9 – 18. http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/608484489

Welsh, Oli. 2008. “Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots review.” *Eurogamer*, 30th of May, updated 10th of December 2015. Accessed March 27, 2021. https://www.eurogamer.net/articles/metal-gear-solid-4-guns-of-the-patriots-review

Wijem, Tom. 2019. “The Global Games Market Will Generate $152.1 Billion in 2009 as the U.S. Overtakes China as the Biggest Market.” *Newzoo*, 18th of June. Accessed December 1, 2020. https://newzoo.com/insights/articles/the-global-games-market-will-generate-152-1-billion-in-2019-as-the-u-s-overtakes-china-as-the-biggest-market/

Wood, Robin. 1977. “Ideology, Genre, Auteur.” In *Auteurs And Authorship: A Film Reader*, edited by Grant, Barry Keith. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp. 84 – 92. http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/608484489

Wollen, Peter. 1969. *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (3rd ed.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972.

Zimmermann, Felix and Huberts, Christian. 2019. “From Walking Simulator To Ambience Action Game: A Philosophical Approach To A Misunderstood Genre.” In *Press Start*. 5, pp. 29-50, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338698394_From_Walking_Simulator_to_Ambience_Action_Game_A_Philosophical_Approach_to_a_Misunderstood_Genre

List of Video Games

Braid (Number None, 2008).

Bayonetta (PlatinumGames, 2009).

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 (Infinity Ward, 2009).

Child of Light (Ubisoft Montreal, 2014).

Death Stranding (Kojima Productions, 2019).

Devil May Cry (Capcom, 2001).

Doom (id Software, 1993).

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (Bethesda, 2011).

Fallout 4 (Bethesda, 2015).

Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice (Ninja Theory, 2017).

Max Payne (Remedy, 2001).

Metal Gear (Konami, 1987).

Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake (Konami, 1990).

Metal Gear Solid (Konami, 1998).

Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty (Konami, 2001).

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater (Konami, 2004).

Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence (Konami, 2005).

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots (Kojima Productions, 2008).

Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain (Kojima Productions, 2015).

Metal Gear Survive (Konami, 2018).

Pac-Man (Namco, 1980).

Penguin Adventure (Konami, 1986).

Portal (Valve, 2007).

Populous (Bullfrog, 1989).

SimCity (Maxis, 1989).

SimCity 2000 (Maxis, 1994).

The Sims (Maxis, 2000).

Snake's Revenge (Konami, 1990).

Spider-Man 2 (Activision, 2004).

Super Mario Bros. (Nintendo, 1985).

Tetris (USSR, 1984).

Wolfenstein 3D (id Software, 1992).

List of Films

Apocalypse Now! (Coppola, 1979).

Charlie and The Chocolate Factory (Burton, 2005).

Citizen Kane (Welles, 1941).

Confidential Report (Welles, 1955).

Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within (Sakaguchi, 2001).

First Blood (Ted Kotcheff, 1982).

Godfellas (Scorsese, 1990).

Indie Game: The Movie (Pajot/Swirsky, 2012).

The Irishmen (Scorsese, 2019).

Oldboy (Chan-Wook, 2003).

Pearl Harbor (Bay, 2001).

The Rock (Bay, 1996)

Rope (Hitchcock, 1948).

Taxi Driver (Scorsese, 1976).

Touch of Evil (Welles, 1956).