3

Mechapocalypse

In the previous chapters of this exploratory search, I have clarified "what" (disruptive conflicts), "how" (playful exploration and additional resources), and "where" (mainstream science fiction (sf) console games published in Japan from the mid-1990s and early 2000s) to look for the political potentials of videogames. It is now time to put the assumptions and theoretical conclusions to a test. The declared focus for the initial search is on popular single-player console games from Japan with science fictional themes and released for Sony Playstation consoles.

With these qualifications in mind, I would like to give a brief overview of some of the tendencies in the Japanese videogame market regarding science fiction. The first thing to say is that there exists little information in accessible form. Online statistics portals like vgchartz.com and the charts found in the annual *CESA Games White Paper* do, however, offer some indication. According to this data, the market in Japan appears to be far less invested in science fiction or realism than that in Europe, the US or Canada.[1] Under the rubric "Past domestic million shipment titles," the *2012 CESA Games White Paper* lists 204 titles, which I have categorized in Table 1.[2]

The table shows that more than half of the titles belong to predominantly fantastic franchises, such as *Super Mario*, *Dragon Quest*, *Final Fantasy*, or *Pokémon*. Of the remainder, 51 titles are simulations, 14 are puzzles and edutainment, and 17 titles are implausible or abstract, but do not belong to any of the other categories (music games, titles like *Doraemon*). Of the 204 videogames sold more than one million times in Japan, a total of seven titles shows a sufficient tendency towards sf, namely *Chrono Trigger* and *RESIDENT EVIL 2* (both rank 65 with 2,030,000 units sold), *Resident Evil 3 Nemesis* (rank 111: 1,450,000 units sold), *XEVIOUS* (rank 141: 1,270,000 units sold), *Resident Evil* (rank 164: 1,110,000 units sold), *Parasite Eve* (rank 186: 1,060,000 units sold), and *Metroid* (rank 191: 1.040.000 units). One could argue for

A. Implausible series and franchises	
Mario	29
Dragon Quest	20
Final Fantasy	13
Pokémon	12
Kirby	7
Donkey Kong	5
Zelda	4
Dynasty Warriors	4
SaGa	4
Various (Monster Hunter, Super Smash Brothers, Dragon Ball, Inazuma 11, Yoshi's Island, Kingdom Hearts, Secret of Mana, Arc the Lad)	17
Sub-total	**115**
B. Simulations (fighting, racing, golf, baseball, mah-jong, horses, etc.)	**51**
C. Puzzle, Edutainment (Tetris, brain training, languages, etc.)	**14**
D. Miscellaneous	**17**
E. Science Fiction	
Chrono Trigger	1
Resident Evil [Japan: Biohazard]	3
XEVIOUS	1
Parasite Eve	1
Metroid	1
Final Fantasy VII (counted above under Final Fantasy)	
Sub-total	**7**
total	**204**

Table 1. Sf among the Japanese all-time million-sellers listed in the 2012CESA Games White Paper.

including *Final Fantasy VII* (rank 14: 4,000,000 units sold) because of its strong science fictional tendency, although most of the *Final Fantasy* franchise shares

the general tendency of Japanese role-playing games mixing sf with fantastic features.[3] However, this does not change the fact that science fictional themes play a minor role on the market.

The picture looks slightly more diverse when considering the annual top-100 sales in Japan from 2000 to 2011 as listed by vgchartz.[4] Apart from the numerous ambiguous role-playing games (hereafter rpg), these charts display a more or less stable 10–15 percent of sf titles for each year. I have compiled the popular sf titles found in this data between 2000 and 2011 in Table 2.

Franchises/Series	**Number**	**Individual Titles**	**Year**
Gundam	39	Dino Crisis 2 (PS)	2000
Super Robot Wars	19	Extermination (PS2)	2001
Mega Man	15	Zone of the Enders (PS2)	2001
Resident Evil [Biohazard]	14	Disaster Report (PS2)	2002
Metal Gear Solid	10	Metroid Fusion (GBA)	2003
Armored Core	5	Classic NES Series: Xevious (GBA)	2004
Ace Combat	5	Famicom Mini: Star Soldier (GBA)	2004
.hack	5	Global Defence Force (PS2)	2005
Sakura Wars	4	Lost Planet 2 (PS3)	2010
Another Century's Episode	4	God Eater (PSP)	2010
Macross	4	Gods Eater Burst (PSP)	2010
Custom Robo	3	Steins;Gate (PSP)	2011
Star Fox	2	Black * Rock Shooter: The Game (PSP)	2011
Front Mission	2	Chikyuu Boueigun 2 Portable (PSP)	2011
Total franchise/series	131	**Total individual titles**	14
Added total	145		
Tentative scope of the book	**119**		

Table 2. Sf titles among the top-100 sales between 2000 and 2011 as listed by vgchartz.com.

The data indicates that the market share of Japanese sf videogames is dominated by a few large and long-time franchises on the one hand, and the theme of giant robots, or "mecha,"[5] on the other. Adapting popular anime content, the titles belonging to *Gundam*, *Another Century's Episode* and *Macross* amount to almost one third (47) of a total of 145 games. Together with other mecha series like the *Custom Robo*, *Armored Core*, *Front Mission* and *Mega Man*, these games represent the strongest current in the field of Japanese sf videogames. Other themes and series like *Resident Evil* (released in Japan as *Biohazard*) or *.hack* are less prominent, and the number of successful individual titles is relatively small.

These findings remain more or less applicable today. They generate the first sample for the consecutive analysis, in which I identify conflicts in some of the major science fictional franchises.

Science Fictional Skins

The statistical data suggests that some of the most popular sf games are adaptations of mecha anime. This is true for *Gundam* games, which are part of the *Gundam* franchise and mostly adapted from the various *Gundam* anime that has appeared since the late 1970s, and the crossover series *Another Century's Episode* (hereafter *A.C.E.*), which adapts story elements, characters and, most importantly, mecha from a wide range of works. According to Linda Hutcheon, an adaptation is an "acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works," a "creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging" and an "extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work."[6] In her analysis, "the adaptive faculty is the ability to repeat without copying, to embed difference in similarity, to be at once both self and Other." In their emphasis on fluidity and contingency, adaptations can be subversive, because they "destabilize both formal and cultural identity and thereby shift power relations."[7]

However, a brief examination of the adaptive strategies in *Gundam* and *A.C.E.* reveals the limitations of such subversive potentials in these examples. Covering a broad range of videogame genres and subgenres from first-person and third-person shooters to strategy role-playing games, *Gundam* displays a variety of adaptive strategies.[8] Titles like *Giren no Yabō* [*Gihren's Ambition*][9] or *Ichinen Sensō* [*One Year War*],[10] make a considerable effort to contextualize the gameplay with a narrative corresponding to the anime, thus offering an alternative, more subjective experience of the respective story adapted. In contrast, the majority of games reduces the context to a minimal reference in the shape of a rough narrative framing or by presenting characters, mecha—in *Gundam* called "mobile suits"—and locations familiar from one of the anime. As **Example 3.1** shows, this tendency is particularly strong in the "arcade mode" of the *Gundam VS.* sub-series (hereafter *VS.*).[11] While roughly introducing the context of the games in the prologue, these games decontextualize the action from the familiar narrative. This is most striking in the case of "arcade mode," which confronts the player with a series of loosely connected scenarios. They reduce the link to a vague reference to setting, while at the same time offering

a wide range of correspondingly adapted but decontextualized characters and mobile suits.

In more than one case, the choices available or the results of a mission openly contradict the anime narrative. Such subversion is more actively explored in the strategy rpg of the *SD Gundam GGeneration* series.[12] Offering a high degree of freedom when it comes to choosing pilots for the various machines and mobile suits available, as well as the possibility of convincing less fundamentalist villains to change sides during the battle, these games create situations that deviate from those in original anime. Such deconstructive tendencies are even stronger in the third-person shooter games of the *A.C.E.* series, which combine mecha, characters and story elements from more than one franchise.[13] As a general tendency, these titles feature an adaptive strategy that reduces the source material to elements of a database shuffled according to need and player choice. Thus, they are examples of postmodern database consumption, a term coined by Azuma. Azuma argues that the trend towards decontextualizing characters from the "grand narrative" culminates in a database of characters and character elements that can be recombined in myriad ways and exist outside any specific narrative context.[14]

This tendency towards a 'databasification' of decontextualized elements also converges with the themability of games mentioned in the preceding chapter, revealing the mecha and even the characters to be scarcely more than decorative skins. Combining various elements of *Gundam* with the gameplay of the successful hack 'n' slash series *Shin Sangoku Musō* [*Dynasty Warriors*],[15] the *Gundam Musō* [*Dynasty Warriors: Gundam*] games[16] deploy this practice most explicitly. *Gundam Musō* confronts the player with epic martial arts battles against several hundred enemy mobile suits and rewards high kill-rates—in stark contrast to the anime, with its emphasis on the psychological struggle of inexperienced civilians forced to fight over life and death and the terrors of war in general. In a different way, the above-mentioned *VS.* series deploys inter- and intra-game skinning practices, reusing its framework and format (and possibly parts of the software code) in successive titles or deploying a minimal number of stages in a large number of contexts.[17]

These observations hint at another dimension of adaptations, namely their economic aspects. In general, economic considerations are certainly a dominant force behind the majority of the *Gundam* games. Hutcheon (2006, 30) grants that "[v]ideogames derived from popular films and vice versa are clearly ways

to capitalize on a 'franchise' and extend its market."[18] At the same time, she claims that economic considerations are always part of adaptations.[19] In the case of *Gundam*, and arguably also *A.C.E.*, the appearance of familiar mecha and characters is likely to be the major factor for the popularity of what would otherwise be highly repetitive videogames lacking narrative depth to an extent where they are, presumably, hard to follow for outsiders. Contributing to one or multiple major franchises, these games also play a role as advertisements for other products, just as the original mecha anime series was sponsored by toy makers like Bandai, who expected elevated sales of real-life models of the mecha and other series-related toys for children. A particularly prolific part of the *Gundam* franchise, the "super deformed" *SD Gundam GGeneration* games are a striking case of the economics behind adaptations.[20]

In summary, games committed to—accurate or original—storytelling tend to offer alternative perspectives and subjective experiences of the *Gundam* world. However, the majority of games discussed so far tend toward decontextualization, databasification, standardization and skinning. These games arguably offer their fan-players what Hutcheon calls the intertextual pleasure of "understanding the interplay between works, of opening up a text's possible meanings to intertextual echoing."[21] They also develop a considerable deconstructive force with respect to the original *Gundam* universe. However, by abstracting the narrative, characters and mecha from their context and from their specific features, they also reduce its political content to a choice between different skins only meaningful for insiders.[22] The lack of novel contributions to the *Gundam* universe most of the games display marks them as highly self-reflexive.

Notably, Hutcheon claims that videogame adaptations not only have to meet the demands of a "truth-of-correspondence," or a reference to the universe of the adapted text, but also that of a "truth-of-coherence," meaning a plausibility of the action in the context of the game.[23] Inverted, the fact that the above-mentioned games fail to convince as adaptations offers an opportunity for taking a closer look at them as games in their own right. The next section analyses how *Gundam* games adapt elements of a major media franchise into specific videogame genres.

Survival Training

The mix of adapted narrative elements (background, characters, mecha) and gameplay in *Gundam* games provides an interesting case for Hutcheon's claim

that successful adaptations have to be equally accessible to knowing and unknowing audiences.[24] On the one hand, the abstracted, reshuffled or even lacking narratives found in most of these games are hardly intelligible for unknowing audiences. On the other hand, the gameplay of many titles is intuitive enough to be grasped immediately. At times confronting the player with tough challenges, the rules and controls are nonetheless simple enough to be mastered to a certain extent, and the instructions are easy enough to understand instantly.

In the following section, I take a look at the two most prominent videogame genres *Gundam* is adapted to, namely shooters and strategy role-playing games. In most cases dominated by third-person combat action on ground and in space, the shooters deploy the mobile suits with their enduring armour, ability to fly and set of super-sized, deadly weapons as human enhancements. The titles of the *VS.* series reduce the complexity of controls, truthful to their arcade framing. More sophisticated examples like *Climax U.C.* or the *A.C.E.* series features complex maneuvers and make use of the full range of the controller.[25] **Example 3.2** shows how these shooters display a tendency towards fast-paced reaction and emphasize hand-eye coordination, which is particularly striking in the 2.5D shoot 'em up *Gundam Seed*.[26]

The action in these games tends to converges toward decontextualized reaction to the accelerated flow of information on the screen. Required of the player are analytical skills to decipher the screen quickly, and a corresponding set of control skills necessary to react to its signals. Hand-eye coordination is arguably part of many videogames, to various extents, and pedagogical research has long highlighted its value as a skill in the contemporary world. Besides the sensorimotor skills, a recent study of cognitive dimension of first-person shooter play indicates that such games promote cognitive flexibility and cognitive-control skills.[27] However, at the same time, visual acceleration promotes a kind of "responsive irresponsibility" and a double vision on the part of the player. One has to identify and evade the most immediate threat, be it projectiles, obstacles or the enemy, while constantly searching for new targets elsewhere on the screen and trusting the automatic trigger to remain on the target until destroyed. The attention moves on to the next target as soon as one has reason to believe that the momentary target will be destroyed by the last fired projectile. However, there is no time to reflect on or even focus on either the individual enemy, or the moment of destruction. In a way, I believe this is an experience similar to Walter Benjamin's well-known description of

film viewing as tactile, habitual "reception in distraction."[28] Although already ascribed a physical quality by Benjamin, this should be qualified further by adding the term "intense," to account for the active, physical involvement of the player.

In their intense reception in distraction, these shooters offer a taste of Paul Virilio's dystopic vision of an accelerated, dromological future. In this future "War of Time," speed is superiority: "to be quick means to stay alive" when knowing-power is replaced by moving-power.[29] At times of accelerated speed and ubiquitous accessibility to destruction, the struggle to maintain a certain margin of political reaction time—time for reasoned decisions—in order not to be replaced by automation of defense and decision, is lost. For Virilio, this means that the world as a field of free (political) action comes to an end and "the more speed increases, the faster freedom decreases." Ultimately, speed converges towards an "instantaneousness of decision."[30]

In light of Virilio's analysis of politics in times of acceleration, shooter games and their emphasis on hand-eye coordination or analysis-reaction take on an ambivalent meaning. These skills could be said to prepare their players for behaving—or at least surviving—in a culture dominated by fast-paced information flows and visual representation, similar to how, in Benjamin's view, film prepared early twentieth-century audiences for future struggles. However, insofar as the games emphasize instantaneous decision, reaction and anticipation, instead of reasoning, imagination and action, they do not offer any alternative to the contemporary tendency towards acceleration; rather, they reflect it in play. As far as I can see, this reflection is not critical but admiring of speed.[31]

At the same time, this "double vision" might be a more general and common structure in videogames. From the perspective of semiotics, Yoshida Hiroshi distinguishes between a semantical and a syntactical dimension of the videogame screen.[32] While one concerns the meaning of the icons and symbols presented, the other puts them into meaningful relation with each other within the game world. For example, while a ball on a baseball game might even leave the screen if it is too high for the dimensions of the game field represented, its shadow remains visible and indicates its position to the player, who, consequently, is challenged to track the shadow and the ball in order to determine the right spatial position and act accordingly. Without mastering the syntactic dimension, the player is unable to master the game.[33] Concluding his examination, Yoshida points out that this common "double vision" is mastered

by most videogame players with ease, whereas it is not only uncommon, but rejected by some critics in the world of art.[34] He raises the important question of how this "double vision" relates to the history of sensuality and in what sense it suggests updating Benjamin's discussion, particularly against the background of Muroi's discussion quoted in the first chapter of this book.

The turn-based strategy rpg, on the other hand, interrupts the flow of time. The titles of the *SD Gundam G Generation* series feature chess-like gameplay in which the player takes turns with the computer in strategic role-playing fights and can think about the next move as long as he or she wants. In command of several units in bird's-eye scenarios, one has to make appropriate tactical and strategic choices to defeat the enemy. Each unit has a specified range of movement and attacks, which are to be used to the player's advantage. Gradually, one can upgrade the equipment, regroup soldiers and gear and create individual teams for the battles to come. Given Virilio's claim that with increasing acceleration, space (territory) as the central contested category in war is replaced by time, these turn-based, de-temporalized games with their strong emphasis on space and distances—and their genre as a whole—might be regarded as a counter-movement. Yet, at the same time, they deploy the numerous mecha of the franchise to create high information density, further amplified by customization options. This turns the games into vast spaces of functional configuration and re-combination of the decontextualized database elements mentioned above.

Again, this is an ambivalent feature. On the one hand, the games promote skills of analyzing and understanding complex information systems and databases in times of that such systems have ever-increasing importance and influence. As such, they confront the player with a high information density and offer an intense but playful experience of mastery. Volker Grassmuck discusses *otaku*, a Japanese term referring to passionate or "extreme" fans of manga, anime, games and related fields of interest, as a new strategy for dealing with the information age.[35] At the end of the twentieth century, he observes, "[h]ardly anybody is not affected by the flood of information and plethora of media. The increasing flow-velocity of our life processes forces us to simultaneously partake in ever-more projects in ever-more places together with ever-more people." In contrast to attempts to respond to this new information density with flexibility and multi-tasking,

> [t]he otaku are trying out a solution that goes in the opposite direction. Their urge to appropriate the world is motivated by the

> ambition to swap the borderlessness of the social cosmos for the microcosmos of collecting, of games, or of the machine. This radical limitation enables them to form an identity and bundle together a life story as a narrative. If the multiple represents opening up, then the otaku represents closing off.

Based on my own research into the otaku culture, I doubt that these claims can be generalized.[36] Nevertheless, the videogames in question deploy their mecha to generate information density, and offer ways to master it. In this sense, these videogames resemble Grassmuck's portrait of the otaku world, because they offer a coherent, closed space and strategies for and the experience of "mastering the social and psychological uncertainties of our age."[37]

In this, they depend on a mechanism similar to the closure Jameson regards as crucial for successful utopian imaginaries. However, as in the case of the shooters, this closed space features characteristics similar to those found in non-game empirical reality, instead of offering alternatives to it. In order to qualify this statement, I would like to distinguish between creative and repetitive information, and the corresponding strategies of engaging with data. McKenzie Wark draws such distinction in *A Hacker Manifesto [version 4.0]*, albeit in the peculiar terminology of production vs. hacking and communication vs. information.[38] He claims that "[w]here communication merely requires the repetition of this commodified difference, information is the production of the difference of difference" (Statement no. 40). A hack "produces a production of a new kind, which has as its result a singular and unique product, and a singular and unique producer" (no. 8). Production "takes place on the basis of a prior hack which gives to production its formal, social, repeatable and reproducible form. Every production is a hack formalised and repeated on the basis of its representation. To produce is to repeat; to hack, to differentiate" (no. 9).

Converting these statements into my terminology, one could say that his description of communication fits my notion of a repetitive engagement with data, because it deploys a formalized, pre-defined difference, whereas his notion of information matches creative engagements, because it entails a novel way of engaging with data. Against this background, I would argue that the potential for creative information in the above-mentioned games is limited to their deconstructive function in the context of the adapted franchise, because none of these games features a novel strategy for producing information. Instead, they perpetuate the contemporary conditions and promote repetitive strategies of managing information rather than creating it anew. In contrast to shooters,

turn-based strategy games appear to offer their players what is lost in acceleration: time to think and make decisions about the future. Yet, a closer look reveals that these games only shift the plane, from accelerated reaction to strategies of managing information density and complexity. In sum, both cases are characterized by acceleration and density. The skills needed to survive their scenarios are similar to those required of us in non-game empirical reality. To return to Virilio's skepticism, quoted in the first chapter, these games, arguably, turn their players into "travelers traveled by the program." As suggested by Carroll and Adorno, they deploy "commonplaces" and offer accessible scenarios, rather than confronting us with disruptive conflicts capable of stimulating independent, radical imagination. Since speed and data are central elements of the videogame space, it should not surprise us that they play an important role in many games. However, the following sections show that they can be deployed in more radical, provocative ways than we encountered here.

Future War

Given the strong tendency toward agonistic or competitive challenges in videogames in general, and their fraternity with war simulations of all kinds, it may come as no surprise that several successful independent works and series share the theme of war with the above-mentioned adaptations.[39] Developed as original videogame series, *Front Mission*, *Ace Combat* and *Armored Core* place the action within genuinely novel, sophisticated and temporally and spatially extensive science fictional universes (see Figure 4).[40]

The turn-based strategy rpgs of the *Front Mission* series, for example, are set in the twenty-first and twenty-second centuries.[41] In a future based on the situation in 1995, when the series' first title *Front Mission* was published, several supranational republics are formed in the early 2000s, such as the European Community (EC), the Republic of Zaftra (formed around Russia), the United States of the New Continent (USN), the Oceania Cooperative Union (OCU), as well as the unstable Organization of African Consolidation (OAC). Due to several developments, the United Nations (UN) are rendered insignificant in the twenty-first century and are replaced by the Peace Mediation Organization (PMO) founded by Zaftra, only for the UN to regain strength in the early twenty-second century with the support of the USN. Despite these developments, the world remains highly unstable, with several coups d'état and anti-state terror on the rise.

By basing its future on real world facts, the series creates a plausible future

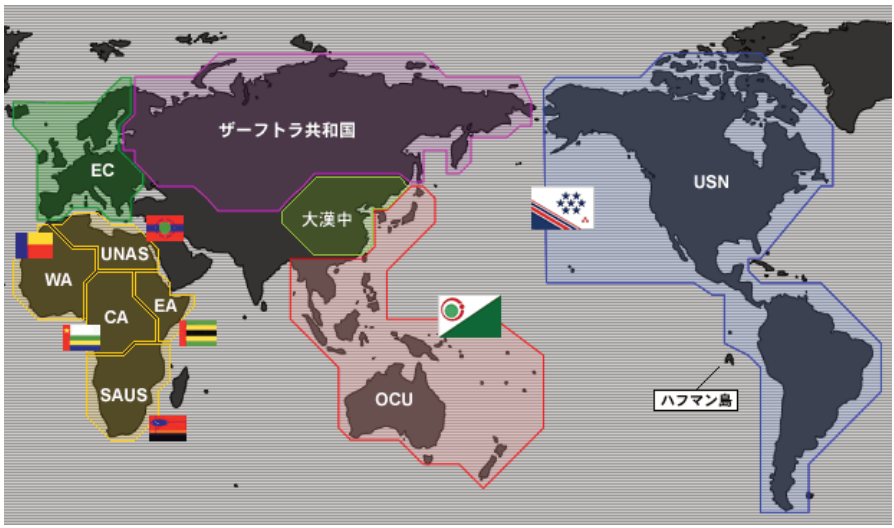

Figure 4. Front Mission world map.

world. This approach is also applied to technology, as Angelo D. Pineda, Kyle A. Thompson and Wilson K. Tam point out:

> Game mechanics aside, *Front Mission*'s true strength comes from its design and story elements. The biggest design influence is the series' grounded realism; the setting is based off of near-future trends of how our world will evolve. For example, the technology of the series has real-life applications. *Front Mission*'s cast of characters come from all over the world, from Venezuela to Korea to even Iceland.[42]

As an important element in the gameplay, the games introduce mecha called "wanzers,"[43] which a player can customize with various weapons of short-, middle- and long range and upgrade to optimize them in order to take on the awaiting enemy forces. In the missions or stages, which sometimes take more than an hour to complete, player and computer take turns in directing the attacks and movements of their wanzers.

The temporally and spatially extensive future world with its advanced technologies and infinite conflicts not only provides the basis for these missions or stages, but also serves as a background for discussing various political and philosophical problems. "In keeping with the series' near-future roots, each game focuses on particular military, political, scientific, and philosophical

themes that form the core of their stories. For example, a major recurring theme in the games is the struggle between globalization and nationalism."[44] While not the most esteemed title of the series, *Front Mission 3* is a good example of the series' "grounded realism" and its political commentary.

Set in the year 2112, the player begins the game in Japan. One quickly learns that future Japan has maintained its non-aggression policy on the surface, while embarking on humanitarian aid missions and conducting weapons systems development beneath—a reference to the critique against the ongoing policy changes in Japan since the early 1990s toward more active international military involvement. During the "Emma-storyline," protagonist Takemura Kazuki aids the foreign scientist Emma in the pursuit of a stolen new weapon of mass destruction called "M.I.D.A.S.," at the same time trying to rescue his sister Alisa, who is abducted for her scientific knowledge about this weapon. [45] The game is infused with themes like war victims, weapons technology and violence, and offers diverse moments of reflection on these issues, some of which I have included in **Example 3.3**.[46] The protagonist is not a soldier but an engineer and test pilot. The story touches upon individual experiences of war and killing several times, while nonetheless maintaining that Kazuki and the player have no choice but to fight against the attackers. In the context of the overarching story, Emma, who is responsible for developing M.I.D.A.S., repeatedly agonizes over her action and responsibility to mankind, in particular after the weapon is used by an over-ambitious general.

Despite the game's absorbing pace and depth, these reflexive episodes remain somewhat superficial. Much more than the rudimentary and unemotional animation techniques used in the dialogs, this is a result of the fact that the gameplay itself does not reflect this critique of violence and war technologies. On the contrary, featuring customizable mecha and diverse weapons in a very similar way to the *Gundam* rpgs, it immerses the player in technology and rewards a certain degree of admiration and enthusiasm. More importantly, the battles remain superficial in their treatment of the terrors of war and the fight over life and death, as **Example 3.4** shows. Human beings are visible only upon escape from their wanzers and, most of the time, the action does not refer to the death or injuries of those involved in the fights. At the same time, the player has to kill every single opponent, even when they have left their machinery and pose no substantial threat any more. Yet, complete destruction of a team member's wanzer does not lead to fatal injuries, and neither causes a loss of the robot: if the mission can still be completed, machine and pilot are restored.

In general, each fight during the runaway starts with full specs—ammunition, armor, etc.[47] This is not just an example of the common rule-based contradictions with plausibility in videogames; what is more important here is that these contradictions are counterproductive to the game's attempt to deliver a critical message.

Front Mission 5: Scars of the War deals with the problem of physical, mental and emotional damage inflicted by war in more sophisticated ways. Following the protagonist, USN soldier Walter Feng, into an armed conflict with the opposing OCU, the story touches upon the victims of war, including the traumatized soldiers, and further problematizes experiments with brain manipulation and soldier enhancement: A soldier in the enemy forces, Walter's childhood friend Glen Duval is subjected to such experiments and ends up killing their mutual friend Randy O'Neill, whom he no longer recognizes after the manipulation. However, as in *Front Mission 3*, these critical elements are presented almost entirely through the narrative, be it in scripted dialogs or cut-scenes.

A similar divide between narrative and gameplay can be found in the *Ace Combat* series, albeit in a very different form.[48] *Ace Combat* is a first-person flight combat simulation. From *Ace Combat 2* to *Ace Combat 6*, the series is set in the fictional world "Strangereal" shown in Figure 5.[49]

Figure 5. Strangereal political map.

A major event in the history of Strangereal is the so-called Belkan war, which is also the main subject of *Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War*. After failing to avert a severe economic crisis, the Belkan government is replaced by a far-right faction that returns the country to economic prosperity and invests heavily in a strong military. In 1995, the Belkans deploy their military force in an invasion of their neighboring countries. The success of these expansive campaigns prompts the two superpowers, Osea and Yuktobania, to enter the conflict against Belka. Forced back onto their main territory after several months of fighting against an overwhelming enemy, the Belkans decide to drop seven nuclear bombs on their own borderlands in order to build a wall that stops the invading forces. The war weakens the superpowers considerably, because their forces are outmatched by Belkan military technology. In the aftermath, they dismantle their nuclear weapons and elect peaceful governments—not before creating secret military elite forces.[50]

Whereas *Ace Combat Zero* presents the player with a retrospective on the experiences and missions of a legendary pilot in the Belkan War, *Ace Combat 5* opens with Yuktobania once again declaring open war on Osea 15 years later. Both games feature immersive stories[51] with a set of interesting characters.[52] Despite their difficult controls, they offer a thrilling and highly entertaining experience of aerial dogfighting.

> At first glance, Ace Combat 5 resembles a realistic flight simulation, since if features dozens of different real-world aircraft, including plenty of American classics like the F-16 Fighting Falcon and the F/A-18 Hornet, as well as Russian planes like the Su-27 and MiG-29. State-of-the-art fighters like the F-22 and classic jets like the F-4 and A-10 Warthog are also represented. In real life, some of these jets handle drastically differently, but despite its realistic looks (complete with gorgeously detailed plane models and cockpits, and authentic heads-up displays), Ace Combat 5 is clearly not intended to be a realistic flight simulation.[53]

Nonetheless, in its attempt to bridge real aerial combat with entertaining gameplay, the series does deliberately approach (the illusion of) a realistic experience in its graphics and gameplay—to this end, the designers, for example, gain expertise from the Japanese self-defense forces. To the extent that *Ace Combat* aims to offer realistic experiences, the vector points toward non-game empirical reality—even if this is a reality beyond most people's experience.

Although the individual player may break out of his or her present in these games, this experience in itself does not feature any radical alternatives departing from our reality in drastic ways.

In sum, both *Front Mission* and *Ace Combat* offer alternative scenarios, which, at times, confront the player with a critical mirror of the present or commentary on a potential future. However, *Front Mission* fails to maintain plausibility in its contradictory gameplay and is thus weakened in its critique. In its pursuit of entertainment, *Ace Combat* fails to depart from reality far enough to generate disruptive conflicts with our empirical experiences of the present. In both cases, the way in which narrative and gameplay are combined prevents any radical political potential from emerging, precisely because the scientific method of constructing their alternative world is not applied rigorously to all elements that comprise the game space. The next section discusses a more successful example in this regard.

The Economic Nightmare

Armored Core (hereafter *AC*) is a long-running series of third-person mecha action games.[54] Its world is ruled by global companies rather than nations or elected political entities. The world's history varies within the series, but, in most cases, the games stage a post-apocalyptic present in the aftermath of a global (nuclear) war.[55] This major event changed the world's power balance in favor of the technology companies involved in these wars, which now hold all political power. Already through its setting, the *AC* series features a direct critique of (neo-liberal) capitalism and ecological destruction in its dystopic future. As the Japanese Wikipedia entry on the "Great Destruction," or "Grand Slam," as the entry calls it, summarizes the background to the first titles as

> the distortion of the maximally grown liberal economy. Rapid increase of slums and environmental pollution in the industrialized countries are paralleled by their fraud against the developing countries, disguised as developmental aid. An irrecoverable gap of economic inequality, population growth, as well as environmental damage and food shortage caused by the destruction of nature, resulted in distrust in the governments' abilities to run the countries.[56]

Beyond a narrative depiction of the consequences this world and its inhabitants are facing, the series puts the player in the role of a mercenary, tasked with

biological and economic survival. During the course of the game, the player is offered numerous contracts by diverse employers, primarily from major companies. These missions require sophisticated machinery and advanced weapons technology. Piloting a mecha called "Armored Core," the player has to fight enemy mecha and other deadly war machines, both manned and unmanned. The money earned from these contracts can be used to purchase new parts for one's own machine.

With its myriad parts and many interrelated layers of customization, the *AC* series is arguably one of the most complex examples of mecha customization. Figure 6 hints at the complexity of the Armored Core setup.

"Armored Core Schematics Interface System" (ACSIS), in short, the shop in *AC4*

Tuning system in *AC for Answer*

Figure 6. Customization in AC.

With all its options, the *AC* upgrade system requires considerable comparison and research in order to be mastered to some extent. Above, I have criticized a similar system in the discussion of the *Front Mission* series or the *Gundam* strategy rpgs. In all cases, mecha are not only an important element of the game

mechanic, but also function as a customizable object of fascination, targeting a technologically savvy audience enthusiastic about (war) machines. **Example 3.5** shows that *AC* shares this technology fetish, arguably propelling it to new heights by offering elaborate designs and various ways to admire the machine, whether as a 3D model or in the opening video sequences.

Yet, whereas other games do not connect this dominant role of technology and customization directly to their science fictional world, the upgrade system in *AC* is a crucial element for conveying the series' dark vision of an economically dominated future. The relation between both elements is achieved by increasing the definiteness of one's actions in several interrelated ways. Among them, the payment system can arguably be said to be the most important. In *AC*, the player is rewarded for the actual performance during the missions, which he or she can fail to accomplish without having to start all over again. Figure 7 indicates that successful and efficient completion raises the income considerably, whereas poor and inefficient use of weapons, damage to the Armored Core or failure to meet the objectives lowers the reward and may even result in a minus balance, since ammunition and repairs have to be paid in any case. Losing the ability to upgrade the mecha is a major problem, as missions do not get easier.

Figure 7. Two results for the same mission in Armored Core for Answer (l, m), followed by the choice to redo or save permanently (r).

The rewards earned during a mission are linked to the player's performance in other series like *Front Mission* or *Ace Combat*. However, the absolute judgment in *AC* is further elevated by the games' treatment of the saving function. What distinguishes titles like *AC4* is that they only allow for saving the entire status upon leaving the game, thereby forcing the player to accept less successful missions or revert to the frustrating method of restarting the entire game and going through the loading process after each suboptimal performance. Such an experience is also part of earlier games such as *AC2*, albeit to a lesser degree.

Here, successful completion, while in itself a considerable achievement for less experienced players like myself (see below), may, depending on the actual performance, not return sufficient revenues for the necessary upgrades, since ammunition and repair costs are generally very high.[57]

Another way of conveying their dystopic message is the high difficulty these games display. The *Armored Core* series is not aimed at casual gamers, but targets hardcore fans with sophisticated data analysis and tactical skills, as well as a good hand-eye coordination. These requirements complicate the struggle for survival as a mercenary substantially. Recent titles like *AC Nexus* or the PS3 games *AC4* and *AC for Answer* feature a complex set of commands, which makes use of almost the entire range of controller functions. For me, a player used to recent first-person and third-person shooters, the earlier *AC2* controls provided an even more demanding challenge, because it does not make use of the analog sticks or offer a key assignment system. With only two key mapping options left, the player is forced to master the mecha in a predetermined, from my perspective counterintuitive way. Offering a frustrating initial playing experience, this limitation and awkwardness of the controls, however, points to the role controls play in the experience of gameplay in general, and the control over technology and mecha in particular.[58]

Together, these elements support and amplify the experience of a world dominated by companies and war technology. By deploying the nova of economic dominance and mecha technology in multiple elements of narrative, game system and gameplay, the *AC* series manages to offer an involving experience of survival in a world that has transformed into a freelance battlefield. It may not surprise the reader that some of the skills these games require are familiar from the earlier analysis of acceleration and information density in *Gundam*, in the context of which I have discussed them as an uncreative survival strategies.[59] The *AC* series radicalizes this tendency almost beyond recognition, confronting the player with a dystopic totality ruled by natural selection, in which biological survival—to the extent to which this category exists in videogames with their saving and retry options—is directly linked to economic survival and the skills necessary to prevail in battle.

Whereas the lack of narrative context to the missions in many *Gundam* games was perceived as a failure, *AC*—which, by the way, does feature a vague overarching narrative—embeds this lack convincingly into its world view. After all, one does not choose to accept contracts due to their political motivation,

but because they are lucrative and ensure survival. Interestingly, *AC for Answer* offers a choice between several companies the player can join as a hired mercenary, including an independent faction, as shown in Figure 8.[60]

"The world's largest corporation. It primarily operates as a defense contractor. Their craft proudly display military colors and feature excellent defense and heavy weaponry."

"A military corporation with political might on their side. They tend to keep their distance from both GA and the Interior. Their craft are standard, highly maneuverable Rosenthal machines."

"An independent mercenary unaffiliated with any corporation. The only available craft is an older Rayleonard model, built for close range combat. Good luck."

Figure 8. Ideological choices in AC for Answer.

At first glance, this might suggest some space for morally or ideologically driven decisions. However, betraying any such expectations, ideology is reduced to choices between different machines.[61] The general tendency of the series suggests that this is not a flaw in the game design, but may well be read as a way of conveying the final consequence of this world: the irrelevance of ideology in the everyday struggle of the mercenary to survive the economic nightmare. Confronting the player with a scientifically rigorous combination of a broad range of expressive means, *AC* is able to offer the player the experience of

a version of Virilio's darkest forecast—a place in which analysis and skills are necessary for survival, ultimately replacing "playfulness" and political freedom.

Deconstruction, Implausibility and Dystopia

This chapter examined several major tendencies in the field of popular Japanese science fictional videogames. It identified some of the ways in which mecha are deployed in different series, ranging from means of addressing franchise fans or a technology-savvy audience attracted to war machinery to attempts at apocalyptic worlds, which are politically explicit not only visually, but also in the gameplay rules and experience. The fact that these tendencies cannot be separated clearly makes the mecha an ambivalent device in Japan's science fiction games.

The analysis suggests that the most dominant franchises on the market are not necessarily the most promising from a political point of view. As adaptations, the *Gundam* games feature a deconstructive tendency in the context of the adapted universe and offer the player a new perspective on and experience of their universe. However, in most cases, they remain self-referential and are dominated by skinning practices—a particularly strong tendency in hybrids like *Gundam Musō* or crossover series like *A.C.E.* The review of adaptations leads to the conclusion that a random selection of database elements does not suffice to generate disruptive conflicts. These results make me wonder if "databasification" can offer the "piquancy of surprise" and "change" at all, which Hutcheon regards as major potential of adaptations.[62] As games in their own right, the analyzed *Gundam* titles have proven to be ambiguous cases, perpetuating the contemporary conditions on the one hand, and offering strategies for survival on the other. Overall, they remain repetitive and do not offer genuine alternatives or novel strategies of resistance.

Series like *Front Mission*, *Ace Combat* or *Armored Core* offer the player an alternative world one cannot call anything other than dystopic. In all cases, the dark tenor is that the effort made toward living together in peace cannot prevent a fiercely fought global war about resources and power. Yet, *Front Mission* and *Ace Combat* stopped short of deploying a science fictional novum in their gameplay rigorously enough to generate otherness and conflict with the known. Instead, they ended up restricting it—and with it their political message—to the conventional narrative layer. The implausibility resulting from the described inconsistencies in *Front Mission* does not make the series' universes

less enjoyable, but works counterproductively to the critical elements displayed in the story or setting, thus weakening their political appeal.

An example of a more encompassing deployment of the novum was found in the sophisticated dystopia of the *Armored Core* series, which not only transfers the player into a post-apocalyptic world, but reflects and amplifies this setting in its gameplay and rule set, thus offering a total, compelling and frightening experience of life under extreme conditions. This finding supports Suvin's claim that in the most effective or "optimal" sf,

> a sufficiently large number of precisely aimed and compatible details draw out a sufficiently full range of logical implications from the central S-F novum und thus suggest a coherent universe with overall relationships that are—at least in respect of the thematic and semantic field associated with the novum—significantly different from the relationships assumed by the text's addressees.[63]

This initial exploration points toward a hypothesis that informs the following case studies: videogame spaces are politically most potent and conflict-laden when they mobilize a wide spectrum of their expressive elements or combine these elements in intriguing ways. The subsequent chapters will focus on titles that offer such complex interplay and negotiation of various elements and actors. What remains to be seen in the light of the critical, dystopic tendency found in the initial exploration, is whether videogame spaces extend beyond the sphere of critique and reflection of the present situation. Is their logic, as Virilio and, at times, Galloway suggest, actually so strongly interwoven with our present that they remain bound to it? Or, might they also succeed in confronting us with conflicts that point beyond the known and direct our imagination toward possible systemic alternatives? The next three chapters will make the case that this is indeed possible where games succeed in deploying a wide range of expressive means on specific themes rigorously.

Notes

1. On a technical level, Nintendo has withdrawn from the race for ever more powerful consoles—more apt to representing realistic environments and complex physical processes required by most of the high-budget productions mentioned above—instead aiming for casual gaming and new consumers with the DS and the Wii. The latter in particular led to a series of games emphasizing bodily movement, which are arguably much more "real" than any realistic

visual representation and, not by chance, contributed to a blurring of the categories of videogames and sports and fitness.

2. Unozawa [鵜之澤], *2012CESA Games White Paper*, 228–33. The data used for the *CESA Games White Paper* is based on the responses of four companies to a research survey conducted for all titles released since 1983, as well as earlier data. Titles are given in Japanese and English in the original.

3. A good example of this mix of fantasy and sf is the game *Makai Tōshi SaGa* [*The Final Fantasy Legend*] of which the English Wikipedia entry remarks that "the game features equipment from different genres, ranging from magic and swords of **fantasy** to **plasma rifles** and chainsaws of **science fiction**."

4. vgchartz, "Video Game Charts, Games Sales, Top Sellers, Game Data – VGCharts." According to their own description, vgchartz employs a broad range of methods to estimate sales numbers, such as polling with gamers and retailers, statistical trend fitting, price analysis and industry consultations (see "Methodology").

5. Mecha is the English version of the Japanese term *meka*, itself a short form adapted from the English terms "mechanism" and "mechanical." According to the English and Japanese entries in Wikipedia, the term is widely used to refer to machines in Japan. In the context of Japanese popular culture, it commonly refers to the science fictional device of robots controlled by human pilots. Early prominent examples of mecha are the manga *Mazinger Z* published by Nagai Gō (永井 豪) between 1972 and 1973, or the tv anime series *Mobile Suit Gundam* from 1979, which developed into one of the most influential cross-media franchises in Japan. I use the term mecha throughout this analysis to refer to such robots.

6. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 8.

7. Ibid., 164, 174.

8. At the time of my first exploration (July 2013), the *Gundam* franchise included 44 titles for the Playstation alone, not to mention other platforms (Wikipedia 2013i). Due to time constraints, the analysis can only focus on some of these titles. I tried to cover the most important sub-series and sequels.

9. *Mobile Suit Gundam: Giren No Yabō – Jion Dokuritsu Sensōki* [Gihren's Ambition – Chronicals of the Zeon Liberation War].

10. *Mobile Suit Gundam: Ichinen Sensō* [One Year War].

11. *Mobile Suit Gundam: Renpō vs. Jion DX* [Federation vs. Zeon DX]; *Mobile Suit Z Gundam: AEUG vs. Titānzu* [AEUG vs. Titans]; *Mobile Suit Gundam: Gundam vs. Z Gundam*; *Mobile Suit Gundam Seed: Rengō vs. Z.A.F.T.* [Federation vs. Z.A.F.T.].

12. *SD Gundam G Generation Neo*; *SD Gundam G Generation Seed*; *SD Gundam G Generation Spirits*; *SD Gundam G Generation Wars*.

13. *Another Century's Episode*; *Another Century's Episode R*.

14. Azuma [東], *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan*, 71–83; for the English translation, see Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*; for a discussion of Azuma's ideas, see Schäfer and Roth, "Otaku, Subjectivity and Databases: Hiroki Azuma's Otaku: Japan's Database Animals."

15. The third-person fighting games offer a choice of characters among the historical figures known from the "Three Kingdoms" period in China (220-280 AD), which the player has to reunite.

16. *Gundam Musō 2* [Dynasty Warriors: Gundam 2]; *Gundam Musō Special*.

17. A similar tendency is present in the *SD Gundam GGeneration*, in which notable changes are mostly of aesthetic nature or concern the referenced work(s). My analysis of

Naruto games suggests that this is not unique to the *Gundam* games, but a might be considered a general current in (Japanese) manga, anime and games (production) culture (Roth, "Playing 'Naruto': Between Meta-Narrative Characters, Unit Operations and Objects."). It would be interesting to analyze the impact such practice has on the economic model the game production and the franchise as a whole is based on.

18. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 30.

19. This should be taken as a claim about professional adaptations that have a commercial background. Amateur- and fan-works certainly follow other intentions and may, to some extent, be regarded as adaptations for the sake of adaptations. Unfortunately, Hutcheon does not discuss this area in any depth.

20. *SD* stands for "super deformed." According to the Wikipedia, this style of "shrinked," tiny representations of *Gundam* mobile suits is in use in parts of the franchise since the 1980s. It has developed from a playful parody to a highly successful sub-franchise which spawned several spin-off series and merchandise. The Wikipedia mentions that the "super deformed" style is presumed to be a strategy of circumventing licensing fees to the *Gundam* license holder Sunrise. Thus, the series also indicates the complexity of the economic dimension of franchises and adaptations in general, which cannot be discussed in detail here.

21. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 117.

22. Traditionally set up as a future armed conflict between different fractions of humanity and post-humanity, *Gundam* features rich political themes in a science fictional setting, explored through an overarching narrative as well as by depicting the individual physical and psychological struggles of the characters caught up in the war.

23. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 14.

24. Ibid., 121.

25. *Mobile Suit Gundam: Climax U.C.*; *Another Century's Episode*; *Another Century's Episode R*.

26. *Mobile Suit Gundam Seed*.

27. Colzato et al., "Videogame Facilitates Cognitive Flexibility."

28. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," 119–21. Benjamin claims that the shock effect of the cinema, originating from "successive changes of scene and focus" and thus from speed, makes film the "*true training ground*" for the new apperception necessary in times of increasing "*aestheticizing of political life*" by fascism. For a discussion of how Benjamin's conceptualization of the "modes of perception" and "reception in distraction" relate to contemporary media, see Schäfer and Roth, "Otaku, Subjectivity and Databases: Hiroki Azuma's Otaku: Japan's Database Animals."

29. Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, 70–71.

30. Ibid., 152–58.

31. For a more comprehensive application of Virilio's dromology to videogames, see Wade, "A Dromology of the Videogame."

32. Yoshida [吉田], "Bideo Gēmu no Kigōronteki Bunseki."

33. Ibid., 63–66.

34. Ibid., 69–70.

35. Grassmuck, "Man, Nation & Machine."

36. Roth, "Otaku in Szene Gesetzt."

37. Grassmuck, "Man, Nation & Machine."

38. Wark, "A Hacker Manifesto [Version 4.0]." As this text is not paginated, I refer to the statement no. given by the author.

39. In his dissertation on the origins of videogames and their philosophical significance, Claus Pias ("Computer Spiel Welten," 163–97.) showed that strategy games were always strongly intertwined with military strategy, planning and war simulations.

40. Tenmou.net, "World Map," Accessed December 1, 2017. http://www.tenmou.net/encyclopedia/world/index.html.

41. For this research, I played *Front Mission 2*; *Front Mission 3*; *Front Mission 5~Scars of the War*. If not specified further, information about the game world origins in my own exploration of the game or the fan site "Tenmou.Net (Front Mission Fan Site)."

42. Pineda, Thompson and Tam, "Front Mission," 1.

43. The term is compiled of the German words *Wandern* (to hike, to wander, to move around) and *Panzer* (tank).

44. Pineda, Thompson and Tam, "Front Mission," 1.

45. Depending on a choice very early into the game, the player pursues one of two storylines in the game. I have only played the "Emma-Storyline" and the following remarks are based on this experience.

46. English subtitles for *Front Mission 3* taken from Unos Hambalos' (2007) *Front Mission 3 – Game Script (EMMA)*.

47. This is why Dave Connoy (2003) gives the following advice in his walkthrough: "Don't be afraid of death. The HP of all the parts of all of your wanzers is fully restored at the end of each battle, and dead pilots are even magically resurrected! Fight every battle to the bitter end, because you never know what lucky break might come your way. Of course, an arduous battle of attrition will reflect badly on your ranking, so you may want to redo the stage anyway." I will come back to the rather common foregrounding of score over death suggested here in a later chapter.

48. For this analysis, I played *Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War*; *Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War*. If not specified further, information about the game world origin in the player's own exploration of the game or the wikia online encyclopedia section "Acepedia (Ace Combat Wiki)."

49. The map was reportedly created by Kōno Kazutoki (河野一聡, Namco Bandai) and uploaded to wikia in July 2014 by SlyCooperFan1 (Kōno [河野], "Strangereal Map").

50. See Radford, "Ace Combat 05: The Unsung War FAQ/Walkthrough," SY01. This all suggests strong similarities with our own history, albeit with certain important alterations. According to the entry on the "Belkan War" in the *Acepedia* wikia, "[t]he Belkan War is based heavily on World War II, with elements of the Gulf War." This interpretation is supported by the German-sounding names of Belkan companies, etc. Yet, the appearance of nuclear weapons also suggests some influence of the Japanese history and the Asia-Pacific War. Unfortunately, a preliminary search could not determine the intentions behind the alterations made to this historical basis, particularly with regards to the nuclear bombs which are dropped by Belka itself.

51. "Ace Combat's continued devotion to good storytelling is ultimately one of this game's best strengths, since the presence of so much plot helps to give the missions a sense of genuine significance and cinematic drama. The high-quality voice acting, constant radio chatter, and stirring, dynamic music combine with the action very well, giving Ace Combat 5 an epic feel." (Kasavin, "Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War Review.")

52. According to Radford, this was not always the case in earlier *Ace Combat* games ("Ace Combat 05: The Unsung War FAQ/Walkthrough," CH01.).

53. Kasavin, "Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War Review."

54. For this analysis, I played *Armored Core 2*; *Armored Core Nexus*; *Armored Core 4*; *Armored Core for Answer*.

55. This event is referred to as the "Great Destruction (*daihakai*)" in the PSX and PS2 titles (from *AC* released in 1997 to *AC: Last Raven* released in 2005), and as the "National Dismantlement War" in the PS3 titles (since the 2006 release of *AC4*). The Japanese Wikipedia entry for *daihakai* refers to three different versions of this event in the series. In *AC4* and *AC for Answer*, the Great Destruction is replaced by a "National Dismantlement War" waged by the leading companies in a situation where national governments are unable to deal with the problems of overpopulation and the rise of terrorism and anarchy. Whereas this later change can easily be explained by a different world setting, earlier games confused their players due to different versions of the Great Destruction. Released after *AC for Answer*, *AC V* does not continue the storyline of the earlier titles, but can be considered as a standalone project in terms of its narrative and world, and will not be focused on in the following section.

56. Wikipedia, "Daihakai," my translation.

57. In other titles, like *AC for Answer*, the player can choose to redo a mission based on the results, accept his or her performance, or cancel the whole procedure, returning to the pre-mission state. On the one hand, this effectively weakens the absoluteness of one's performance. On the other hand, it confronts the player with a difficult choice, since the earlier results are erased when opting for retrial.

58. From a contemporary perspective grounded in an ever more realistic and intuitive experience of technological control, technical (and thereby often sensual) restrictions and limitations in titles like *AC2* or early PSX *Gundam* games such as *Mobile Suit Gundam*; and *Mobile Suit Gundam: Gyakushū No Shā* [Chars Counterattack] can offer a deeply disruptive, alienating experience of a "lack of control" over the machine.

59. *AC* offers the player the choice not to accept a mission or to abort it. *AC for Answer* is well known for requiring of the player nothing more than a successful completion of the final two missions—offering enough reward for missions aborted midway to upgrade the Armored Core sufficiently. Here, the game departs or abstracts from its economic logic, because it is conceivable that companies aiming towards profit and efficiency would not hire an unreliable mercenary repeatedly.

60. Translation taken from Ramza411sb, *Interactive Let's Play Armored Core: For Answer – Part 1 – Introduction.*

61. This is most aptly expressed in the following section of a walkthrough by Acid Losvaize ("Armored Core For Answer – Walkthrough" ACFA03, errors in the original.): "When you start the game, will be prompted about some options, and finally about your sponsoring company. Whatever you choose, it won't affect storyline, just your initial gear and parts that will be in the shop at first. When I begun the game, of course chosen independent type, but I think it's better to take Interior Union since Tellus legs and core are premium quality, and you will be able to buy two Altair by selling one of the crappy samsara or medusa weapons. I strongly recommend you to do this. Drawback of choosing Interior instead independent… you are losing blade dragonslayer (I mean, you don't have it and can not buy blades until later in the game), that is quite useful to kill AF's. Besides, AALIYAH gear is more expensive than TELLUS, so economically you lose choosing this last one. Anyways, for me is best to have two Altair from the first mission."

62. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 4.

63. Suvin, "Narrative Logic, Ideological Domination, and the Range of SF: A Hypothesis with a Historical Test," 6.