6

Violent Technologies

In the previous chapters, I have shown that videogames can challenge fundamental assumptions about common life, both regarding the structural hegemony of linear time and regarding the dominant, teleological way of engaging in everyday activities. In this final analytic chapter, I would like to take a closer look at the status of player action, arguably one of the most central features of the medium. Action is also a central political term for many theorists and thinkers, because it is the way in which we can influence society most directly and deliberately. As mentioned above, Geuss favors a broad and abstract understanding of political action as action capable of creating a new situation.[1] If we accept the broad understanding, playing videogames can be political in terms of a shared game space, if the actions of a player influence the ways in which the participating community of players engages or can engage with the game space. This layer, while possibly also applicable to single-player games, mostly concerns multiplayer game spaces. Another possible political significance of player action is its potential to influence the ways in which the players engage or can engage with their environment and the societies or world they live in—that is, if the experience made or lessons learned from playing are transferred to other non-gaming situations.

Arendt, in contrast, defines political action more narrowly—and, radically—as characterized by novelty, "boundlessness" and "inherent unpredictability" and based on human equality in plurality. For her, political action is about appearing or performing politics freely and publicly, thereby establishing something greater than our private, individual lives.[2] Arendt goes as far as to assert that freedom is the reason for people to live together in political organization in the first place, adding that political action is the only way in which this freedom can be experienced. As such, political action has to be without external purpose, and the purpose of the political, in her words, is "to establish and keep in existence a space where freedom as virtuosity can appear."[3] While almost converging with the concept of play, this aspect of her political philosophy invites substantial

critique of contemporary politics and its end-oriented dimension.[4] Regardless, in Beiner's analysis, Arendt's insistence that this kind of political action or political space has diminished in modernity turns it into a tool of critique.[5] In addition, her insistence that the idea of public action and performance is tangible puts Arendt's conceptualization in touch with Virilio's idea of creative play and his fundamental challenge to videogames, which I outlined at the beginning of the book. In a more detailed fashion, Claus Pias rejects the idea of the player as free subject in videogames. He argues that videogame contingency and emergence is merely an effect of the illusion videogames create by disguising their programming as a black box. He shows that in action games, the player is a device interconnected with the computer; playing requires an accommodation that affords time-critical input.[6]

This final analytic chapter seems like a good moment, then, for returning to this challenge. Asking whether players travel, or whether they are traveled, Virilio sharply distinguishes between active creativity and passive reaction, challenging the possibility of action in videogame space wholesale. Arendt, likewise, distinguishes the two sharply, arguing that behavior is the dominant mode of human relationship in modernity, conditioned by bureaucracy and the dominance of the standardizing, equalizing "society" and its conformism. To Arendt, the victory of the conforming social over the pluralist political is deeply troubling, because "[t]he end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective."[7] Most explicitly, she discusses the threat that the ever more dominant bureaucracy and a pseudo-science that produces computerized, calculated predictions of the future, pose to the political landscape.[8]

> In a fully developed bureaucracy there is nobody left with whom one can argue, to whom one can present grievances, on whom the pressures of power can be exerted. Bureaucracy is the form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act; for the rule of Nobody is not no-rule, and where all are equally powerless we have a tyranny without a tyrant.[9]

In a sense, then, both thinkers criticize a general trend toward rule-based behavior, which videogames only stand for symbolically. More recently, David Graeber updates these warnings with his examination of the increase in bureaucracy even in the face of—or rather in concert with—the trend towards "deregulation."[10] Whether we agree with Virilio and Arendt's ideal of the political or not, the overtly pessimistic analysis of the increasingly tyrannical

bureaucracy today suggests at least that alternatives might be worth exploring. What better place to start looking in than a totally rule-based (totally bureaucratic) medium. The question for this chapter is whether videogames can offer spaces in which alternatives to the bureaucratic status quo can be hinted at or even experienced and explored? Can they confront us with conflicts that point toward freedom and political action in a novel sense—despite their existence as "private" endeavors and precisely because they are totally rule-based media?

This question gains additional force if we consider that videogames are, in many ways, strongly entangled with one of the basic pillars of bureaucracy, namely violence. In well-known games from *Doom* to *Call of Duty* or *Battlefield*, proceeding means violently defeating the enemy. In *Lost Planet 2*, for example, the player does not "discover" the planet, but "conquers" it. These are merely some examples of a larger tendency. As Schrank puts it, "[m]ainstream games are designed for players to overcome the 'other,' alterity, and difference."[11] From a theoretical perspective, violence is a widely discussed problem. Both structural and physical violence are generally regarded as crucial for enforcing regulations and maintaining the rule-based order.[12] Both are also at work in destructive and harmful ways in society, as well as in videogames, for example with regard to gender, race and the discrimination of minorities.[13]

Theorists either reject violence completely, or consider it one of the ways for the powerless to regain power or agency. Reviewing the existing literature, Vittorio Bufacchi goes as far as to claim that "violence is, and has always been, the essence of politics."[14] With regards to its emancipatory potential, Frantz Fanon argues that disorganizing society in order to decolonize it is always a violent process. In his view, the naked violence of colonialism "only gives in when confronted with greater violence."[15] Like Fanon, many influential thinkers have regarded violence as political action because it seems to share with political action the effect of transgressing or interrupting "what otherwise would have proceeded automatically and therefore predictably."[16] For thinkers like Georges Sorel, Frantz Fanon or Jean-Paul Sartre, this turns violence into a potential factor or even a legitimate requirement for radical change.[17] Such notions of revolutionary violence have been promoted repeatedly as a promising or even the only possible answer to structural, systematic or individual violence. As Neil Roberts points out with regards to Sartre,

> [v]iolence is fundamentally an activity emerging from the category of agency. Agency here refers to one's ability to act. Beyond simply

> questions of acquiring control or potency, it involves a person's ability to make decisions. The capacity for agency, therefore, represents an important dimension of freedom and freedom's connection to anti-colonial violence. Those lacking subjectivity perform violence in order to gain agency.[18]

In contrast, Hannah Arendt rejects any kind of violence. She contrasts violence, understood as instrumentally enhanced natural strength, with properly political power, understood as the ability to act in concert.[19] In *The Human Condition*, Arendt claims that "[p]ower is what keeps the public realm, the political space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence." Violence, in her understanding, can destroy power but never become a substitute for it.[20] Bhabha summarizes some of the existing positions and points out the complexity of the discourse:

> For Arendt, Fanon's violence leads to the death of politics; for Sartre, it draws the fiery, first breath of human freedom. I propose a different reading. Fanonian violence, in my view, is part of a struggle for psycho-affective survival and a search for human agency in the midst of the agony of oppression. It does not offer a clear choice between life and death or slavery and freedom, because it confronts the colonial condition of life-in-death.[21]

One important question for this chapter, then, is, whether violence in videogames offers any emancipatory potential with regards to free or political action? Do videogames succeed in reconfiguring the concepts of rules, action and violence, or their relation? Is violence involved in the production of disruptive conflicts that allow the player to re-conceptualize action from the ground up?

In order to find some foundation for the empirical analysis, I would briefly like to discuss what kind of violence is possible in games in the first place. Violence is both a concrete, physical or psychological, and an abstract, theoretical term. With regard to the latter, Bufacchi observes that the etymologically correct meaning of violence, namely "passionate and uncontrolled force" is often combined with that of "violation" or infringement, "because acts of excessive force frequently result in the violation of norms, rights or rules."[22] On yet another plane, one might distinguish between instrumental violence and intrinsic violence.[23] Whereas instrumental violence refers to violence as a means

to an end, acts of intrinsic violence contain inherent value and operate outside the means-ends continuum.

These four dimensions of violence—concrete and abstract, as well as instrumental and intrinsic—are useful in the following analysis insofar as they allow for a better understanding of the kind of violence experienced in game spaces, and of the way in which violence might be connected to action. With regards to the concretely physical or psychological dimension, one might point out that the virtual, voluntary character of videogames prevents them from becoming violent spaces. After all, they are "just a game." Switching off the console solves all problems and violence is never immediate, never a physical threat to the player. It would be mockery to compare voluntary gameplay with the situation of the physically, psychologically or structurally oppressed, on the grounds of its strictly rule-bound character alone. Yet, even if not direct, I maintain that, to the extent to which violation of common norms, as well as physical violence is carried out by the player in a game world, it can be recognized as such. What is more, violent action is frequently a preferred or the only possible means of reaching the goal in videogames. Such violence is, primarily, instrumental.

Needless to say, violent videogames are not able to convey the experience of physical violence, war or oppression in an experientially "realistic" way to the player.[24] However, because they are recognized, violent action in games may be accompanied by an affective—or "psycho-affective"—quality. Tavinor goes as far as to claim that "[f]ictional worlds seem to allow us a greater access to some kinds of emotionally provocative situations, given that acting in a fictional world lacks the cost of acting in the real world."[25] Since the immediate consequences do not extend into the outside world, players can take pleasure in violations of intended rules, or physical violence in games—or, at least, they do not need to apply the same evaluation to such action as they would outside of the game space.[26] Instead, the significance and status of violence has to be established and embedded anew.

If this is the case, I wonder if videogames might not also offer new perspectives on political action through their treatment of violent action and violation within their confined boundaries. Do they offer spaces in which Arendt's claim, that total bureaucracy leads to complete powerlessness, can be experienced? If so, maybe these spaces also confront players with stimulating conflicts capable of reorienting our perspective on action and violence. Could the rule-based character of videogames offer new ways to challenge the rule-dominated

character of the present? The following analysis of *Metal Gear Solid* indicates that conflicts between action and rules indeed reconfigure and restructure our perspective on these issues in a novel, stimulating way.

Control

In the popular horror series *Biohazard* [*Resident Evil*], the player fights undead creatures infected with a highly contagious virus. Traversing barren lands and seemingly abandoned villages in *Biohazard 4* [*Resident Evil 4*] (2005), one is suddenly confronted with an assault from all directions. But despite the apparent inferiority of the player character, who, at least in terms of quantity, stands alone against an army, victory is possible thanks to superior abilities, firepower and healing skills. While offering the player the terrifying horror of unexpected, ruthless attacks from behind, the game nevertheless makes him or her the intruder. The game *The Earth Defense Forces* discussed in the previous chapter makes this tangible in its juxtaposition of the invaders, which elegantly traverse the terrain and structures, and the defending human player character, whose collateral damage destroys whole cities.

In such games, meaningful obstacles are created through the difference between the player character's abilities and the enemy. The player has to conquer the environment, often by destroying all enemy forces. Such a difference is also central to the *Metal Gear Solid* (hereafter *MGS*) series.[27] However, in this case it is deployed in a slightly different way that prompts critics to regard it as a critique of violence and a counterexample to conventional shooters.[28] As Derek Noon and Nick Dyer-Witheford observe, *MGS* "emphasizes unobserved movement, subterfuge, camouflage, evasion, trickery, and out-smarting enemies, not just shooting everything that moves."[29] In the first section, I would like to examine in more detail this characteristic gameplay, which the lead designer Kojima Hideo has dubbed "tactical espionage action."

MGS presents the player with a consistent world and an ongoing narrative about great conspiracies during and after the Cold War, putting him or her in control of a genetically and technologically enhanced protagonist, who has to help avert a terrorist threat to global security in a one-man, covert operation.[30] A hybrid between shooter and adventure, the series emphasizes stealth and invisibility. The player has to direct the protagonist through hostile terrain, evading enemy soldiers, traps, as well as the vicious nature he is surrounded by. As **Example 6.1** indicates, *MGS* creates the gap between player character

and enemy abilities mainly on two planes, namely sensual perception and action capabilities.

In terms of sensual perception, the player character, simply put, sees and hears more than the enemy. Part of this advantage originates from the combination of the various viewpoints the player can assume, like third person, first person and limited bird's-eye view, and his ability to use the environment as cover.[31] The other part of the superiority stems from enhancements of technological and science fictional nature, like a map on which the enemy positions can be monitored in real time (*MGS1* and *MGS2*), several types of goggles (*MGS3*) and other visual enhancements (*MGS4*), as well as active radar and a directional microphone (*MGS3*). Such enhancements also include the famous card boxes the player-character can carry and "put on" when in need of disguise in warehouses and storage rooms, as well as means of impersonation and camouflage in the form of a wide range of "suits" and "face paints" in *MGS3*. In *MGS4*, the camouflage is realized science-fictionally in a body suit called "octocamo," which blends with the environment after a few seconds of idleness. These sensual aspects are complemented with a difference in action abilities and behavior. In general, the enemies follow pre-defined routines and are astonishingly noisy, lazy and relaxed, given the circumstances. The player character is far more flexible and agile, and is able to traverse the environment silently and stealthily. In addition, a considerable part of his capabilities of forceful action are silent and can be executed from a distance and without being spotted. Moreover, the games make use of the distinct features of videogame space and the play situation. Figure 20 and Figure 21 offer an abstract schema of the differences the game generates between the player (character), and the computer-controlled enemies, on the various levels of visual sensory.

Generally, *MGS* confronts the player with a series of more or less contained areas controlled and patrolled by human and robot enemies, which have to be traversed in order to proceed. To understand the significance of stealthy movement for the gameplay, it is important to know that discovery is a painful, time-consuming and often deadly experience. **Example 6.2** shows that discovery is highly likely to result in player character death, or in time-consuming shoot-outs and extended run-and-hide, depending on the title and the situation. The player character is spotted when crossing an enemy's path or line of sight, or making suspicious noises at close range. To avoid detection, the game challenges the player to move carefully, to use the environment as cover, to perceive more than the enemies, to recognize their routines and to

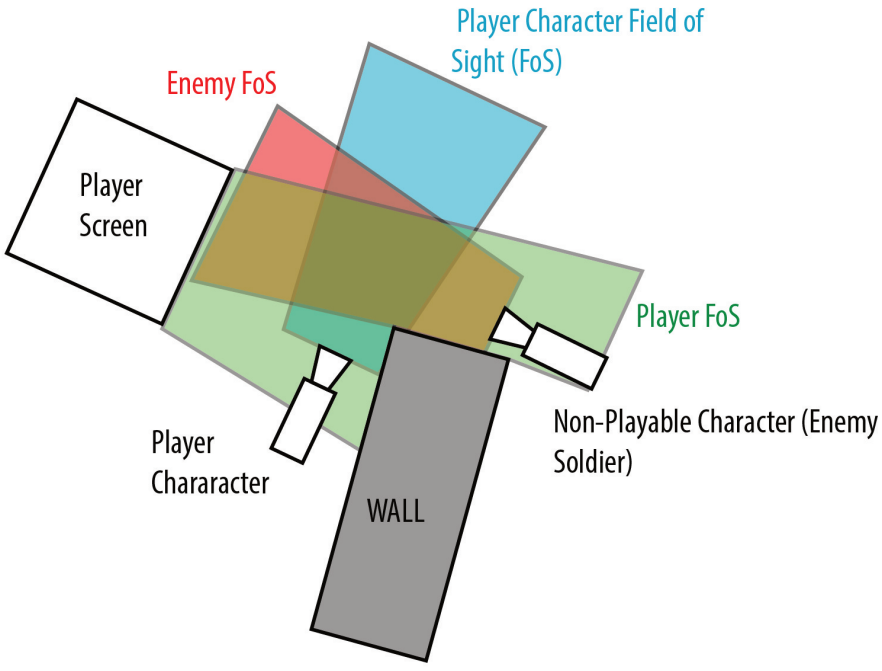

Figure 20. Player has the visual advantage due to the third-person angle on the game world. The enemy soldier is in his field of sight (FoS) although neither the player character, nor the enemy see each other.

know when to move and when to hide. [32] Although the player has superior means and often the benefit of the doubt, the gameplay is nevertheless a thrilling experience, because, in most cases, one can never be sure of all potential threats. Putting the opposing forces on rails—more limited than those of the protagonist—the game tasks the player with spotting and reading enemy routines correctly and finding tactical solutions for traversing an environment full of enemy sentinels, traps and other obstacles. In this sense, *MGS* may be said to offer an experience of bureaucratic tyranny and its totality of rules. The player cannot but learn to understand the system, "behave" according to its norms and rules, and adjust to its dynamics.

This, in turn, makes *MGS* an example of what Galloway, based on a short *Postscript on the Societies of Control* by Gilles Deleuze, calls "allegories of control."[33] Galloway believes that "what Deleuze defines as control is key to understanding how computerized information societies function." For him "video games are, at their structural core, in direct synchronization with the

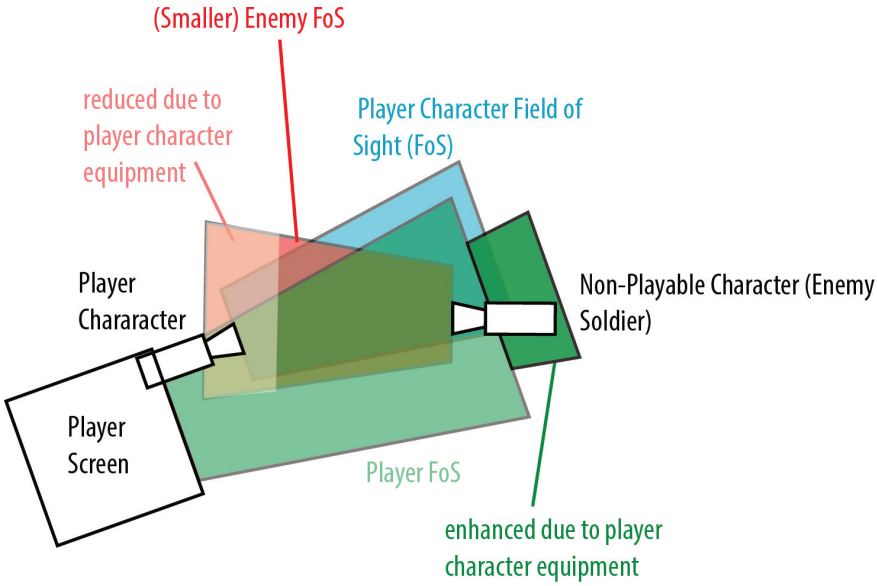

Figure 21. Player has the visual advantage due to technology the player character can equip (googles, radar, etc.), while the enemy visual field is shortened by other technology (camouflage suits, etc.).

political realities of the informatic age." Such "allegories of control" signify universal standardization because they substitute ideological critique by the logic of informatics control, identified as numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability and transcoding. While pointing to the similarity between the logics of videogames and social control, he also claims that, due to this proximity, they can make transparent the otherwise hidden "boring minutiae of discipline and confinement that constitute the various apparatuses of control in contemporary societies." For Galloway, games like *MGS*—among other exceptional works he mentions—stand out because, here, "to play the game means to play the code of the game. To win means to know the system. And thus to *interpret* a game means to interpret its algorithm (to discover its parallel 'allegorithm')." Such games epitomize "the flatness of control allegory by unifying the act of playing the game with an immediate political experience."[34]

This rather abstract statement may be best understood in the context of the gameplay analyzed here. The *MGS* games confront the player with a rigid system of rules that could be interpreted as similar to the bureaucratic control

in contemporary societies. Equipping the player character with a more flexible, stealthy set of abilities, it suggests that rule-based systems can be challenged covertly. As long as they are not confronted, the enemies do not become hostile and might best be regarded as "requisites," strictly following the algorithmic rules. With the help of careful observation, their rigid and predictable routines can be turned against them. In this case, both structural and physical violence are circumvented. Against the background of Arendt's conceptualization of action, one may say that although the player is not free, his or her limited possibilities to resist the structural violence of the opposing rules stems from the fact that, within this videogame space, the system and its sentinels obey the even more rigid rules of Arendt's tyrannical Nobody.[35]

Recently, Japanese media scholar Itō Mamoru has reviewed this idea of the control society in light of the increasing blending of control society with digital technologies. He describes contemporary society one in which "an interface is put in between human beings and their environment, and which, by way of an information feedback transferred by high-end computers, assimilates natural environment, social environment and even human spirit and body into their circuit. This circuit, in turn, is equipped with a system that can control all things."[36] Against this background, the experience of *MGS* can be described more accurately. The games do not just make the tyranny of rules explicit and part of the player's experience of the game world. They do more than that by confronting the player with a conflict generated by the difference between their rule-based world and the player's perception and expectations of such world based on everyday life experience or common sense tangible. The games are full of moments in which the player is clearly pointed toward the fact that what you see is not what it seems. The relation between visuals and detection is a good example of this. Since there is no explicit tipping point for enemy detection, conventional gameplay is characterized by an almost tactile progression through the environment based on careful observation. As **Example 6.1** shows, the distance and circumstances at which one is safe from enemy detection is not a "realistic" matter. Instead, knowing the tipping point is a question of experience and of applying a kind of "double view" similar to that at work in the *Gundam* shooting games discussed in Chapter 3. In order to win the game and to beat the system, the player has to know what he or she sees and, at the same time, know what it actually means within the rigid boundaries of the game space. However, the *MGS* games do not simply put an interface between player and the game world—as all videogames do in one way or other.

Rather, they make this interface itself a tangible part of the game world and the player experience, even putting it under his or her control to some extent.

This is done intentionally, as the recurring and often central motives of structural violence, standardization, information control, etc. in the series—in *MGS2* and *MGS4* in particular—suggest. In *MGS2*, the world is under the control of a mysterious group called the "Patriots" [*aikokushatachi*], who have long implemented systematic, computer-based control and information censorship over society. In the final showdown, the protagonist and player character Raiden confronts the genetically manipulated Solidas, who threatens society in the attempt to free himself of the grip of these ubiquitous powers and change his genetically pre-designed fate. In *MGS4*, this motive is repeated. The game portrays a future world dominated by and dependent on a global war economy, sustained by a ubiquitous computer system that controls and monitors all human soldiers and their access to weapons. Private contract armies under the surveillance of the system are waging small-scale wars in many areas of the world. Controlling a rapidly aging Solid Snake, the protagonist known from *MGS1*, the player tries to avert his genetic brother Liquid's revolutionary plans to take over the system, thus indirectly supporting the status quo.

This ambivalence of the player character's role is amplified by the conspiracy plot of the games, which keep the player in uncertainty about the meaning and status of his or her own actions in the world of *MGS* (although some kind of heroic undertone is never abandoned completely). More than once, the player is directly confronted with this uncertainty and asked to reflect on it. Arguably, the most direct address can be found in *MGS2*, as **Example 6.3** shows.[37] In the last parts of the game, the entire mission of the protagonist Raiden is revealed as an orchestrated "play" [*enshū*] aimed at generating an "extreme situation." The scenario is explained to be the last test-run for a new training method for the creation of super soldiers. This message has a double meaning, because its content describes the design recipe for all *MGS* titles, ever. To enjoy the game, one has to play the protagonist's role to the end [*yakuwari o hatasu*]—an unquestioning obedience, which is commended as a major contribution to the success of the test, and which is a necessary condition for playing the game in the first place.

In this way, the game confronts the players with their own "behavior" in a total, rule-based structure and confronts them with the fact that there is no alternative to playing, that there are no other options to proceed than the ones determined

in advance by the designers, even in the face of obvious betrayal. Yet, when reflecting his lack of own will in the epilogue, Raiden, whom the designers establish as a representation of his target audience of masculine videogame players,[38] decides to take things in his own hands and find a better way to live than by merely obeying rules, encouraged by none other than Snake, the veteran soldier of *MGS1*, who has experienced such powerlessness reduction to an obedient tool himself.

Overall, *MGS* offers an experience of totally rule-based environments that differ from our everyday life experience and makes their mechanisms not only visible, but subject to player experience and, in a more limited way, control. While suggesting ways of resisting and overcoming these rule-dominated situations, the games frequently confront the player with the fact that they cannot escape the structure. The player character is, ultimately, part of the overarching videogame space and bound to its rules. In both cases, the game achieves its effect by generating conflicts in the player's experience of the game space. One conflict emerges between the rule-based game world and the player's expectations of its behavior based on everyday knowledge. This conflict can seemingly be overcome easily, as it merely requires adjusting to the game routines and "learning" how to resist or side-line them. Gradually mastering the game space and its controls, the player is alerted to his or her own role in this space and to the fact that there is no escape from that role.

In this, the series offers an intriguing combination of time and space in the context of my earlier emphasis on acceleration and speed. Virilio claims that the negation of space due to the development of means for instantaneous action at a distance leads to the possibility of a "*direct encounter of every surface on the globe*."[39] *MGS* instead offers a spatial visualization of the blind spots every complex system has due to its rigid rules, and proposes using the advantage of agility and technology to identify and exploit them, often in a time-consuming fashion. Although these strategies remain behavioral, to speak with Arendt, because they rely on the rules of engagement, the designers offer a disruptive experience in those moments where they exploit this limitation in a critique of obedience in contemporary society. By highlighting this fact and consciously confronting the player with his or her limitation in the game and in society, the designers turn the rigidity and conformism of the videogame space into a reflexive moment geared towards disrupting the player.

Affect

In most violent videogames, violence is, primarily, a means to win the game. The player is often confronted with an existential enemy in Carl Schmitt's sense,[40] i.e. one who negates the player's existence and has to be eradicated because he prevents progression in the game. However, games do more than that. As Koster pointedly argues, "[m]ost games encourage demonizing the opponent, teaching a sort of ruthlessness that is a proven survival trait."[41] Among many others, this is the case in *Front Mission* or the previously mentioned *Earth Defense Forces*, where the player has to occupy the arena or stage totally in order to proceed. In the *Front Mission* series, enemy pilots have to be killed, even if they abandon their wanzers and do not pose a real threat any more. In conventional first-person shooters, enemies can be ignored temporarily, but remain active attackers, at all times in pursuit of the player. As argued above, *MGS* can be regarded as a partial critique of seemingly unavoidable violence, promoting non-violent solutions during large parts of the games. However, on another level, the range of means in *MGS* is also deployed to highlight non-instrumental, affective aspects of violence, thus catering to a growing importance of affect in society and research.[42]

While promoting non-violent evasion, the thrill of the covert operations is amplified by the availability of a broad range of ways to deal with a situation. Both with regards to long-term strategy and situation-based tactics, the player can choose between evading the enemy, applying non-lethal force or disposing of the enemy by lethal means. Depending on the game, the balance between these methods shifts. During large parts of *MGS1*, lethal force is more or less the only possibility for solving situations where stealth is not an option, as in the end boss fights. This changes from *MGS2* onwards, where even in an enemy encounter, non-lethal force like knocking enemies out or anesthetizing them is available to the player. As **Example 6.2** shows, such action may cause suspicion upon discovery of the unconscious bodies, but remains without severe consequences. In contrast, lethal force, if spotted, results in reinforcements and alert status, making it difficult to move for a painfully long period of time. Moreover, as Irie points out, dead bodies remain in the field without disappearing, thus forcing the player to go to the trouble of hiding them from enemy sight.[43] During crucial parts of *MGS2*, in which the enemies are on guard and report to base frequently, lethal force (or direct discovery) leads to immediate suspicion and, if not covered up successfully, to an almost invincible reinforcement of enemies, making it even more difficult for the player to

navigate through the environment. The game also rewards a non-lethal play-through with the ironic code name "pigeon."[44]

MGS3 and *MGS4* most actively promote non-lethal gameplay as a difficult achievement, rewarding successful non-lethal play-through within the limits of several other restrictions not only with a special rank, but also with additional items at the end of each game.[45] At the same time, both games make escaping the enemy in alert phases easier, due to the vastness of the environment and the relative sufficiency of ammunition and weapons. Given the time-consuming and frustrating experience of discovery, it is fair to say that the preference is still for stealthy, non-lethal solutions.[46] However, the overall readjustments to the balance between all three possibilities puts a stronger emphasis on forceful and lethal action, offering a novel and a real choice between almost equal alternatives, with advantages changing according to each particular situation.

This tendency toward an equality of means seems to reinstate violence as a central element in the gameplay. As such, it might be said to converge with conventional shooters. The forum post quoted in footnote 46 points this out, remarking that "[p]eople complained that MGS4 could be just blasted through." However, by offering an increasingly real choice in terms of means, *MGS* also adds meaning to violent action beyond its reduction to an instrumental level. By making violence avoidable, the series foregrounds its psychological, intrinsic aspects and the destructive physical effects violence has. In other words, the choice of means potentially creates an awareness of the content of these means. It confronts the player with the fact that any action taken is, at least in part, not only behavioral but—within the limits of the videogame space—also either deliberate and intrinsic, or a result of a lack of control (skills) and power on the part of the player.

In overwhelming, confusing situations, outwith the player's control, reverting to lethal violence and its lasting, predictable effects is a tempting option. However, the existence of other ways foregrounds the violent acts committed as the player's choice. Pat Miller supports this impression in her analysis of *MGS*. Observing the gradual shift in balance and the opening of the game toward more "meaningful" or "real choices" from *MGS1* to *MGS3*, she claims that Kojima is able to communicate his critique of violence particularly well because

> MGS3 managed to use the elements of player choice to set the medium of a videogame apart from, say, books and movies. In a sense, Kojima gave you a portion of the game entirely, and

> somewhat perversely, player-created—that is, a product of nothing more than the player's earlier choices—and derived a meaningful message from it. […] Books and movies, as passive media, relate a message to the reader by presenting a story where the reader sees the consequences of the protagonist's decisions and interprets from there. Videogames, as *MGS3* would have us understand, can be aimed directly at **the player.**[47]

Such reflexivity is further amplified by the fact that often, violent solutions to overwhelming situations lead to discovery and, as a result, extended periods of inactivity on the part of the player—here, the designers almost appear to mock the player for resorting to violence.[48] In other cases, most notably the boss fights, non-lethal solutions are far more difficult to achieve than lethal disposal.

In *MGS4*, this tension reaches a maximal level. In the boss fights against the four members of the "Beauty and Beast unit," the player confronts psychologically distorted, technologically enhanced, existential enemies. Victory over a technologically enhanced "Beast" is followed by an encounter with the respective "Beauty," who, although defeated, still attacks Snake bare-handed. Although these scenes are also examples of the designer's erotic fantasies present in all titles—in this case, holding up the camera at specific moments makes the Beauty pose for the player—the Beauty's embrace remains deadly, putting the player into the position of running away from a weakened enemy who deserves pity more than hostility. Here, the use of force is instrumentally logical, but simultaneously deeply disturbing.[49]

But while violence as a last resort for want of other options can still be explained instrumentally, there is also a dimension of videogame violence as entertainment in the games. At times, one just pulls the trigger instead of crawling past. Especially the later titles do not restrict violent action through game mechanics and always carry an admiration for weapons and war with them—the broad arsenal of deadly firearms available and the general setup of the protagonist as a one-man army attest to this. Moreover, in videogames, violence does not cause the same effects as it would outside of the game world. In other words, such violence has a different quality than structural or physical violence in the everyday and, even if executed for the sake of carnage and destruction, remains playful and—for some players—entertaining, as controversial as this observation might be. This does, however, not erase its cognitive and psychological significance for and interpretation by the player. It is this dual structure that the designers, once again, deploy in their ambivalent

engagement with playful violence, both on the level of player choice and in various commentaries on violence.

The four Beauty and Beast bosses of *MGS4* are victims of psychological damage inflicted in war and violent conflicts. In **Example 6.4**[50] I have compiled several instances in which the game comments on the player's violence. During the fight with The Sorrow in *MGS3*, the player has to lead the protagonist through a river, in which the dead bodies he or she has produced so far in the game float past, screaming in agony. Here and elsewhere, commentary on violence and violent action not only target the instrumental, necessary aspect, but also a more affective, intrinsic, playful dimension. Thereby, it emphasizes the stark contrast between the terrifying physical and psychological effects of the violence depicted and described in the game, and the player's playful acts of violence. In *MGS2*, protagonist Raiden asks Snake if he ever enjoyed the killing. Snake's forceful denial only amplifies the disruption on the part of the player, who is aware of the dual nature of his or her own action, simultaneously playful and violent. While offering a broad arsenal of deadly weapons and combat actions, the designers infuse the games with comments on violence that are intended to disrupt the player. The protagonist of *MGS2*, Raiden, is mocked by Snake for his virtual experience of war and criticized for his seeming fascination for violence and killing. Later, the player finds out that Raiden was a child soldier and a merciless killing machine in the past. Often, this commentary addresses the player directly, as at the end of *MGS1*, where Liquid accuses him of having enjoyed the killing throughout the game. For the player, it is hard to deny this, since violence in *MGS* is, on the whole, frivolous entertainment.

Violence is part of many videogames and players are usually aware of the implications of their in-game actions, even if they are not effective beyond the game space. However, most games do not discuss violence actively or locate this discussion entirely on the instrumental level, as I have shown in the case of *Front Mission 3*, where violence is justified by the situation and the need to proceed in the game world. In *MGS*, the designer's creativity in addressing the player in this ambivalent way offers a different perspective. The games repeatedly confront their players with a conflict between their own, earlier, entertainment-focused in-game actions and their sympathies with the protagonists on the one hand, and the horrors of violence and its results on the other. When combined with the variety of means available in *MGS*, the critical comments on violence in these games gain a disruptive force, confronting the player with the ambivalence of his and her actions.

Importantly, this conflict is effective because it juxtaposes the majority of unquestioningly violent games with the possibility of non-violent progress in *MGS*. It draws its force from the fact that the games offer the player instrumental and intrinsic incentives to deploy violent means and target the actual player's choices in each specific game world with their critique. Of course, this risks the critical commentary being ignored. However, it might be the only way to turn playful violence into an element of a disruptive conflict. Where Arendt largely ignores this intrinsic dimension of violence in her focus on its "instrumental" aspect,[51] *MGS* makes it a central focus of critique. Importantly, this critique depends on the possibility of playful violence and can, in this sense, only be explored in this way because the virtual and voluntary videogame space offers the active experience of violence without producing the implied consequences outside of the game. Whereas in the preceding section I showed how *MGS* makes mechanisms of control transparent and available to the player's experience, now it is player attitudes and engagements with the game space that are revealed. Yet, in both cases, the conflicts mostly trigger critical reflection of the status quo. In the following section, I examine the ways that *MGS* goes beyond reflection, potentially pointing the player toward radical re-conceptions of life in common.

Freedom

In several moments during the *MGS* games, the difference between enemy and player or player character abilities is turned upside down both sensually and with respect to action. Amongst the many examples of this are many of the boss fights, starting with the infamous Psycho Mantis from *MGS1*. For example, the fights in *MGS3* are characterized by an apparent reversal of ability—while the player can rely on the invisibility, the long-range sensorium of the player character, and his sophisticated close combat techniques, opponents like The Fear, The End or The Boss are hard to beat precisely because they appear superior in these categories. Sensually, the player is deprived of his or her usual advantage over the enemy, confronted with (seemingly) invisible enemies who surpass his or her senses. The tension between seeing and being seen is most effectively reversed in the last fight against The Boss, where the usual "crawling" causes complete blindness, as the fight commences in a field of flowers.

In other instances of this reversal, endless repetition prompts the player to question the possibility to proceed in the game. For example, in *MGS1*, the protagonist is captured and repeatedly tortured by Ocelot, not certain how and

when to escape this threat, which is repeated until the player cannot keep up with the increasing speed of button-mashing required to survive the torture any more. In *MGS2*, boss fights with opponents like the RAYs, or a painfully long period of time during which the (naked) player is seemingly trapped in a room with all doors locked, cause anxiety and extreme insecurity, because these situations lack the kind of (conceivable) end we are used to in videogames. This does not mean that the videogame state of exception in *MGS* is divorced from the regular rules entirely. Admittedly, most of the above-mentioned situations maintain a link with the knowledge and skills obtained in regular gameplay. In addition, the radio offers more or less helpful hints on how to solve the situation. However, while requiring considerable skills, even the skill-based relation to the regular experience is reversed. For example, the chances of success in the encounters with Solidas (*MGS2*) or The Boss (*MGS3*) are much higher if the player ignores the reflex of keeping his or her distance from the opponent, and counters attacks rather than carrying them out.[52] Yet, in my experience, in some instances, the games do manage to enter an uncontrollable sphere beyond common sense, as **Example 6.5** shows. The fight against The Sorrow can only be won by accessing the items menu after the protagonist's death and reviving him with the "revival pill." Against Psycho-Mantis in *MGS1*, who directly reacts to controller input, only switching controller ports has an effect, and the victory over his reincarnation in *MGS4* likewise depends on methods that are far from self-explicatory. In both cases, the solution is counter-intuitive with regards to player expectations, both based on other games and on earlier experience from *MGS*.

As the example shows, the fight against Psycho-Mantis also contains some of the most significant demonstrations of sensual deprivation in the series. Mantis is not only invisible and steals the players eyes (activating first-person mode allows the player to experience the perspective of Psycho Mantis, which becomes the only way to spot the enemy in the second half of the fight), but also has the ability to generate what at first glance looks like the black "video" screen familiar to videogame players in the 1990s.[53] *MGS2* offers several additional instances of visual chaos, in which the designers demonstrate their dominance over the game world and its rules. During an action-intense sequence toward the end of the game, the screen is suddenly scaled-down in a fashion familiar from moments of "game over," accompanied by the respective sound. For an instant, this event may successfully trick the player into believing that the protagonist has died from enemy fire. However, a closer look reveals that the usual "Mission Failed" statement reads "Fission Mailed," and that Raiden is still

alive, now only visible in miniature but, nonetheless, controlled by the player. This and other instances during the series are usually referred to as self-reflexive parodies or instances of Brechtian "estrangement" breaking through the fourth wall.[54] However, one can also regard these moments as demonstrations of the designer's superiority over the videogame space of *MGS*, which reminds the player of the fact that the rules are man-made and can change at any time.

What these examples have in common is that, at least when experienced for the first time, they confront the player with extreme situations in which common sense, knowledge and prior experience fail. Both the overpowering enemies in the boss fights, during which the hunter becomes the prey, and the moments in which the rules seemingly change, replace the usual feeling of mastery with anxiety, psychological thrill and pressure. Based on the work of Agamben, I propose to understand these situations as "states of exception" invoked by the designers. For Agamben, modernity is marked by two interconnected currents. In *Homo Sacer* he identifies the excluding inclusion of naked life—meaning the power of the sovereign to exclude a member from society, which at the same time implies that this member is made available to the lethal force of society—as the original political relation and basis of the sovereign's power in modernity. He claims that human life today is not simply part of Foucauldian biopolitics or subject to machine-based calculation, but converges with the political. In addition to this trend, the state of exception becomes an increasingly common political practice in modernity, which blurs the boundaries between exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *zōé* [bare life] and *bios* [qualified life].[55] Thus, from one side, more and more aspects of private human life are subjected to political regulations and decisions, and, from the other side, the state of exception has increasingly become common political practice.[56] This state of exception is "a space devoid of law, a zone of anomie in which all legal determinations—and above all the very distinction between public and private—are deactivated."[57] Usually, the state of exception is invoked in extreme situations, which are judged irresolvable by applying "conventional" law.

Crucially, the state of exception is marked by ambiguity and an undecidability in which *factum* (life) and *ius* (norm) fade into each other. This blurring has decisive effects on the character of action within its boundaries. The state of exception "defines a 'state of the law' in which, on the one hand, the norm is in force [*vige*] but is not applied (it has no 'force' [*forza*]) and, on the other hand, acts that do not have the value [*valore*] of law acquire its 'force'."[58] Simply put, in the state of exception, that which is usually applied (the norm) is not

applied (while not being rejected as wrong either), while that which would not be accepted, judged by the norm, is applied. This problem of the status and evaluation of action in the state of exception is explained in more detail in the context of the *iustitium*, which, for Agamben, is the archetype of the state of exception.

> The crucial problem connected to the suspension of the law is that of the acts committed during the *iustitium*, the nature of which seems to escape all legal definition. Because neither transgressive, executive, nor legislative, they seem to be situated in an absolute non-place with respect to the law. […] The idea of a force-of-~~law~~ is a response to this undefinability and this non-place. […] Force of law that is separate from the law, floating *imperium*, being in force [*vigenza*] without application, and, more generally, the idea of a sort of "degree zero" of the law—all these are fictions through which law attempts to encompass its own absence and to appropriate the state of exception, or at least to assure itself a relation with it.[59]

Agamben's discourse is far more complex than I can outline here—for example, Agamben carefully examines the ways in which the state of exception maintains a connection to the norm. Yet, at this point, his conceptualization is helpful insofar as it describes a radical situation similar to the experience of some moments in *MGS* when any rules that pre-structure action in the regular, normal situation are abolished, and when the norm cannot be applied. They all depart from common rules and earlier experience in some sense and create moments when neither acquired skills, nor logical deduction guarantee success. The player has to find ways out of these exceptional situations, which sometimes proves very difficult and physically intense. For example, depending on the player's skills, the sharp-shooting showdown against The End in *MGS3* might bind the highly alert player to the screen for more than one hour. My own attempts often oscillated between extreme frustration and liberated arbitrariness, frequently ending in laughter: where nothing is certain, anything—even the most illogical acts—may have equal chances of success.

Thus, these situations show the arbitrariness of the videogame space and reveal the sovereign's absolute control over it. During the brief period of novelty, when these situations are contrasted with the memory and experience of "normal" gameplay, they furthermore convey the impression that anything is possible within videogame space. At the same time, such moments are also

moments when action loses its directionality and becomes a force in the absence of any evaluative criteria or laws. Precisely because the solution can be anything, any action can either be a means to win, or simply an expression of the player's helplessness or desires. What is more, it is unclear whether the action maintains its previously known meaning. Violent acts might turn out to be not violent at all. Such states of exception in *MGS* function as a kind of non-place (Agamben) or a utopic enclave (Jameson) within the videogame space, in which the player has to—and, for the first time, is free to—observe, think and experiment with the environment repeatedly and beyond conventional, instrumental knowledge of the game (system). For a brief instance, the videogame space of *MGS* becomes a violent technology, which the player can enact in whatever way he or she wants—provided, of course, he or she does not give up and seek help in walkthroughs and guidebooks. Frequently, these situations tricked me into attempting all kinds of absurd actions, which one would normally know to be out of the question. At the cost of countless "continues," I felt invited to abandon any sense of systematic rules and do the seemingly impossible, illogical and irresponsible.

Just as Agamben highlights the connection the state of exception maintains with the norm, it is important to understand that these exceptional situations gain their status precisely because of the contrast—or conflict—with regular gameplay. However, it is precisely this contrast that allows the designers to generate a space in which the player is uncertain for the first time. A space in which repetition and death seem to become the only valid currency, and experimental, playful action, including what was, until then called violence but now not attributed any prior judgment, the only means likely to yield any effect. For a brief moment, the player may experience a kind of freedom of choice usually not available in videogames—an experience of freedom that, created by the lack of solutions, may immediately shift toward frustration or boredom in the face of player aspirations to proceed in the game, but an experience nonetheless. While drawing on Arendt, Agamben seems to have a very different perspective on modernity and the present. I wonder what this experiential conflict between total bureaucracy (or rule-based, instrumental play) and the state of exception (arbitrariness of rules, deadly playfulness) means in terms of the relation between the two thinkers and their thoughts. I leave this question to those better-equipped to answer it. At least it seems fair to say that, against the odds of the medium videogame, the conflict outlined above does point the player toward questioning action fundamentally while providing a sense of freedom and thus direction for potential imagination of alternatives.

Unchartered Territory

In videogames, the designers are without doubt in control of the rules and thus of videogame space as such. Yet, the three sites of conflict analyzed above offer different examples of how videogames can engage with the question of political action. In sum, they provide surprisingly intense and fundamentally critical experiences of the status quo and its affordances of action, and, in my view, even direct our imagination toward potential alternatives geared to improving these affordances. In other words, videogames can be intentionally open spaces, framed but ultimately not fixed by the designers. While *MGS* provides fixation and total rule-based closure during large parts of the gameplay, it is precisely those aspects that are deliberately left open to player choice. This turns the games into an interaction with the designers and, at the same time, offers their spaces to an, admittedly narrow, version of playful virtuosity. Kojima recently stated that he has a clear message that he wants suffuse his games with, but that it is not his intention to "teach" this message to the players.[60] This subtle approach makes games like *MGS* open to stimulating conflicts, in which the designers leave the choice and responsibility for choosing how to move to the player.

Finally, the *MGS* games seem to succeed in deploying the medium's distinct expressive potentials in order to create unique game spaces and experiences. Arendt writes that

> [t]he most radical change in the human condition we can imagine would be an emigration of men from the earth to some other planet. Such an event, no longer totally impossible, would imply that man would have to live under man-made conditions, radically different from those the earth offers him.[61]

But maybe we do not have to travel that far. Is it not the status quo that approaches such man-made conditions in its increasingly pervasive bureaucracy and societal control? If so, MGS deploys the medium's potential to offer equally radical, man-made spaces and to confront the player with conflicts that hint at and fundamentally question this status quo. Against the odds, they seem to offer spaces in which the status quo collapses momentarily to give way for something "new."

From Arendt's (and Virilio's) perspective, such experiences may not amount to political action. After all, playing games does not—if we ignore the recent trend toward public display of playing and augmented reality games—make a public appearance. Moreover, the action itself remains confined and, ultimately

reduced to the freedom granted by the designers. The first problem is less pressing in my context, since it is not spaces for political action that I am looking for, but rather conflicts that may stimulate our imagination of such spaces and alternative societies in which they exist. With regards to the second, I am tempted to refer to Arendt for a solution. She ascribes to political action characteristics similar to those frequently discussed in the context of play, namely novelty, boundlessness and inherent unpredictability.[62] While emphasizing virtuosity as a key requirement for performing political actions, she differentiates art from political action, claiming that the former is always reified, dead thought turned into tangible, and a finite product rather than ongoing and open-ended.[63] In other words, a crucial difference for Arendt seems to be the openness of the process, in terms of the ways of engaging with it and to its continuity over time.

I do not know whether it is likely that these experiences lead to radical change. However, my own experience comes close to how Felix Stalder describes the disruptive effect of outstanding cultural movements like Dada or Punk Rock. As Stalder claims, with reference to the work of Greil Marcus, "these movements achieved, at least briefly, what is usually unattainable: they suspended all rules. Suddenly everything was up for grabs; nobody held any authority over the future anymore. […] Everything was to be reinvented, here and now. The emptiness and absurdity of the spectacle was revealed. Reality imploded and the void was teeming with the promise of the new."[64] In my experience, the exceptional situations in *MGS* can have such a disruptive effect on the player, challenging him or her to reinvent the world—at least for a brief moment—anew under the signpost of a vague promise of freedom. If freedom is understood as "the ability to program or reprogram oneself or create oneself anew from scratch,"[65] then such freedom appears within the grasp of our imagination in the experience of exceptional situations in *MGS*. As, once again, Arendt claims:

> new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle. The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable.[66]

Perhaps it is this feeling of the possibility of action that the games manage to convey for an instant in their most extreme moments. Whereas in the

case of aesthetic conflicts, some of the tensions were created by the role of the unimagined computer performance in videogame space, this time it stems from the fact that the player experiences a space of absolute closure, which is deliberately detached in its rules and behaviors from the regular game world tyranny.

How these spaces—that of bureaucratic tyranny and that of the sovereign in the state of exception—are related, is a question I feel incompetent to answer. Keeping in mind that Agamben frequently speaks of two currents (see above), it seems possible to regard the bureaucratization of (public and private) life in our society of control as a genuine problem for subsequent work. The experience of the frustrating effects that contemporary bureaucratic and administrative tyranny have may be more frequent and more directly perceivable in the everyday, than the hidden arbitrary and despotic rule of the sovereign over human life. If anything, the *MGS* games succeed in revealing the immediacy with which the sovereign (designer) can reach the player character and the player. Even if the player feels in control during large parts of the games, the rules of the game may change arbitrarily. As before, this conflict between control and being controlled is created at the risk of frustrating the player. However, the experience of the various exceptional situations discussed above and the reflexivity built into them indicate that we can expect games like *MGS* to offer far more than a guided tour. The player may be traveled, but in such a way as to show him or her what lies beyond the established path.

Notes

1. Geuss, *Politics and the Imagination*, ix.

2. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175–76, 190–92. For a more detailed discussion and critique, see Beiner, *Political Philosophy. What It Is and Why It Matters.*, 1–24.

3. Arendt, "What Is Freedom," 145, 153.

4. Beiner, *Political Philosophy. What It Is and Why It Matters.*, 1–24.

5. Ibid., 6–8.

6. Pias, "Computer Spiel Welten," 123.

7. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 58.

8. Arendt, *On Violence*, 6–7, 29–30.

9. Ibid., 81.

10. Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules*.

11. Schrank, *Avant-Garde Videogames*, 79.

12. Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules*, 32–33, 57ff.

13. With regards to videogames, see for example Embrick, Wright, and Lukács, *Social Exclusion, Power and Video Game Play*.

14. Bufacchi, "Two Concepts of Violence," 193. Most prominently, Thomas Hobbes derives the necessity of a social contract from its dominance in the state of nature. Carl Schmitt's famous definition of the political as a distinction between friend and enemy is based on a commitment to eradicate the enemy by means of physical violence (Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 7).

15. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 2–3, 23.

16. Arendt, *On Violence*, 31.

17. Sorel, "From Reflections on Violence"; Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*; Sartre, "Preface." See also John L. Stanley's (1976) introduction to *From Georges Sorel*.

18. Roberts, "Fanon, Sartre, Violence, and Freedom," 143–44.

19. Arendt, *On Violence*, 44–46. Bhabha (2004, xxi) points out that Arendt's (1970) rejection of violence was a direct response to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and Sartre's pro-violent preface to it.

20. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 200–202.

21. Bhabha, "Foreword: Framing Fanon," xxxvi.

22. Bufacchi, "Two Concepts of Violence," 194.

23. Roberts, "Fanon, Sartre, Violence, and Freedom," 144–47.

24. Campbell makes this point convincingly by examining the difference between the messiness and chaos of the battlefield and the degree of abstraction and clarity necessary in games in order to be playable (Campbell, "Just Less than Total War Simulating World War II as Ludic Nostalgia.").

25. Tavinor, *The Art of Videogames*, 131–46.

26. In the context of videogames, violence is frequently discussed with regards to negative psychological effects on players in general and children in particular. Given the complexity of media effects discussions and the strong bias in much of the research done in this field, this discussion requires more expertise than I have and more space than I can grant it here.

27. *MGS* is a globally successful series of videogames developed under the direction of Kojima Hideo and released by Konami from 1998 onwards. Although the series is based on two earlier games called *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*, this chapter focuses on some of the more recent installments of the *MGS* series, namely *Metal Gear Solid*. (hereafter *MGS1*), *Metal Gear Solid 2.Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (hereafter *MGS2*) and *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*. (hereafter *MGS3*), both played mostly in the *Metal Gear Solid HD Edition*, as well as *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*. (hereafter *MGS4*). I refer to the HD edition of *MGS2* and *MGS3*, although I have also played the regular version of *MGS3*—the differences between the two versions are ignored below, in favor of clarity.

28. Miller, "Metal Gear Pacifist."

29. Noon and Dyer-Witheford, "Sneaking Mission: Late Imperial America and Metal Gear Solid," 78.

30. Naked Snake in *MGS3*, his son Solid Snake in *MGS1*, *MGS2*, and *MGS4*. *MGS2*

introduces another operative called Raiden, whom the player controls through large parts of the game.

31. Whereas the visual field in third-person view is fixed in *MGS1* and *MGS2*, the player has control over it in *MGS3*, and *MGS4*. The higher degree of freedom achieved here, is carefully balanced by the designer as to not make the games too easy. Whereas the enemy forces could be displayed on the map in *MGS1* and *MGS2*, this feature is not available in MGS3, where it is replaced by a number of temporarily available sensors, and reappears only in form of a vague threat detector in *MGS4*. The tension created in *MGS2* while the player cannot access the map and thus does not see what is behind the next corner, gives way to a widening of the playing field and the introduction of more obstacles to the visual field. Whereas the earlier games hide the enemies from the screen, the latter hide them from the player's eyes.

32. Although sensitivity is not limited to visuals, but, increasingly in the later titles, includes audio information, the latter seems to follow parallel patterns and thus is not a focus of this analysis. This omission should not detract from the fact that the audio elements of the game are crucial and contribute to its experience beyond mere additions. At several moments during the games the importance the designer has attached to sound becomes apparent, for example when a naked Raiden sneezes due to the cold in a warehouse and thus gives away his position in *MGS2*, through the rumbling stomach that betrays Naked Snake in *MGS3* once his food supplies run low or the awkward but silent crawling style in *MGS4*.

33. In the short essay on which Galloway's inquiry is based, Deleuze carves out the difference between spatially bound, disciplinary societies and free-floating, flexible societies of control. He claims that "[i]n the disciplinary societies one was always starting again (from school to the barracks, from the barracks to the factory), while in the societies of control one is never finished with anything—the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation." "Control is short-term and of rapid rates of turnover, but also continuous and without limit, while discipline was of long duration, infinite and discontinuous" (Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 5–6) As far as I understand Deleuze, in societies of control, one is free to move through space but under constant, computer-enhanced control, which registers, limits and remembers every move.

34. Galloway, "Allegories of Control," 88–91, 99–103.

35. From a similar perspective, Burden and Gouglas argue that the game *Portal* can be regarded as "an algorithmic exploration of human struggle against algorithmic processes" that increasingly shape our everyday. They claim that "the procedural nature of games provides a unique opportunity to explore the increasingly procedural nature of such increasingly prevalent technology" (Burden and Gouglas, "The Algorithmic Experience: Portal as Art").

36. Itō [伊藤], "Dejitaru Media Jidai ni Okeru Genronkūkan," my translation.

37. English subtitles for *MGS2* taken from El Greco's (2005) *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty Game Script*.

38. Noon and Dyer-Witheford, "Sneaking Mission: Late Imperial America and Metal Gear Solid," 87.

39. Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, 149–52, italics in the original.

40. Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, 8.

41. Koster, *A Theory of Fun for Game Design*, 68.

42. In recent decades, research related to the affective dimension of human life has been growing significantly. Ito offers an overview of the early establishment of the field and its trajectories, showing that this research is, in part, a reaction to the scientific emphasis on the

intellect and conscious action (Itō [伊藤], "Dejitaru Media Jidai ni Okeru Genronkūkan"). Particularly well-known works include the analysis of Brian Massumi, who examined how emotional reactions to a potential (future) threat influence individual decisions (Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect"; Idem, *Politics of Affect*).

43. Ogiue [荻上] and Irie [入江], "Sen'yū Taidan," 16.

44. Hamamura [浜村], *Metal Gear Solid HD Edition Operation Guide*, 249.

45. Online discussions about non-lethal play in *Metal Gear Solid 2* suggest that such strategy is at least theoretically possible, although not rewarded (Malumbrus, NeoSarinatan and Mr_Big_Boss, "Discussion about Non-Lethal Playthrough in Metal Gear Solid 2"). In contrast to the rather limited discussions of non-lethal gameplay in *MGS1* and *MGS2*, there are numerous forum threads and guides to non-lethal gameplay for *MGS3* and *MGS4* (see for example goldeneye86, "Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater: No Alert/No Kill Guide"; Hellicar, "Metal Gear Solid 4: Sons of the Patriots – Big Boss Rank Guide").

46. This general tendency is also pointed out in the following post on the IGN forum from May 29, 2012 (errors in the original): "I always play MGS games on a hardest available difficulty. I came into to series with MGS3, which I first played at first on easy and I must say I hated the game (I'd punch my younger-self if it would be possible. I didn't understand anything about stealth and just blasted my way through the game (of course I skipped all cutscenes [sic] and codex sequences). Only problem was that MGS3 wasn't designed to be a shooter, so I just found it clunky. I put the game on a hold for a while, but somehow got around to it once and decided to give it another chance. I selected Hard for a difficulty and the curve raised so high, that it literally forced me to learn the sneaking mechanics and complex controls. I also desided to pay attention to the story, since by then I had grown and was ready for more complex story. It took a while to get into the controls, but after that I found a whole different game. I just loved it so much, MGS3 stands there as my favourite game even today. But now back to the original message, I choose to play on hardest because it is what really forces you to play these games the way they were meant to be played. People complained that MGS4 could be just blasted through. Yeah, on normal maybe, try that shit on extreme." (riesenkartoffel, "Comment in the Discussion of 'METAL GEAR SOLID 3. NO KILLS. NO ALERTS. NO DEATHS RUN COMPLEEEETEEEEED" on the *Metal Gear Solid 3* Board of IGN, Posted on May 29, 2012.)As this post points out, there is a huge difference between normal and hard difficulties in all *MGS* games—the latter emphasize tactical skills and stealth maneuvers to a far greater extent. While I am aware of the possible difference in experience this entails, this dimension has to be granted more attention than I can give it in this experimental project. Thus, the analysis refers to my gameplay on normal difficulty.

47. Miller, "Metal Gear Pacifist."

48. Making violence inefficient and "waiting" a central motive of a videogame in our accelerated times may, in itself, be interpreted as a strong political statement.

49. Despite their functional dimension, moral choices in games frequently invite commentary by scholars, critics and gamers. Tavinor, for example, discusses the experience of moral choices in *Bioshock* from 2007, in which the player may or may not kill defenseless characters called Little Sisters (Tavinor, *The Art of Videogames*, 130). In 2009, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* has generated worldwide discussions amongst gamers and in mass media, because one of the stages enables the player to kill innocent civilians as a covert operative in an airport taken control of by a terrorist group.

50. English subtitles for *MGS1* and *MGS3* are taken from El Greco, "Metal Gear Solid Game Script"; and MHamlin, "Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater Game Script."

51. Roberts, "Fanon, Sartre, Violence, and Freedom," 145.

52. These situations highlight the active quality of the seemingly passive gameplay (stealth, avoiding contact, camouflage): prompting the right attack from the opponent by positioning the protagonist in the right distance turns the spatial position itself into a kind of weapon against the system. They also reveal the tactile character of the game, which requires the player to link the sensual information with movement and "feel" his or her way through the system and its sentinels.

53. This screen appeared when a gaming console or other peripheral was switched off or had lost the signal from the console, which was usually attached to the video-in port of the television screen. In *MGS1*, the message reads "Hideo" instead of "video." While this appears significantly different in English, the difference in Japanese is harder to spot given it consists only of the omission of two small dots (*dakuten*) over the first character, rendering ビデオ (bideo, the Japanese Anglicism for "video") ヒデオ (Hideo).

54. Noon and Dyer-Witheford, "Sneaking Mission: Late Imperial America and Metal Gear Solid," 87; Ogiue [荻上] and Irie [入江], "Sen'yū Taidan," 17.

55. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 19.

56. For Agamben, the twentieth century offers numerous examples that show how the individual liberties won in democratic societies, which signify the preference of the private over the public, become the locus of sovereign decision in totalitarian states, but also in the state of exception, most openly found in the modern camps of Auschwitz and Guantanamo (Agamben, 129). Despite his influence, these and other claims make Agamben a controversial thinker, both with regards to his theory, and with regards to his polemic writing, which polarizes at times without intrinsic necessity (Geulen, *Giorgio Agamben Zur Einführung*, 118.).

57. Agamben, *State of Exception*, 50.

58. Ibid., 29, 38.

59. Agamben, 51. According to Agamben, the term *iustitium* literally means "standstill" or "suspension of the law." (Agamben, 41.)

60. *Gēmuteki Riarizumu 2.0* t=1:28:15.

61. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 10.

62. Arendt, "What Is Freedom," 190–92.

63. Arendt, 152; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 168–69.

64. Stalder, "Culture without Commodities: From Dada to Open Source and Beyond," 23.

65. Muroi [室井] and Yoshioka [吉岡], *Jōhō to Seimei*, 60.

66. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 178.