Chapter 14

"Turn the Game Console off Right Now!"

War, Subjectivity, and Control in *Metal Gear Solid 2*

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Misreading

Few video games polarize fans like Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear*. The series is famous for its stealth action, odd humor, convoluted storylines, and its technically marvelous cut-scenes. Kojima is an auteur capable of creating ambitious games that, as opposed to most triple AAA video game titles, tend to conform less to market research and focus groups. The result is a deep divide between the Kojima loyalists, for whom the designer can do no wrong, and his detractors, who fill message boards and review sites with strident critiques of *Metal Gear*'s obtuse control schemes and pretentious cinematic interludes. With the release of *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (*MGS2*) (2001), the gulf between these camps narrowed. Following the popular and critical reception of *Metal Gear Solid* (*MGS*) (1998), *MGS2* was expected to continue the adventures of the popular main character Solid Snake. While the game does begin with the player controlling Snake, the bulk of the gameplay focuses on Raiden—a younger, less masculine, and more vulnerable hero. Many fans were aggravated with this change and castigated Kojima's hubris and disingenuousness (many of the promotional materials emphasized Snake). But what those critics misunderstood, then and now, is that the feelings of frustration are not the consequence of a design misstep or miscalculation, but are instead an integral part of *MGS2*'s gaming experience. As a consequence of this seemingly "bait and switch" trick, players are initiated into *MGS2*'s subversive logics of control and affect.

Thus, one of the greatest misunderstandings about the *Metal Gear* series is that Hideo Kojima's vision envies and mimics cinema when, in fact, it exhaustively exploits and highlights its gamic form. Many critics of *MGS2* attribute the game's incomprehensibility to a self-indulgent design strategy that relies too heavily on movie-like cut-scenes. Patrick Redding, a designer for Ubisoft Montreal, echoed this sentiment in his presentation at the Austin Game Developers' Conference (2007):

> Among the many positive things cited about this game: The incredibly detailed graphic environments, the rich set of stealth and combat systems (supporting, among other things, the player's ability to choose to complete the game using non-lethal measures against guards and other foot-soldiers), smart level design and unique boss battles.
>
> What wasn't so universally well-loved was a story that jarringly shifted the player perspective from Snake to Raiden; maddeningly overlong cut-scenes . . . and extremely disruptive in-game dialogues (usually delivered via Snake's Codec implant) that dragged on and on . . . In the end, loyal *MGS* fans who have a high tolerance for Hideo Kojima's idiosyncratic plots and themes were pissed off by how the moment-by-moment manifestation of the story interfered with the gameplay.

Redding's discussion of *MGS2* prefaces his next point that "story must support gameplay." In his view, *MGS2* exemplifies a disjunction between the narrative and the player's actions since the player is often forced to sit through, rather than participate in, large portions of the game. However, *MGS2* cannot and should not be interpreted or evaluated using traditional frameworks of narrative or ludic design. Yes, the game's narrative is communicated through long cut-scenes and talking-head communications via the codec interface,[1] but the game is meaningful and noteworthy precisely *because* the player is deliberately placed within the very nexus of this frustration. To understand *MGS2*, and a growing number of post-modern games that foreground their gamic form, is to focus on affect and technics. The frustration and confusion of *MGS2* rests precisely in the affect the game engenders as it flaunts the very technologies of its creation, and questions the medium's conventions and the relationship between algorithm and player. The player is *supposed* to be confused and frustrated by the narrative's delivery. She is not only told she is being controlled but she is meant to feel and intuit it. Thus, an analysis of *MGS2* cannot rely solely on an evaluation of its narrative coherence or its gameplay mechanics, but must combine considerations of how its unique storytelling mode interacts with the procedural elements of play. What is needed presently is an extension of Ian Bogost's (2006) claim that, "[w]e should attempt to evaluate all texts as configurative systems built out of expressive units" (p. 70). Understanding video games in this way allows game studies to give equal attention to the structures of play and the construction of meaning (p. 53). Regrettably, many scholars as well as media critics, journalists, and players view games as interesting cultural artifacts, but do not believe that games are sufficiently sophisticated to offer deep textual readings. For example, Steven Johnson in his best-seller *Everything Bad is Good for You* (2005) equates the content of a video game to a math-ematical word problem. Using the *Zelda* series as an example, he makes the claim that "the least interesting thing about [*Zelda*] is the substance of the story"

(p. 60). For Johnson, games do not possess the same power of thematics, characterization, and story as literary works, although games do offer cognitive challenges that "teach abstract skills in probability, in pattern recognition, in understanding causal relations that can be applied in countless situations, both personal and professional" (p. 59). *MGS2* challenges this dismissive and reductive view through the sheer complexity of its storyline. More importantly, the game demands a critical hermeneutic that can account for how its technical gameplay capabilities present new opportunities for communicating the kinds of narrative elements (e.g., story, character, drama) Johnson sees games lacking.

Embracing the idea that video games do have the capability to generate emotional affect, while tackling complex and controversial narrative material, this chapter focuses on how *MGS2* offers a critical rather than a celebratory perspective on the military-entertainment complex. This is particularly interesting because it is a political stance atypical of popular wargames. Tracy Fullerton (2007) argues that game design needs to break free of the restrictive structures, assumptions, and mechanics that appeal to the mythical "hardcore" gamer and expand the expressive capabilities of games beyond the pattern set by military and war titles. Game criticism can also contribute to this project by identifying and understanding subversive forms of representation and play built into major releases like *MGS2*.[2] As Ed Halter reports in *From Sun Tzu to Xbox* (2006), "While computer games were not directly created for military purposes, they nevertheless arose out of an intellectual environment predicated in defense research" (p. 82).[3] Not surprisingly, many games revel in battlefield fantasies instead of addressing the horrors of military violence. As an espionage game, *MGS2* glorifies violence and combat yet it also exposes and theorizes about the biopolitical, infopolitical, and disciplinary consequences of modern military formations and technology. These concerns are framed in the game primarily as questions about posthumanity, or how to conceptualize the shifting or disappearing definition of the human in light of digital technology, in an era when distinctions between human/computer, freedom/control, and war/game are increasingly blurred.[4]

Human/Computer

As with many studies of posthumanity, this argument begins with Alan Turing (1950) who in the provocative opening to "Computing machinery and intelligence" proposes the question "Can machines think?" and then quickly dismisses it. As he later clarifies, he finds the question "too meaningless to deserve discussion" (p. 442). For Turing, this simple question limits the complicated cognitive and philosophical issues of humanity to the failures of language. He suggests that the question invites us to draw up definitions of the terms "machine" and "think" and then perform a statistical survey based on the parameters set by the terms. This exercise would ultimately defeat the purpose of Turing's posthumanist project because the restrictive terminology cannot account for dynamic new forms of subjectivity. Thus, instead of evaluating the categorizations of thought, the human, the machine, and the subject against existing definitions that are inherently exclusionary and historically determined, Turing revised the question into an entirely new ludic rather than linguistic form—namely, the imitation game.[5]

What is of special interest to contemporary media studies, and game studies in particular, is how gaming becomes the technique for demonstrating intelligence at the interface. As Turing sees it, the imitation game provides the ideal testing platform because it ejects the complications of terminology for the manipulation of symbols in a cognitive exchange which, in his estimation, enacts the very essence of thought—play. Video games, as simulation, involve staging various forms of the imitation game. Players are meant to immerse themselves in fictional worlds with digital actors and agents where the boundaries between human and machine blur. Moreover, while many times the fun of the game is in suspending one's disbelief, often the tendency to internalize the algorithm overtakes or becomes indistinguishable from traditional play activity (Galloway, 2006, p. 92). When engaged in this mode, and in striking similarity to the interrogator's attempts (from Turing's game) to remove the veil from the test subjects, the player looks for exploits with which to escape the suggestions and restrictions of the game to expose its artifice. *MGS2* is a noteworthy outlier in the military game genre because it makes explicit its manufacture of and participation in a digital imitation game that provocatively plays against its own algorithm. This is expressed in the narrative through the shifting roles of Raiden, who is first characterized as an agentive actor; then a rogue threat attempting to take the system down from within; and finally not a threat at all, but revealed as a gamer who generates valuable simulation data with each press of the button for the surveilling game technology.

While a functional plot summary of this convoluted and multilayered game franchise is almost impossible to manage, some background information is necessary before this analysis can continue.[6] *MGS2* positions the player for most of the game as Raiden, a new operative in the Foxhound special operations unit.[7] Foxhound is a small, elite operation run by Colonel Campbell and utilized by the United States government for sensitive, clandestine missions. Raiden infiltrates what is known as the Big Shell, a large series of platforms in the Hudson River. The Big Shell is supposedly a cleanup facility built over the wreckage of a destroyed oil tanker. Via the codec interface (Raiden's nanomachine-powered communications device seen in Figure 14.1) Colonel Campbell informs Raiden that the Big Shell facility has been taken over by the Dead Cell terrorist organization and that they have also captured the President of the United States. Their leader, Solid Snake, is demanding a $30 billion ransom. Raiden is tasked with sneaking into the

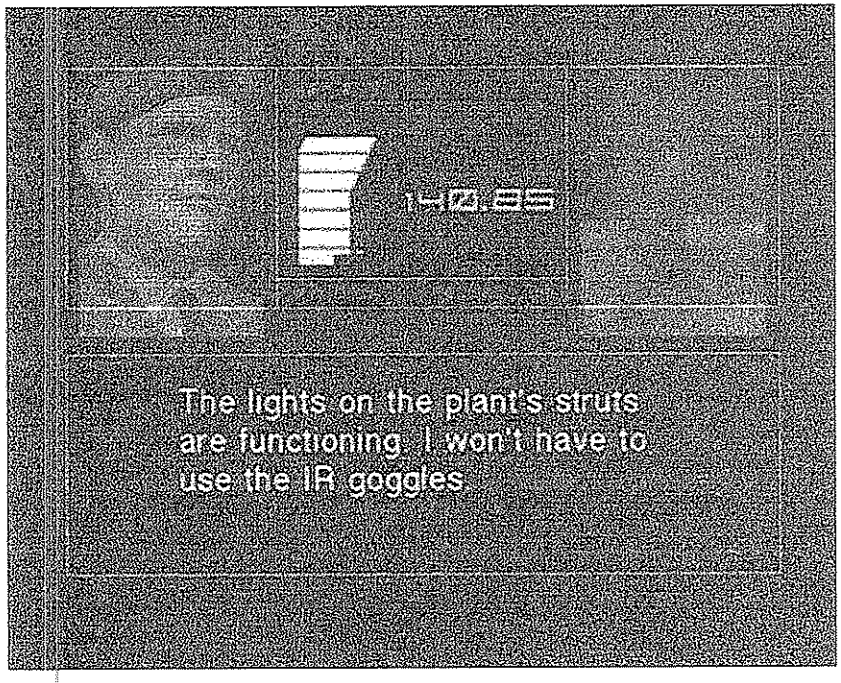

Figure 14.1 A conversation between Colonel Campbell (left) and Raiden (right) in the codecinterface, *MGS2*

Big Shell and rescuing the President. Progression through the game relies on peeling back the seemingly endless layers of deception within this story.

It is eventually revealed that behind all the plot twists and deceptive communications is a committee of twelve influential world leaders known as the Sons of Liberty. These individuals, as it is revealed at the end, have all been deceased for a century. They exist as a computational form of intelligence stored within the massive weapon Arsenal Gear which the Big Shell was built to conceal. The following codec exchange between Raiden and his boss Colonel Campbell and love interest Rose details how the Sons of Liberty (who, in this scene, Raiden now realizes are manipulating the Colonel and Rose) are positioned as an amorphous and networked form of world government dedicated to managing the global informational flow:

> **Colonel**: The mapping of the human genome was completed early this century. As a result, the evolutionary log of the human race lay open to us.
> **Rose**: We started with genetic engineering, and in the end, we succeeded in digitizing life itself.

> **Colonel**: But there are things not covered by genetic information. Human memories, ideas. Culture. History.
> **Rose**: Genes don't contain any record of human history.
> **Colonel**: Is it something that should not be passed on? Should that information be left at the mercy of nature?
> **Rose**: We've always kept records of our lives. Through words, pictures, symbols . . . from tablets to books . . . But not all the information was inherited by later generations.
> **Colonel**: A small percentage of the whole was selected and processed, then passed on. Not unlike genes, really.
> **Rose**: That's what history is, Jack.
> **Colonel**: But in the current, digitized world, trivial information is accumulating every second, preserved in all its triteness. Never fading, always accessible.
> **Rose**: Rumors about petty issues, misinterpretations, slander . . .
> **Colonel**: All this junk data preserved in an unfiltered state, growing at an alarming rate.
> **Rose**: It will only slow down social progress, reduce the rate of evolution.
> **Colonel**: Raiden, you seem to think that our plan is one of censorship.
> **Raiden**: Are you telling me it's not!?
> **Rose**: You're being silly! What we propose to do is not to control content, but to create context.[8]

This expressed mission of creating context but not controlling content seems especially poignant in light of predominant understandings of gaming. The content of gameplay arises out of play itself (how the player uniquely traverses the game)[9] and not from the programmed and prescribed limitations of the game. Thus, gameplay is an emergent and unique affective and cognitive experience shaped within—not determined by—the gameplay context. The Sons of Liberty, much like game designers, are committed to creating spaces of potential action that suggest outcomes, but do not prescribe them. As the Colonel and Rose explain to Raiden, the objective of his mission was not to accomplish a predetermined goal but to play the game as Raiden saw fit. Although it is never made explicit, fans of the series might recognize that the entire game is a rough re-creation of the course of events of *MGS2*'s predecessor *MGS*. In terms of the narrative, everything has been orchestrated to test the simulation capabilities of the Sons of Liberty. Raiden is essentially a beta-tester for virtual world software. For Raiden, *MGS2* ends with the frustrating realization that his life has been an experiment and that there was never any mission to accomplish and no endgame. For the player, there is no fulfilling climax, only the epiphany that *MGS2* is a superficial update of *MGS*. This game (the Sons of Liberty simulation) within a game (*MGS2*) based on a game

(*MGS*) disciplines the subjectivity of Raiden through contextual framing and the setting of conditions and mechanics of play. Similar to the Turing Test then, the game is not about whether or not Raiden can excavate some hidden truth about the difference between human and machine, or reality and simulation (e.g., discover if the Sons of Liberty are human or a machine); rather, the act of participation in the simulation makes these distinctions functionally irrelevant.

Updating the work of Donna Haraway on cyborg subjectivity, N. Katherine Hayles has situated contemporary life within what she terms the Regime of Computation. Reality has become saturated with data flows and computational processes that so permeate biological, political, social, and economic constructions that reality itself is " 'made' but not necessarily 'made up.' " Borrowing a term coined by Thomas Whalen, Hayles calls the "globally interconnected cognitive systems in which humans are increasingly embedded" the cognisphere (2006, p.161). This phenomenon, by definition, assumes the liveliness of machines and their cognitive equivalence to humans just as in *MGS2*. Hayles, in her characteristically techno-skeptical manner, emphasizes that the "Regime of Computation" is purely a conceptual term designed for interrogation rather than acceptance or denial. She uses it to describe the historical, philosophical, and cultural processes through which reality has been constructed and understood as computational, rather than as representational. *MGS2* is a textual example *par excellence* that simulates the computational through its envisioning of bodies as informatic, its fetishization of the digital interface, the ubiquity of nanomachines and genetic enhancement, and the inescapability of digital surveillance. In light of Hayles's (2006) claim that " '[w]hat we make and what (we think) we are co-evolve together' " (p. 164), Turing's question "Can machines think?" can be reformulated for *MGS2* as: "What are we now that we think with machines (games)?" This question takes on particular salience in light of wargames such as *MGS2* that complicate the convergence of mass entertainment and militarism.

War/Game

Games in the *Metal Gear* series set in the years prior to *MGS2* deal with traditional military conflicts, often waged between national powers, and involving nuclear threats embodied in the metal gear weaponry. Metal Gear Ray, and to some extent Arsenal Gear, function as decoys within the story of *MGS2*. Relying on the traditional conceptualizations of warfare that structure video game conventions, one expects that the central conflict of the game will involve destroying these weapons and thus avoiding disaster. As is eventually revealed, only Solidus Snake, the evil genetic super-soldier and brother of Solid Snake, is interested in this kind of project, and even he is being manipulated by the Sons of Liberty. The real threat of *MGS2* is the computer intelligence housed inside Arsenal Gear—the

disembodied processing unit that has designed and run the simulation that is the entire game. *MGS2*'s representation of warfare is thus biopolitical: networks of power are focused on the management of life rather than administration of death. In this sense the Sons of Liberty " 'make' live and 'let' die," rather than "take life or let live" (Foucault, 2003, p. 241). Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker (2007) argue that this form of "regulative power" is made available by a convergence of biology and informatics (as represented in *MGS2*) that transforms biopolitical power into a productive force which, in its practice, is meant to "impel, enhance, and optimize the species-population" (p. 74). Nikolas Rose (2007), addressing medical and scientific technologies, echoes this formulation. He uses the term "technologies of optimization" for the various tools and processes which "control vital processes of body and mind" (p. 16).

MGS2 makes significant use of the Dual Shock technology, a haptic feedback device, built into the Playstation 2 controller to communicate the theme of biological and informatic convergence. To this end the bumps, jerks, and rumbles that are triggered by the game code are meant to simultaneously mimic visceral responses of surprise, tension, or danger and affectively incite and engage the player. Most effective, perhaps, is the rhythmic throb that accompanies a dangerously low health gauge. This tactile feeling can most closely be likened to the feeling of a beating heart inside the controller's plastic casing. Obviously, *MGS2* is not the only game to include such special effects to cue players to their status within the game world. However, this game convention can be examined from the perspective of biopolitics as a form of informaticization of the human body. Vital statistics bars and other codified ways of managing oneself in the game world communicate an informatic, quantifiable, and measurable essence of the body informed by developments in medical technology based on concepts of the body as measurable and technical.[10] *MGS2* takes this conceptualization rather far with its series of computerized interfaces and technologies of bodily communication and surveillance. The opening credit sequence (Figure 14.2) and the introductory menu screen (Figure 14.3) both use molecular diagrams reminiscent of honeycombs as a stylistic and thematic trope. This notion of the building blocks of life is architecturally mapped within the game itself. When viewed as a map, the Big Shell (Figure 14.4) is strikingly similar to the visuals of chemical or genetic diagramming. Given this metaphor, Raiden can be read as a form of biological infiltrator, or a virus traveling through the facility's body. This connection is made explicit once the player reaches Arsenal Gear and must literally travel through it. Each section of the weapon is named after a part of the digestive system (e.g., ascending colon, sigmoid colon, etc.). This is just one example of how *MGS2* maps its narrative themes onto the aesthetic structures and technical architectures of the game.

Contrary to the fear of technophillic disembodiment and visions of downloaded consciousness often attached to new media technologies and theory, Rose, as well

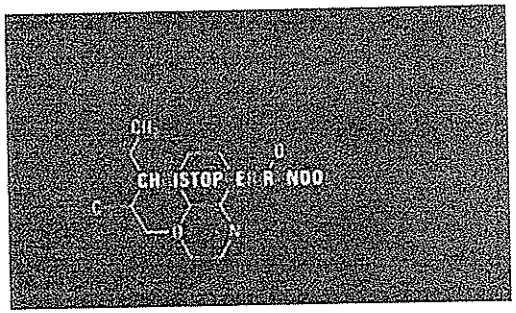

Figure 14.2 MGS2: Example of opening credit's animation using molecular diagrams that transform into names

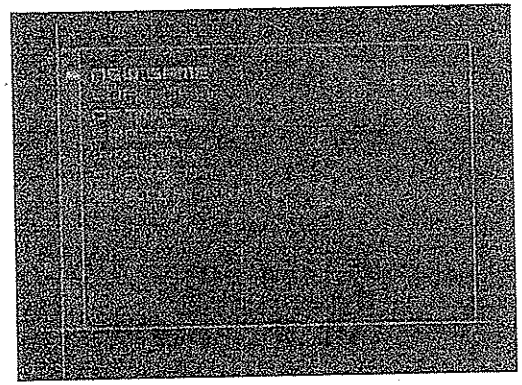

Figure 14.3 MGS2: Menu screen with molecular diagram visible on the right

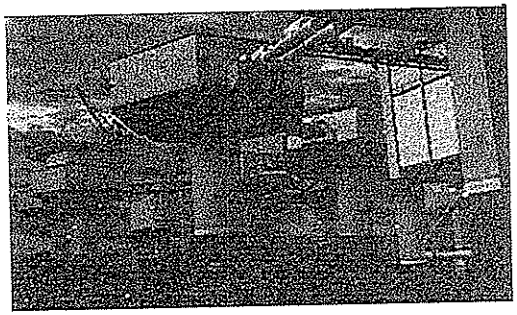

Figure 14.4 MSG2: Cinematic shot of the big shell where the majority of the game takes place. Note the similarity in structure to the molecular diagrams

as Galloway and Thacker, argues that these biopolitical processes envision and configure the body as all the more biological rather than purely informational. While *MGS2* is interested in notions of artificial life and dreams of informational consciousness, it is equally invested in the subjectivity and physicality of the human player at the interface. This is accomplished, in large part, through the controller's haptic feedback that communicates tension and alarm while also breaking the diegetic fourth wall by hailing the player as the embodied gamer (e.g., "Raiden! Turn the game console off right now!"; and, "You'll ruin your eyes playing so close to the TV!"). One should recall Hayles's claim that the technologies we create and the way we envision ourselves develop together. *MGS2* models the formations of new subjectivities and overtly references them, effectively forcing the player to consider her posthuman relation to the game technology.

Raiden himself is not only embedded with nanocommunicators but is clothed in a "Skull Suit" that monitors his biological function. This suit, as part of the simulation, turns out to be feeding its information directly to the Sons of Liberty. Solid Snake, as a symbolic counterpart to Raiden, is less technologically advanced; indeed, he represents a different historical construction of the full spectrum warrior—that is, a soldier capable, through training and equipment, of deploying and succeeding in a variety of battlefields. Snake's technicity lies in his genetic engineering. As part of the Les Enfants Terribles project, he is the genetic progeny of Big Boss, one of the most famous Special Forces soldiers in military history. Snake can be read as a creation of the gene sequencing era, in which the human was reduced to a sequence of configurable code in popular imagination not altogether separate from Turing's understanding of the human mind as a processing unit executing algorithms. Contrarily, Raiden, with his biometric suit and a history of intense indoctrination and training, is deeply rooted in an era of biomedia. His body is not so much compiled, like Snake's, but read and rewritten. Eugene Thacker's (2004) understanding of biomedia fuels this reading of Raiden:

> The "goal" of biomedia is not simply the use of computer technology in the service of biology, but rather an emphasis on the ways in which an intersection between genetic and computer "codes" can facilitate a qualitatively different notion of the biological body—one that is technically enhanced, and yet still fully biological.
>
> (p. 6)

Raiden's body is informatic to the extent that its biological basis can be exploited, modified, managed, and reworked as needed to fuse with and execute the simulation. From his childhood on he has been inscribed, erased, and repurposed as needed but, in the end, he remains uniquely biological and human. Snake, however,

is a technological product of military genetic experimentation with an accompanying expiry date (his accelerated aging becomes an issue in *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* [2008]) emphasizing his rapidly depleting use value in the new age of warfare.

MGS2's treatment of the modern soldier and war agrees with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's (2004) assertion that "[w]ar has become a *regime of biopower*" in that "daily life and the normal functioning of power has been permeated with the threat of violence of warfare" (p. 13). *MGS2* activates a form of anxiety over the looming presence of war. Hardt and Negri also connect biopower to the corporatization of military powers and neoliberal strategies for expanding markets and spheres of influence. Given these conditions, the world has been placed in a "global state of war" where wars are not isolated events but bound within a web of conflicts (p. 5). To cope with these destabilized and distributed warfare zones, military powers must be configured as networks (p. 59). Hardt and Negri's analysis focuses primarily on the reorganization and retooling of the U.S. military in response to increased demands to conduct protracted counterterrorist, counterinsurgency, and nation-building operations in multiple sites around the globe. Building on the work of Paul Virilio and Sylvere Lotringer, Robin Andersen (2006), argues that the endless rehearsal, preparation, and simulation of warfare resulting from the marriage of the military and entertainment sectors has caused the boundaries between war and peace to blur (p. 256). The reformulation of the military and warfare into network structures is not limited to strategic, tactical, and logistic reorganization within the Armed Forces; rather, the war machine extends to the "entertainment sector" and the video game industry which, along with the Defense Department, "work together to advance the state of the art" in modeling and simulation technology (Halter, 2006, p. 211). The end result of these kinds of collaborations are games such as *America's Army* (2002) which provide novel ways to recruit and advertise military service to key demographics. However, many other video games with less explicit connections to the U.S. Armed Forces provide other military benefits. The proliferation of war-themed video games which stage modern and historical conflicts normalizes the global state of war. They provide additional media experiences that supplement the video, photographic, and textual reportage from contemporary and historical battlefields. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these virtual experiences fit into a narrow ideological and political frame that mythologizes and legitimizes these conflicts by reducing them to battles of good vs. evil. Immersed in this cognisphere of war-media consumption, players are often hailed into certain subject formations which are more conducive to the conditions and expectations of the global state of war. Raiden, in many ways, is representative of this type of monitored, indexed, and disciplined subject.

In a codec dialogue between Solid Snake, the post-Vietnam era Special Forces genetic super soldier, and Raiden, the post-9/11 biomediated counterinsurgency

agent, Snake (assuming the codename Pliskin) addresses the historical gap between their two forms of development:

> **Raiden**: I've had extensive training—the kind that's indistinguishable from the real thing.
> **Pliskin**: Like what?
> **Raiden**: Sneaking mission 60, Weapons 80.
> **Pliskin**: VR [Virtual Reality], huh.
> **Raiden**: But realistic in every way.
> **Pliskin**: A virtual grunt of the digital age. That's just great.
> **Raiden**: That's far more effective than live exercises.
> **Pliskin**: You don't get injured in VR, do you? Every year, a few soldiers die in field exercises.
> **Raiden**: There's pain sensation in VR, and even a sense of reality and urgency. The only difference is that it isn't actually happening.
> **Pliskin**: That's the way they want you to think, to remove you from the fear that goes with battle situations. War as a video game—what better way to raise the ultimate soldier?

As opposed to Snake's genetic construction, Raiden has been managed, manipulated, and optimized from birth. Much is made throughout the game of Raiden's prior military experience taking place entirely through virtual reality (VR) training which, as Snake observes, conveniently omits the more visceral and horrifying aspects of combat. Michael Macedonia, technology officer for the Orlando branch of the U.S. Army Simulation, Training, and Instrumentation Command, also recognizes this but does not see it as detrimental to the efficacy of simulation in training. He explains that "a lot of what we're doing in [Army simulation] training is creating memories" that can be recalled and triggered in combat (qtd. in Halter, 2006, p. 198). Halter goes on to explain that Macedonia and other military researchers view "consciousness as a result of complex, but ultimately tweakable, informatic systems. And indeed, the idea of the brain as a kind of reprogrammable computer" (p. 199).

When Raiden's VR training is referenced within *MGS2*, clips of gameplay from previous iterations of the *Metal Gear* series often appear within the interface. Many players will remember these scenes from their previous experiences. Players of *MGS* can draw upon memories of prior gameplay in order to successfully navigate *MGS2* in the same way Raiden's VR training was meant to prepare him for the Big Shell infiltration. This, of course, is part of the overall strategy behind games like *America's Army*—it extends the reach of the training taking place within the armed forces to the home. Individuals with high technical aptitude, problem-solving skills, and familiarity with military conflicts and computerized interfaces

are likely to make a much easier transition into military service. However, such a subject formation is in no way limited to games explicitly created for military recruitment. Instead, many different video games can be seen as not only creating certain kinds of memories but significantly shaping opinions and perceptions of warfare.

The military-entertainment complex is thus a productive form of power which actively attempts to shape the social and cultural landscape. One of the rhetorical features of this strategy has been a "shift from 'defense' to 'security' " (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 20). What this means is that, as a networked and distributed global formation, the U.S. no longer has a concern only for the defense of boundaries but seeks actively to sculpt its circumstances through unilateral interventionist strategies. Hence, war is transformed from a "destabilizing force" to "an active mechanism that constantly creates and reinforces the present global order" (p. 21). *MGS2* figures this change as the Sons of Liberty simulation, which, rather than engaging in destructive nuclear tactics, attempts to shape and reimagine life itself. Raiden, as the infiltrator, can be viewed as a form of infection, breaching the boundaries of security, and worming his way into the core. But, as the Sons of Liberty reveal, this activity is not unwelcome; Raiden is testing the system. As Galloway and Thacker (2007) have theorized, the notion of security in the cognisphere is all about "the creation of boundaries that are selectively permeable" (p. 75). Security then can be redefined as a form of network administration or the granting of access, the setting of codes, and mapping of relations. Provocatively, Galloway and Thacker present gaming as the future revision of security in their table of binaries, prognosticating the journey in power regimes from Deleuzian "Societies of Control" to ". . . the Future" (p. 101). The Sons of Liberty simulation seems to solve the administrative problems of network security through gaming. The simulation accepts subjects into its envelope and then, through the subjectivity-shaping process of gaming, creates the ideal subject. Raiden-as-virus may permeate the boundary and attempt to infect the core, but his intervention simply becomes part of the database—synthesized and banked as user experience data for later use. In this way, gaming accepts all experiences as well as mythologizes and glorifies freedom, but ultimately maintains firm protological and algorithmic control. The seemingly infinite calculations and iterations of the gamic act provide for the ultimate process of generative data-gathering, offering a sense of false freedom for the player while being strictly monitored, controlled, and indexed. One can imagine how gameplay could be transformed into a process whereby subjectivity is formulated and then used to harvest data for a variety of purposes. As the gamic and social spheres increasingly blur, exploiting crossovers will become increasingly valuable for a variety of political and economic interests, and theorizing disruptions and subversions will be even more important.[11]

Freedom/Control

Gilles Deleuze's "Postscript on the societies of control" (1992) has served as the theoretical foundation for much of the work on power in contemporary networked and computational society.[12] Deleuze conceives of the control society as one in which individuals are tracked, sorted, and conceived of as data-sets. Access is granted but monitored and mapped. He uses the term "modulation" to describe this shift from disciplinary enclosure to management and control (pp. 4 and 7). While aware of the watchful eye of Foxhound (and the Sons of Liberty), Raiden is unaware his actions are anticipated, expected, and desired. He believes his infiltration is clandestine and that his ultimate goal of saving the President and destroying the weapons on board the Big Shell are subversive. In short, he knows he is being modulated, but not controlled. Similarly, players of video games understand the restrictive interfaces and guidance of the rules of play, yet still, if marketing rhetoric is any indication, find the "freedom" of digital play alluring. Although it is bound within the inherent informatic directives of the algorithm, Galloway (2006) has pointed out that *MGS2* is one of the few video games to struggle over its own mechanisms of control. The narrative and gameplay consistently register this anxiety and battle of wills.[13] The game forces the player along its path, but refuses to cloak itself in the pretense of liberation that other games rely on, going as far as to implicate the player in its operations of power.

Whereas Raiden is trapped within and shaped by the Sons of Liberty simulation, the modern player is ensnared within the seductive mythologies and trappings of the war video game which accustoms her to a world of conflict. But this relationship eventually concludes in a stark psychic break between player and Raiden when Snake calls attention to Raiden's dog tags. Earlier in the game the player, upon accessing a computer terminal, was given the opportunity to emboss the tags with a name of his or her choosing (see Figure 14.5). Raiden now looks at the tags as Snake asks, "Anyone you know?" Raiden responds, "No, never heard the name before. I'll pick my own name . . . and my own life. I'll find something worth passing on." Play itself is revised in this moment, as the player's earlier actions are recontextualized as a form of interpellation. Raiden's psychic break with the player can be read as a form of "rupture" which Judith Butler (1993) insists can take place between the subject and the interpellating law: "The law might not only be refused, but it might also be ruptured, forced into a rearticulation that calls into question the monotheistic force of its own unilateral operation" (p. 122). The player is identified as another node within the network of power, interpellating Raiden's subjectivity just as much as the simulation. This scene forces the player to recognize her simultaneous affinity with Raiden and empathy for his plight, as well as her own participation in, and subjection to, the control schema. Given this

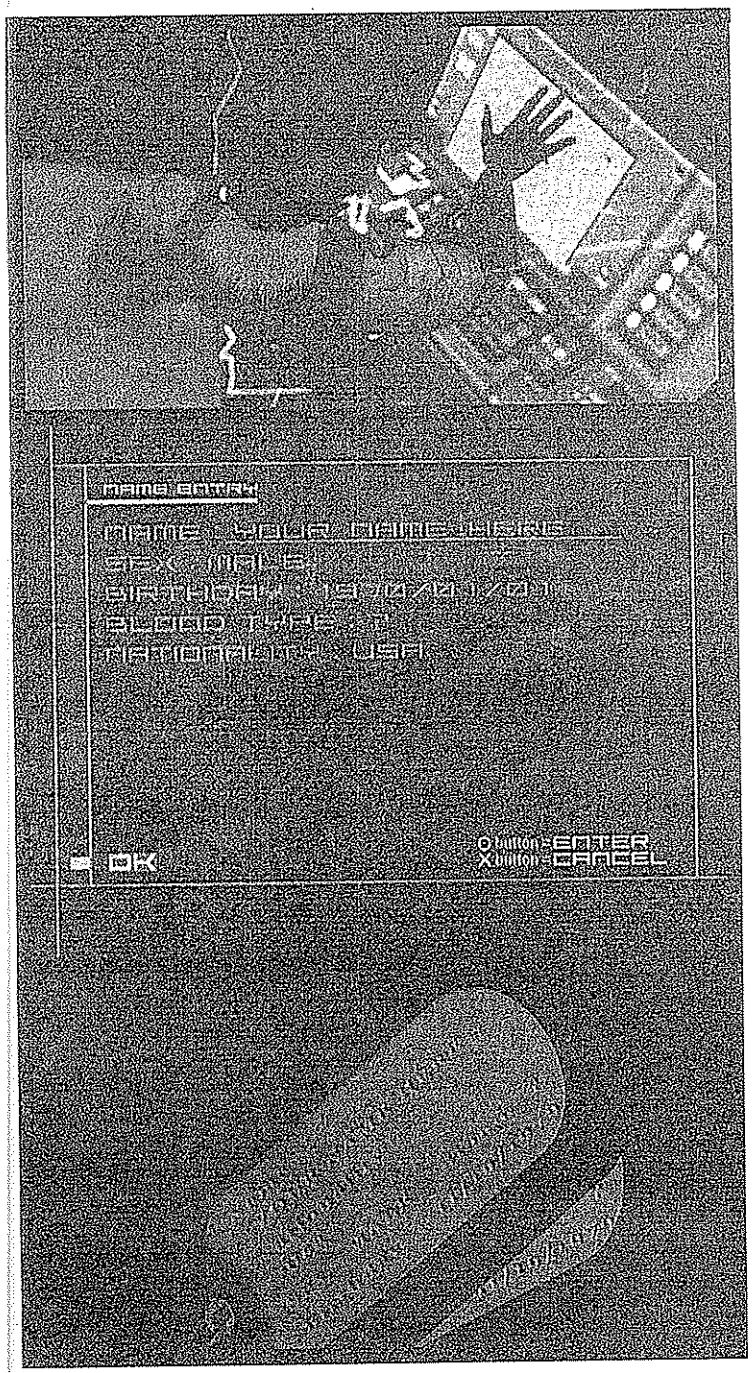

Figure 14.5 *MGS2*: Dog tag embossing sequence. Screenshot used with permission from James Howell

relationship with Raiden and power, perhaps what we (as disciplined and simulated) need is our own mutation.

At the game's end, Snake counsels Raiden on the streets of New York on how to proceed amidst the recognition of the inescapability of regimes of control. Snake's solution is to locate lines of flight within subjective experience: "I know you didn't have much in terms of choices this time. But everything you felt, thought about during this mission is yours. And what you decide to do with them is your choice." The idea here is that the player of the game, once "freed" of the restrictive architectures of gamespace (hence the outdoor setting where this conversation takes place) can recontextualize and rearticulate the gaming experience for themselves.

The credit sequence, interspersed with footage of the streets of contemporary New York City (Figure 14.6), draws this final message to its conclusion. After the credits stop, Snake explains that "Life isn't just about passing on your genes. We can leave behind much more than just DNA. Through speech, music, literature and movies . . . what we've seen, heard, felt . . . anger, joy and sorrow . . . these are the things I will pass on. That's what I live for." In other words, Snake posits culture as a means of psychic flight or refuge in a society that overdetermines subjectivity. Notably, Snake does not mention video games as one of the forms of culture which provide an escape from the apparent determinism of genetics. This suggests that games represent a disturbingly reductive set of ideologies and investments incapable of the kind of resistance *MGS2* preaches.

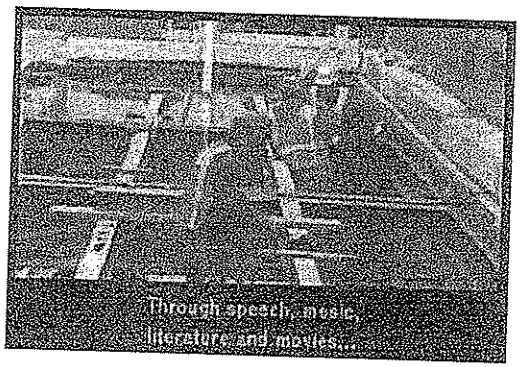

Figure 14.6 *MGS2*: Example of footage of New York shown during end sequence

On/Off

Certainly, the video game industry is not only indebted in many ways to the military-entertainment complex but is also steeped in reductive notions of what

constitutes play, gamers, and suitable candidates for game industry positions. Yet these problems are not intrinsic to play. Freud's famous analysis of the fort/da game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1961) provides an archetypal example of the ways in which gaming can serve as a form of mastery. In the game, a toddler copes with his mother's repeated departure and return by staging her loss with a reel and string. Repeatedly, the child makes the reel disappear (by throwing it over the edge of his cot) and then brings it back, rehearsing the pain of her absence and subsequent exultation of presence of his mother. The game repositions the boy from a passive to an active role in his own loss and makes him "master of the situation" (p. 16). *MGS2*, and other games, can also be read as participating in a similar shift, allowing the player to assume an active role in some situation wherein she is traditionally passive. The problem is that the conditions of this play, as discussed in this chapter, as well as in the work of Galloway, are incredibly restrictive. Thus, gaming might provide a form of psychic catharsis but little in the way of liberation.

But is the solution to be found in, as the ending of *MGS2* apparently endorses, turning the game console off and seeking other methods of subversion? McKenzie Wark (2007) criticizes a strategic turn to a "real world" free of the problems of the digital: "The utopian dream of liberating play from the game, of a pure play beyond the game, merely opened the way for the extension of gamespace into every aspect of everyday life" (p. 16). As Wark explains it, this new reality of a game-like everyday is an effect of the military-entertainment complex's emergence. Consequently, finding forms of play free of the oppressive digital architectures of the simulation replaces technological problems with new ones.

However, as the political battlefield expands, it also opens up the possibility for a variety of game forms to exist at the threshold of the physical and virtual: flash mobs, alternative reality games, and various forms of strategic protest and performance art, play, parody, and appropriate spaces to locate exploits in the network and cognisphere. If our lives are becoming increasingly ludic, the answer to the problematic of the control society cannot be found in turning off the game console, but in recognizing the irrelevance of identifying gamespace *only* on a screen or a tabletop. The simulation is already running before we sit down at the TV or computer. Our task now is to learn how to become better gamers, and come to terms with what it means to play with or against military games of all stripes.

Notes

1. Players can open a menu system that allows them to punch in key codes acquired during gameplay to speak with the game's characters. These communications provide story, background information, and hints, and even serve as the save game function.

2. It must be emphasized that what is being discussed here is very different from forms of modding, countergaming, hacking, and performance that are traditionally associated with subversive gaming. In the forms just mentioned various player-activists recontextualize, reshape, and repurpose an existent, often regressive, video game. What is of interest to me is how select games may in fact be read as entering into progressive discourse without this kind of technical intervention.
3. For further reading consult Tim Lenoir and Henry Lowood's excellent summation "Theaters of war: the military-entertainment complex," http://www.stanford.edu/class/sts145/Library/Lenoir-Lowood_TheatersOfWar.pdf.
4. This chapter analyzes both what is presented in *MGS2* and how it is presented given the mediation of the game's interface. This is a critical perspective lifted from N. Katherine Hayles (1999), who has issued the following call: "By adopting a double vision that looks *simultaneously* at the power of simulation and at the materialities that produce it, we can better understand the implications of articulating posthuman constructions together with embodied actualities" (p. 47).
5. The ideal setup for the game would involve a "teleprinter" or keyboard, with accompanying screen or monitor to read the symbols, as the interface between the room of the test subjects and interrogator. The test subjects, either a man ("A") and a woman ("B") or a machine ("A") and a human ("B"), are asked a series of questions that test the adequacy of their performance of gender or humanity. The game involves test subject "A" manipulating the flickering signifiers on the interrogator's screen in order to have him or her misidentify him or it as a woman or machine respectively.
6. Thankfully, a large community of amateur and independent Metal Gear scholars has blossomed on the Internet. One of these individuals, Grant Morrissey, has drawn up a full plot summary of all the games: http://junkerhq.net/MGS2/metal_gear_solid_plot.txt.
7. The very beginning of the game, also known as "The Tanker Chapter," occurs two years prior. In this chapter the player assumes control of Solid Snake, the beloved protagonist of the *Metal Gear* series. Snake, as a rogue agent, is investigating the transportation of a new Metal Gear weapon, the RAY, which is being held onboard by the United States Marine Corps. Snake quickly discovers after arriving that the tanker has been seized by Russian terrorists led by Revolve Ocelot, one of the main villains from *MGS*. Eventually, Ocelot kills the commanders of both the Marine forces and Russian terrorists aboard the ship, seizes RAY, and sinks the tanker. Snake disappears into the depths of the river. These events provide the backdrop for the main storyline involving Raiden.
8. Dialogue obtained from Metal Gear Solid 2 Ending Analysis website: http://junkerhq.net/MGS2/.
9. I am drawing here from Espen Aarseth's *Cybertext* (1997).
10. One of the more interesting innovations of the health bar interface is contained within the follow-up to *MGS2*, *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* (2004). This game contains a separate menu interface with which to administer first aid (bandages, splints, antiseptic, etc.) to manage the various injuries the main character receives.
11. Galloway's (2006) "countergaming" in *Gaming: Essays on algorithmic control* and McKenzie Wark's (2007) *Gamer theory* both provide good examples of how to think through these issues.
12. See Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2006), Alexander Galloway (2004), and Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker (2007).

13. The primary antagonist of *MGS1–4* is the most glaring representative of this control anxiety. In *MGS*, Revolver Ocelot lost his hand in a confrontation with Solid Snake and the Cyborg Ninja. It is revealed in *MGS2* that Ocelot replaced his arm with that of Liquid Snake, however, this has caused their two personalities to enter into conflict for the control of Ocelot's consciousness. In *Metal Gear Solid 4*, it appears that the two beings have completely merged forming Liquid Ocelot.

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