**The Authored Landscape***Architecture as Negotiated Authorship in Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain and Gone Home*

**Introduction**

In this essay I will explore the relationship between architecture and authorship in *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* (*MGSV*) and *Gone Home.[[1]](#footnote-1)* [[2]](#footnote-2) I will first investigate and articulate the debate around authors and authorship, and the difficulties of translating those theories onto the video game medium. I will then offer an argument that authorship can be witnessed through the frame of video game architecture, and explore how it can be negotiated between the player and the designer, and how the nature of play and the nature of games interact within this argument.

**Definitions of *Authorship* and the *Author***

Ideas of authorship and *the author* have become increasingly complicated and contested. Therefore, before delving deeper into specific instances of authorship it is necessary to explore what being an author entails. Originally, the roots of the word author come from the medieval and early renaissance periods. The standard medieval etymology of the terms *author* and *authority* and their Latin forebears *autor/auctor* and *auctoritas* are derived from two sources, as noted in *Authors and Authority*.[[3]](#footnote-3) The first is the Latin verb *auieo*, which means ‘to tie’. The second is the Greek word *autenitim,* which refers to a person ‘worthy of trust and obedience’, as influentially posited by Dante Alighieri in *Il Convivio.*[[4]](#footnote-4) This traditional view of authorship has three distinct characteristics: An author is a *creator* (*auieo*), an author is *trusted*, and an author is worthy of *obedience* (*autenitim*). These characteristics, alongside strong ties etymologically to *authority*, place an author as a genius figure who crafts works with meanings defined by that author, and whose control and authority over their works is unquestioned. This traditional view synchronises well Chris Crawford’s view of game design, as formulated in *The Art of Computer Game Design*, with its strong dedication to the designer’s control over all aspects of game creation, and cynically dismissive of exterior views and critics.[[5]](#footnote-5) However, this ideology is quickly bought into contention. This definition struggles with multiple authorial voices (as does Crawford), associating a singular creative identity to any created artefact, and holds authors to strict didactic bounds of trustworthiness. An author in their privilege cannot lie. Even within the context of the period, this definition was regularly subverted. Chaucer in *The House of Fame* calls out the conflicting narratives of Homer, Dares and Guydo regarding the fall of Troy, postulating the presence of ‘lyes’ [sic] in these texts; *Le Roman de la Rose* has multiple authors, with manuscripts added to over time.[[6]](#footnote-6) [[7]](#footnote-7) Translating this theory over into the world video games also proves problematic. Who is considered an author when studios collectively design games rather than a singular person? How much authority is usurped by a player, who in the act of playing takes on a level of authorial duty? And, with that murky player/author boundary, to whom or what does a player owe obedience?

An alternate ideology of authorship that may offer some insight into these issues is the *auteur theory*. Much like the current video game industry, cinema struggled with identifying an authorial voice in movies as defined within the traditional boundaries of authorship, where the directorial voice could so easily be masked by the producers, technicians and actors of any given movie. Indeed, even proponents of the *auteur theory* concede that a good film can ‘be made without a director’, or at least a discernible directorial voice.[[8]](#footnote-8) What defines the *auteur* then at its base, Andrew Sarris suggests, is a level of technique. One has to be a *good* director to be an *auteur*. Building from this, the second premise of the theory is the ‘distinguishable personality of the director’. To be an *auteur,* a director must showcase a distinct style and recurrent tropes over a group of films. The final premise of the *auteur theory* is the projection of interior meaning, something similar to the *auteur’s* world view and attitude towards life, but still abstracted from it by being inherently imbedded in the cinematic and unable to be completely realised in non-cinematic terms. *(Sarris 1962 ,Pg. 516-517).* On some levels, the *auteur theory* offers some answers and rebuttals to the problematics posed by traditional views of the author when applied to video games, allowing for the transcendence of the director’s voice and personality beyond the mire of competing authorial voices posed by larger design teams. There is a great deal of truth too in directorial style being tied to the visual and movement elements of a work, and interior meaning (such as it is) being abstracted from reality by the medium it is born from. The work of Hideo Kojima in his *Metal Gear* series provides an excellent test case for *auteurship* within video games, and this essay will certainly look to interrogate that synergy with this in mind. Conversely, the *auteur theory* struggles with acknowledging other members of a design team’s contributions to a game, or a player taking on authorial roles. Indeed, Peter Wollen suggests we have already seen the potential flaws of the *auteur theory* when many authorial elements have to be dismissed as a result of conflicting ‘noise’ from subordinates and co-workers; the theory does not allow for a non-directorial author.[[9]](#footnote-9) Moreover, it requires a director to showcase a style over multiple titles to be considered an *auteur*, precluding designers of single games from authorial consideration. Taken to a logical end, the works of the *auteur* become subsidiary to the auteur themselves, their role becoming a conduit through which a spectator witnesses the interior meaning of the director develop. Though André Bazin shies away from completely agreeing, in *De la Politique des Auteurs* he remarks upon the potential extreme: ‘There are no works, there are only auteurs.’[[10]](#footnote-10)

The final authorial ideology that will be utilised within this essay is drawn from Roland Barthes *The Death of the Author*:

As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.[[11]](#footnote-11)

In Barthes typically grand fashion, he sets out an ideology that is radically opposed to the concepts already raised. The act of creation strips an author of his authority, placing the burden of meaning with the reader turning him instead into a scripter. Where an author exists and pre-exists a text, a scripter is unable to precede or paramountly *exceed* a text, liberating the text from the ‘tyranny’ of defined meaning and instead opening it up to endless possible meanings. *(Barthes 1977, Pg. 143).* If the *auteur theory* sees works being subsumed by the *auteur*, then Barthes argues for its opposite: the author being subordinated to his text as another construct. According to Barthes, it is possible to have multiple interpretations and authorities for a work, drawn from the ‘reader’, which synergises well with concepts of the player as an author, and similarly Barthes’ conceptualisation of a text as *unoriginal*, not in a derogatory sense, but as a remediation from a ‘single theological meaning’ intentionally crafted by an author-God to a ‘tissue of quotations’, offers an interesting framework on how the multiple creative influences of a design studio might impact a video game. *(Barthes 1977, Pg. 146).* This postmodern deconstructionist argument offers a great deal of fertile context for the likes of Cindy Poremba’s thoughts on player-authors, Mia Consalvo’s work on cheating and Brenda Laurel’s comparisons between video games and theatre, among many others.[[12]](#footnote-12) [[13]](#footnote-13) [[14]](#footnote-14) However there still remains a number of concerning issues. Foremost among them is the struggle with context. One critic of Barthes, Seán Burke points out that the author is the only category which overlaps the concepts of text and context, something that Barthes theory at its provocative extreme negotiates poorly.[[15]](#footnote-15) Similarly, Michel Foucault, argues for a less extreme version of the scripter (what he terms the *author-construct*) which allows an *author-construct* to exceed the bounds of their text by influencing other texts and occupying a ‘transdiscursive’ position.[[16]](#footnote-16) But then surely, such a position allows the creeping return of the author into the theory, which presents a different complexity. More distinct to video games, *The Death of the Author* is problematized by the agency and creative licence of a player. Video games are, as Espen Aarseth describes, *ergodic*. They require non-trivial effort to traverse, implicating the reader in the creative process of a ‘work in movement’, an artefact that is incomplete and requires additional input.[[17]](#footnote-17) Not only does Aarseth suggest the player is implicitly authorial, his remarks upon *textual machines* as ‘a device capable of manipulating itself as well as the reader’ suggest the text itself as a self-propagating agent of its own. *(Aarseth 1997, Pg. 24)*. By this logic, the player of the video game would have to metaphorically dissolve themselves, as with any other author, forestalling any chance of for the development of meaning. (Gone Home?)

**Architecture: The Frame to Explore Authorship in Video Games**

As we have seen articulated, the definition of authors and authorship remains ambiguous, and while there are strong parallels between existing modes of interpretation and authorship within video games, we can also see these translate awkwardly, and are problematized by issues not present in other mediums. Where then, does authority and authorship lie within the sphere of video games? I would like to suggest that authorship and where it is negotiated is primarily found within the *architecture* of video games.

A useful parallel to the *auteur theory* by Sarris states:

The way a film looks and moves should have some relationship to the way a director thinks and feels… Because so much of the American Cinema is commissioned, a director is forced to express his personality through the visual treatment of material rather than through the literary content of the material. *(Sarris 1962, Pg. 516)*

The assertion that authorial intent has to be expressed through a structural, technical and visual dimension over a strictly narrative one is further expounded upon by Peter Wollen, who says you have to ‘[trace] structure not a message through works.’ *(Wollen 1972, Pg. 532).* A director (or *auteur*) for a video game is often seen to follow a similar ideology. Certainly, video games compressed narrative windows and mechanical complexities make traditional and extended cinematic structures a largely futile endeavour for the game designer; a frustration noted by narrative designer Stephane Beauverger from an interview in *Vampyr Episode 4 - Stories from the Dark.[[18]](#footnote-18)* With the regularly commissioned nature of games (be it by studio or publisher) and these issues with narrative, a director is left pursuing authorship in other areas of game design, and a primary area of this is architectural design of a game. It is also worth noting, while not applicable to either *MGSV* or *Gone Home*, that games do not even require narrative in some cases, perhaps even working against the core nature of a game as aptly described by Jesper Juul in his paper *A Clash Between Games and Narrative*.[[19]](#footnote-19)

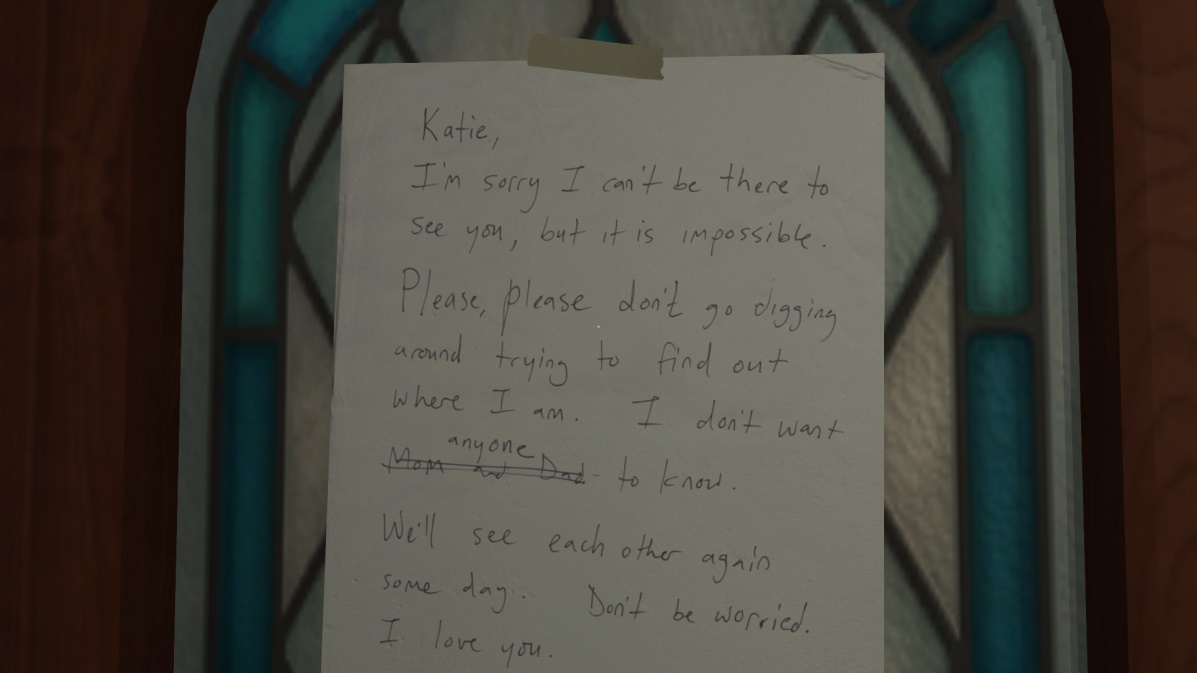


Figure : An ominous note greets the protagonist of Gone Home, returning to an unfamiliar house on a stormy night.

Henry Jenkins agrees, putting forward that we examine games ‘less as stories than as spaces ripe with narrative possibility.’[[20]](#footnote-20) Game designers, much like film directors and crews, build worlds and settings as much as they do narratives. There is a reason, Jenkins suggests, that game documents tend to focus more on level design than character development, and that when translating the *events* of a film to the format of a video game for instance, they often become *environments* within that game. *(Jenkins 2004, Pg. 121-122).* This *environmental storytelling,* as Jenkins calls it, allows for narrative elements and possibilities to be pursued through construction of space and architecture. In *Gone Home*, the game opens with the game’s protagonist, Katy, arriving home from a significant time away travelling. The complication, of course, is that this isn’t her home in any real sense. Her family moved into the house of her father’s deceased relative, and on a dark and stormy night Katy arrives to an empty house with a locked door, no lights and an absent family, magnified by an ominous note written by her sister. [Figure 1]. We can clearly see a number of environmental storytelling elements evoked in this scene: pre-existing narrative associations to horror, mystery and thriller genres are invoked by the weather, the hidden key, the empty house; clear narrative hooks and information are presented by the ambiguous note in the *mise-en-scene*; a ‘staging ground’ for the coming narrative events is initiated. *(Jenkins 2004, Pg. 123).* Furthermore, upon entering the house, a great many resources for emergent narratives are provided, from interactive trivialities like books, pens, cups to more evocative items like keys and hidden codes. The narrative, such as it is, is moved from more traditional, tightly controlled and contained events of other mediums, into a more plural narrative space brought into existence by the game’s architecture. Authorially, this becomes very interesting. The control over viewer experience and when and if a spectator receives information a director can achieve within a movie proves anathema to the design of a *good game*, which we have seen is a more plural experience of possibilities not certainties. *(Jenkins 2004, Pg. 120).* Ifwhat makes good directorial technique within the *auteur theory* works against good directorial technique within a video game, then this becomes a complicating factor to mapping the theory to the video game medium. The control an *auteur* can level is paramount to ensuring their ‘voice’ can be identified above the masking presence of other creative influences present. *(Sarris 1962, Pg. 515 and Wollen 1972, Pg. 530).* The agency of the player, who is navigating Jenkin’s narrative space inherently contests the *authority* traditionally associated with an authorial figure by abstracting the level of control they can exert. Poremba argues this means the ‘interactive author forfeits their agency’, as a designer does not retain complete autonomy with the addition of player-agency, and emboldening a dissolution of author’s grasp of a text we have already seen advocated by Barthes and Foucault. *(Poremba 2003)*.

If what Poremba says holds true, then the game designer’s authority must be engineered outside of player control if they are to have authority at all. As has been suggested, this is primarily seen through the architecture of the game. A designer instead has to leverage control of narrative via embedding it in the architecture of a game. Jenkins argument is not *when* or even *what* the narrative is that important, but rather *where*:

… one can imagine the game designer as developing two kinds of narratives - one relatively unstructured and controlled by the player as they explore the game space and unlock its secrets; the other prestructured but embedded within the mise-en-scene awaiting discovery. The game world becomes a kind of information space, a memory palace. *(Jenkins 2004, 126).*

This offers an interesting perspective, advocating for a compromise between the designer and player on how narrative is encountered: the player through their own exploration of the designed space, and the designer by what they can encounter in that designed space. This thereby surely implies a *negotiation* of authority between player and designer, not one ceding control to the other. This flies in the face of both extremes of auteurship and the liberated reader, where neither Wollen’s observation of the *auteur theory* ‘the director never submits himself to another author’ nor the dissolution of the author into the text completely holds true. *(Wollen 1972, Pg. 30).* When considered in the light of computers as textual machines and games as cybertexts, ergodic forms that are works-in-motion, we can see how this negotiation becomes an integral part of the game-player interaction. *(Aarseth 1997, Pg. 2-4, 51)*. Inherent to the video game is the inbuilt requirement of a player; video games are ‘unfinished’ in the sense they necessitate additional input in order to progress, unlike other mediums. In and of itself this quality of video games compels both player and designer into a negotiation over authority. On one hand, the design of a video game is built around the inclusion of additional input and exterior control (as seen in the concept of narrative space), but on the other the ergodic quality of video games forces a player into a challenging position: it is possible to *fail*. If the player of *Gone Home* cannot find the requisite keys and codes to unlock new areas of the house, or the player of *MGSV* is killed by Russian Special Forces in Afghanistan, the game cannot progress. This places a caveat on the player as an author; the game will always be good enough (barring glitches and bugs) to fulfil its authorial role, the player has no guarantees they can fulfil theirs, undermining the conceptual *trust* required of an author. If a player cannot trust themselves to successfully traverse a game, how much authority can they wield? Contrastingly, the authority of the game designer is as ever contested by Barthes and Foucault, the author dying when a text is narrated without a view to act on reality, but instead to act intransitively. This implies the negotiation is not between the author, mediated by their created artefact, and the player, but simply between the artefact and the player. *(Barthes 1977, Pg. 142)*. Curiously, this in turn is contested by the unfinished or open nature of a game. How is one supposed to dissolve the author of an artefact that is perpetually in the act of being written? Because of its immediacy and the constant negotiation between the player and the game/designer, a game is as a consequence always acting on reality, and so rarely if ever enters an intransitive state.

**Architecture and Patterns of Meaning**

Having investigated architecture as a way of remediating events and narrative into a narrative space, and the negotiation of authorship therein, it is important to consider architecture and how it pertains to authorship on its own terms. Michael Nitsche’s *Architectural Approaches* synergises well with Jenkins, agreeing that the arrangement of narrative elements in a virtual space is a powerful tool to encourage a player’s participation in a game world, but further suggests that this stimulation to engage can be developed through ‘the structure of navigable virtual space’.[[21]](#footnote-21) According to Nitsche:

Architecture helps describe how a game world can gain significance and a quality or ‘place’… Depending on their interaction with the world, players change their positioning toward these environments and take on a role. *(Nitsche 2008, Pg. 159)*.

By this depiction, architecture is a vehicle by which to imbue a game world with meaning, and that a player’s varying experiences and interactions with this environment influences the way they play the game via the *role* they take on. More importantly, meaning is derived from the way Nitsche’s rule-driven, architectural game space is interacted with, as is invoked by Christopher Alexander: ‘A building or a town is given its character, essentially, by those events which keep on happening there most often’ (italics in the original text).[[22]](#footnote-22) Repeated action gives meaning to a location through a pattern of repeated events, but simultaneously these patterns are reflective of the architectural arrangement that they occur from. Once again, we witness a negotiation of authority between player and game designer: the designer’s intended use for a space or structure, and the player’s actual interaction with that structure. However, Nitsche posits that a game designer can learn from architecture to incentivise certain patterns, and de-incentivise others, offering an opportunity for greater authorial influence. *(Nietsche 2008, 159-160)*. This certainly favours ideologies of the author mobilised by the *auteur theory* and to a lesser extent traditional views of the author, by allowing more of the *distinct personality* and *interior meaning* intrinsic to an *auteur* to be expressed. This is statement is quickly problematized. The designer, *auteur* or otherwise, is still beholden to the ultimate aim of any architectural endeavour, which is the meaningful use of the space. Inevitably, this means for all a designer’s intended uses for a structure, they may well be completely overwritten by players and remodelled by their interactions with the space. *(Nitsche 2008, Pg. 160)*.



Figure : Metal Gear Solid V's Mother Base, still under construction and awaiting Snake's direction for its development.

A remarkable subversion of this issue is present within *MGSV*, in the form of Mother Base. Destroyed in the wake of Cipher’s attack in *Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes*, the newly resurrected Mother Base in *MGSV* is first encountered while it is still under construction.*[[23]](#footnote-23)* [Figure 2]. At first, it offers little more than a place to shower off the persisting blood and grime from Snake’s missions, and occasionally improve team morale and further the plot of the game. This rapidly changes, when after a small number of introductory missions Snake is tasked with determining the direction for its development. By investing the game’s currency (GMP), resources and enduring a significant wait time, the player can choose to improve various elements and departments of the base, like Security, R&D and Support. Where other structures (particularly bases, which often contain a more personal element) may have become re-appropriated by players, by deliberately including a modularity and upgradability to the Mother Base Kojima Productions allow players to choose the pattern of interaction they have with the structure, while it still remains within the bounds intended for it by the designers. Chris Crawford would refer to such a base design as ‘dirty’ and something to be avoided, that too many features interfere with a game’s I/O and make it overly intricate. *(Crawford 1984, Pg. 56)*. *MGSV* is certainly intricate, and at times so rich with options as to be potentially overwhelming, but Crawford’s view on game design is perhaps overly prescriptive and a product of its time. The ability to offer more opportunity for player agency and involvement is, while not always a positive inclusion, certainly something we can see advocated for in more modern takes on game design, such as with Poremba and Miguel Sicart.[[24]](#footnote-24) *(Poremba 2003).*

As a further impact, the player’s Mother Base development choices quickly manifest themselves in game play consequences. A player that indexes heavily into expanding the Support department of the base will have a very different experience of *MGSV* to a player that decides to ignore developing Mother Base and invest their resources purely into unlocking early weapons equipment. While the latter may have an early strength in the game, able to contest opponents in earlier missions more aggressively and efficiently, they may come to struggle when they desperately need to expand their R&D department to maintain their advantage, whereas the former may have to play more carefully at the start the game, but will have the advantage of superior air support. We can see the architecture of Mother Base, whose use and meaning have been affected by the player, leading to these *emergent narratives. (Jenkins 2004, Pg. 128-129).* Similar examples can be seen in *Gone Home*. One notable example is when the player stumbles across a handmade cross, abandoned in a hidden passageway with biblical scripture scrawled on the front, at which point the player can decide to take it with them. There are hints and rumours throughout *Gone Home* that Oscar Mason, Katy’s great uncle who bequeathed the house to her father, may haunt the house and accordingly a ward against evil seems in some ways to be a prudent idea. However, shortly after proceeding down the corridor towards the basement, the lights blow. This playful example of an emergent narrative shows how they can exacerbate a player’s preoccupation with potential storylines by legitimising them, even when those preoccupations are unfounded – such as in this instance - and in turn subvert some of the associated narrative agency of the player.

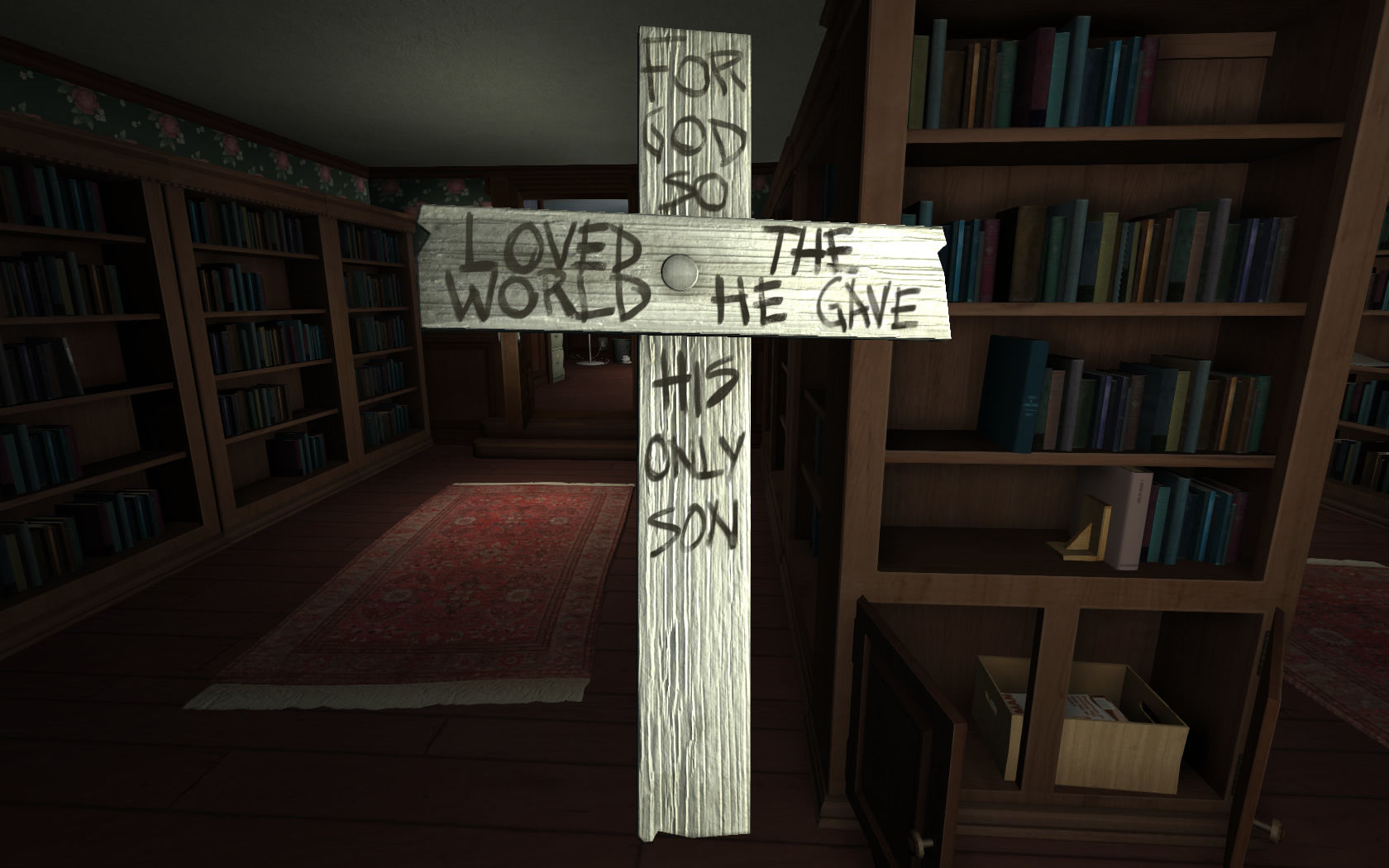


Figure : A protection against evil? Emergent narrative in *Gone Home*.

**Architects of Play: Playgrounds and the Magic Circle**

Another issue of translating architectural theory into the world of video games lies with a fundamental contrast between the real world and the digital. Architecture is divided into two classes, human-made spaces and natural spaces, where human-made spaces show humanities understanding of the natural space it is created in. *(Nitsche, Pg. 161)*. This is done in three ways according to Nitsche: human-made spaces make a natural space more *precise,* by defining and making a natural space’s meaning more cohesive, they *complement* the natural space by adding elements that might be lacking, and they *symbolise* human understanding of nature, offering a transcendental possibility to acquired meaning such as with monuments. ‘The existential purpose of [architecture],’ Alexander suggests, ‘… is to uncover the meanings potentially present within the given environment.’ *(Alexander 1979, Pg. 18)*. The issue lies with the fact everything within a video game is inherently a digital construct. By their very nature, video games are entirely man-made structures. This adds a very subversive quality to video game architecture. If the entire environment is a carefully constructed one, then interaction with architectural structures occurs even when interacting with nominally natural spaces, and the area in which a designer can exert and influence meaning over exponentially increases. What does it entail if the meanings uncovered in the ‘natural’ environment were deliberately placed there? This is a conundrum well-articulated by Jesper Juul:

… video games are two different things at the same time: video games are real in that they consist of real rules with which players actually interact, and in that winning or losing a game is a real event. However, when winning a game by slaying a dragon, the dragon is not a real dragon but a fictional one. To play a video game is therefore to interact with real rules while imagining a fictional world, and a video game is a set of rules as well as a fictional world.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The binary nature of games as *half-real*, part fiction and part real, means that in the act of *play* a player can, via the *mimicry* present within a game, interact simultaneously both with a fictional natural space and the real rules that underpin it.[[26]](#footnote-26)

At this point, it is useful to examine what *play* entails. Much as was articulated about authors and authorship, the definition of play is a long contested one. Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens* puts forward: ‘More striking even than the limitation as to time is the limitation as to space. All play moves and has its being within a playground marked off beforehand either materially or as a matter of course.’[[27]](#footnote-27) This is echoed by Caillois, who notes play as ‘separate from real life.’ *(Caillois 2001, Pg. 8).* Other elements include a focus on the *ruled* nature of play, and a voluntary submission to those rules. Once again, we see a focus on space. Play is in part defined by a ruled, set boundary; there is an architecture to play. This is most famously described as the *magic circle* by Huizinga, where players subscribing to the rules enter the game’s magic circle. While the magic circle has become contested in recent years with the rise of pervasive games, it is extremely useful metaphor in this instance.[[28]](#footnote-28) *(Consalvo 2007, Pg. 7).* For *Gone Home*, the magic circle is the boundaries of the house; the game occurs within the walls. For *MGSV* it is more complex, varying by scenario, but within many missions there is an interesting negotiation between the magic circle of *the mission* and the magic circle of the *game proper*. In most missions in *MGSV*, it is possible to leave the area of operation, thereby ending the mission. This calls into question what is considered the boundary of the game?

**Breaking the Rules: Usurpation of Authority by the Player**

A game’s magic circle, as we have seen, is defined by its rules as set out by the game designer and arbitrated by the game itself. However, as with any architecture it is possible for it overwritten by its users. Poremba states:

… is a game bound by the context set out by the game designer, or can it be reinterpreted by the play community? In the context of current digital games, player authorship demonstrates that, in reality, reinterpretation is simply a part of game play and agency. *(Poremba 2003).*

The implication of this is that, by the current context of digital games, it is acceptable to renegotiate the rules of the game, and in doing so change the rules of the game. This potentially allows for the boundaries of the magic circle to be drastically shifted. One such example is the concept of modding a game, allowing for additional content to change the boundaries of the play space, which is largely not participated in either *Gone Home* or *MGSV.* Another example would be the idea of escaping the map and escaping beyond the created space of the game. This is arguably a form cheating, as postulated by Consalvo, in that the player takes on such on authorial capacity as to ‘play god’. *(Consalvo 2007, Pg. 98).* An important nuance here is the distinction between *game* and *play*. Huizinga points out ‘play is older than culture’, and Sicart notes that games are only a form of play, albeit a privileged form. *(Huizinga 1949, Pg 1. and Sicart 2014, Pg. 84).* Even if a games designer holds authority over the *game* (something that we have shown to be highly contested), can they claim authority over *play?* Miguel Sicart suggests that while the games *designer* certainly can try, that mode of creation needs to be abandoned in favour of a new ecology of play, the games designer transformed instead into an architect:

Playing is negotiating a wiggle space between rules, systems, contexts, preferences, appropriation, and submission. So for this type of play, what kind of design can we apply? Designing for play means creating a setting rather than a system, a stage rather than a world, a model rather than a puzzle. Whatever is created has to be open, flexible, and malleable to allow players to appropriate, express, act and interact, make, and become part of the form itself. *(Sicart 2014, Pg. 90)*

The designer is made into a stage setter, a facilitator who does not possess the form they have created. The form of play, Sicart exhorts, belongs only to those who engage with it. Sicart’s concepts mirror significant elements also articulated by Brenda Laurel in *Computers as Theatre*. *(Laurel 1993, Pg. 14-19).* We can see designer’s attempt to encourage this renegotiated play in a number of games. A famous example is *Halo 3’s* skulls easter-eggs, obtainable only by traversing to areas seemingly outside of the map or inaccessible, an alleged breach of the magic circle.[[29]](#footnote-29) In *Gone Home*, there are achievements for speed running the game and finding a hidden Journal entry, that are realistically only possible through meta-gaming. Within the rules and architecture of a game, both examples may well be considered cheating, but by the authorial power of a player the rules of play can be remediated to allow for it.



Figure : The torture of Quiet in *Metal Gear Solid V*

**The Architecture of Torture: Removing the Player’s Agency**

Having seen the extreme end of player agency and authorial power, a powerful contrast is to look at when this agency is inhibited. Within *MGSV* the most dramatic of these incidents lies in the torture of Quiet. [Figure 4]. This graphic sequence of Quiet, bound to a chair and scantily clad, facing an anonymous torturer, masked and contrastingly concealed, who proceeds to electrocute her. Throughout the scenario the player has no agency, caught perversely between torturer and tortured. The torture is emphasised by architectural compression. Scarry says that the appropriation of the world as a weapon in the torturer’s arsenal is a crucial part of torture; a dissolution of the victim’s world, which is forcibly remediated into a signifier for torture itself.[[30]](#footnote-30) Similarly, Ivan Girina echoes Scarry: ‘The world of the tortured and her pain becomes a manifestation of the torturer’s power and agency.’[[31]](#footnote-31) This stark removal of agency, perpetrated via the constriction and violent appropriation of the world, works as a stark reminder of *auteuristic* agency. Throughout *MGSV,* Hideo Kojima is preoccupied with issues of the military-industrial complex, and the self-destructive nature of violence and revenge. Girina notes that this is a consistent theme throughout multiple *Metal Gear* titles, including *Metal Gear Solid* and *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, where torture (and its futility) are also explored.[[32]](#footnote-32) [[33]](#footnote-33) When the player’s agency is returned to them in *MGSV*, it comes with a haunting echo of Quiet’s torture. What was once an unimportant question about interrogating enemies and using lethal combat techniques becomes a lot more ethically complex. This clearly represented thematic is emblematic of an *auteur*: recognisable personality and interior meaning on obvious display. As we have already seen, this is still a problematic view of authorship for a video game, in regards to modern game design and literary theory. Kojima attempts to escape the death of the author, in part because of the nature of video games as a continuous process, and also because he deliberately curates himself as a construct and ‘personality’ outside of the bounds of his games where he ‘poetically fosters certain aspects of his life’, primarily through the realm of twitter. *(Burke 2004, Pg. 31).[[34]](#footnote-34)*

**Death of the *Auteur***

However, while Kojima may have transcended many of the issues surrounding the video game auteur, increasingly other would-be *auteurs* have not. This is in part because of postmodern deconstructionism, but it is also combined with the practicalities of modern game studios claiming authorial roles, in a similar way to the arguments of Jerome Christensen.[[35]](#footnote-35) However his ideas of meaning being defined as *productivity*, fit poorly with definitions of play, which is inherently *unproductive.* Instead, I would argue for a negotiated meaning from both the rules and architecture of games, and the negotiated play space that provides. Rather than the birth of the reader coming at the expense of the Author, I suggest instead that another author is born; dialogue rather than destruction.

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