



Mechanisms of Meaning: Absurdism and Realism in Game Design as Philosophical Manifestations in *NieR: Automata* and *Metal Gear Solid*

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Abstract. Video games have evolved into intricate mediums, allowing players to engage with profound philosophical concepts. However, the relationship between philosophical themes and gameplay mechanics remains under-explored. Despite the rise of narrative-driven games, there is a lack of comprehensive studies examining how philosophical underpinnings influence game design and player engagement. This research investigates the synergy between game design and philosophical themes, using *NieR: Automata* and the *Metal Gear Solid* series as focal points. The analysis centers on the juxtaposition of absurdism, evident in *NieR: Automata's* meta-narrative, against the realism anchoring the geopolitical narrative of the *Metal Gear Solid* series. Detailed dissection of gameplay mechanics demonstrates how these titles immerse players in philosophical dialogues, going beyond mere narrative exposition. The study reveals that game mechanics, when influenced by philosophical tenets, can enhance player engagement and foster deeper reflection. By intertwining gameplay and philosophy, games can serve as immersive platforms for both entertainment and intellectual exploration.

Keywords: Game design, narrative mechanics, absurdism, realism, player engagement

1 Introduction

The world of video games, once predominantly viewed as entertainment, has burgeoned into a domain of deep narrative and philosophical exploration. As mediums, video games inhabit a unique position between fiction and reality. Juul defines this stance as "half-real," where abstract game rule systems meld seamlessly with their fictional narratives, offering players an avenue to engage with abstract concepts tangibly [1]. Central to this "half-real" landscape is the philosophical dichotomy between absurdism and realism.

Absurdism, inspired by thinkers such as Camus, posits an inherent lack of meaning in life, suggesting that searches for purpose are inevitably in vain [2]. Conversely, realism seeks to faithfully portray life with its intricate complexities, grounded in

empirical truths [3]. This philosophical contrast manifests vividly within the gaming realm, which spans from abstract titles to those deeply rooted in realism.

Jenkins has pointed out the growing narrative sophistication in video games and their potential for fostering deeper philosophical engagements [4]. However, few studies have delved into how these philosophical themes are ingrained within the very mechanics of games. In this light, *NieR: Automata* and the *Metal Gear Solid* series emerge as pivotal subjects. These titles represent divergent points on the philosophical spectrum of absurdism and realism, making them apt subjects to understand the intertwining of narrative, philosophy, and gameplay.

Building on Bogost's argument that video games can operate as a form of "procedural rhetoric," allowing them to convey ideas and philosophy through mechanics, this paper posits a close interplay between games' philosophical underpinnings and their design choices [5]. Yet, a counter-argument exists, with some scholars like Sicart emphasizing that game mechanics should, at their core, focus on play and player experience, suggesting potential conflicts when deeply embedding philosophy [6].

Seeking to bridge this divide, our research emphasizes that games serve as potent vehicles for philosophical dialogue in today's digital era. By integrating philosophy into gameplay, games offer not only enriched entertainment but also promote deeper reflection and insight. Titles that blend philosophical themes with immersive mechanics encourage players to contemplate their position in the world, suggesting a harmonious coexistence of philosophy and gameplay that enriches both.

2 The Philosophical Foundations

Video games, beyond their entertainment value, serve as mirrors reflecting deeper philosophical paradigms. This section delves into two central pillars—absurdism and realism—that have profoundly influenced game narratives, design choices, and player engagement.

2.1 Absurdism in Philosophy and Video Games

Absurdism: The inherent conflict between man's search for meaning and the cosmos' apparent indifference. For instance, imagine the plight of Sisyphus, condemned to push a boulder up a hill for eternity, only to watch it roll back down—a futile task in an indifferent universe.

Absurdism, a philosophical belief rooted deeply in existentialist thought, traces its origins to a world grappling with post-war trauma, technological advancements, and a rapidly changing sociopolitical landscape. After the devastation of World Wars, there emerged a collective sentiment that traditional values and beliefs had been upended, leading many to question life's inherent meaning. Albert Camus, often credited as one of absurdism's primary proponents, believed in the discord between our intrinsic desire for significance and the silent, unyielding universe that seemingly offers none. He posited that this confrontation with the 'absurd'—the realization of this profound

discrepancy—is at the heart of human existence. Fast forward to our digital age, the realms of art and entertainment have continually mirrored these philosophical shifts. Video games, a medium in its nascent stage during the 20th century's latter half, soon began to evolve as a reflection of these changing societal paradigms. With technology's advancement, game developers started experimenting, pushing the boundaries of traditional storytelling, and incorporating meta-narratives—a narrative about the narrative, questioning the very fabric of its own storytelling. This approach closely echoes absurdism, highlighting the inherent conflict between a structured game environment and the undercurrents of existential ambiguity running beneath.

This intersection of absurdism and meta-narrative in video games isn't mere coincidence. As games evolved, so did their ability to engage with players on deeper, more philosophical levels. The meta-narrative serves as an ideal tool, prompting players to question not just the game's reality but, by extension, their own, thus aligning perfectly with the core tenets of absurdism. The video game industry, influenced by the broader societal and historical context, has found in absurdism a resonant philosophical grounding, offering players not just escapism but a genuine medium to grapple with life's most profound questions.

2.2 Realism in Philosophy and Video Games

Realism: A philosophical stance emphasizing the existence of objective reality independent of human cognition, distinguishing between the knower and the known.

The origins of realism stretch back to antiquity. Plato and Aristotle, two pillars of Western philosophy, broached topics that would sow the seeds for future realist thought. While Aristotle anchored the universals within tangible objects, perceivable through empirical observation, it was the modern resistance to idealism that cemented realism as a distinctive philosophical paradigm [7].

In the 20th century, notable figures like Karl Popper breathed fresh life into realist traditions. Popper's focus on falsifiability as the hallmark of scientific inquiry postulated that knowledge evolves based on empirical evidence and is ever subject to refinement [8].

Realism's evolution in the digital age, especially within video gaming, reflects a broader cultural shift. Technological advancements have allowed games to emulate real-world experiences both visually and narratively. However, the essence of realism in games is not just in replicating real-world aesthetics but in translating the complexities and dynamics of reality into interactive experiences.

Where can one find realism in video games? It's embedded in the game mechanics that simulate real-world physics, in moral choices that bear tangible consequences, and in storylines that echo our societal challenges. A prime example of this realism is evident in games like *Dishonored*. In this title, the game meticulously tracks the player's actions, specifically the number of people they choose to kill or spare. This accumulated score is referred to as 'chaos', and it dynamically influences the game's environment, narrative, and the characters' interactions (Fig.1).

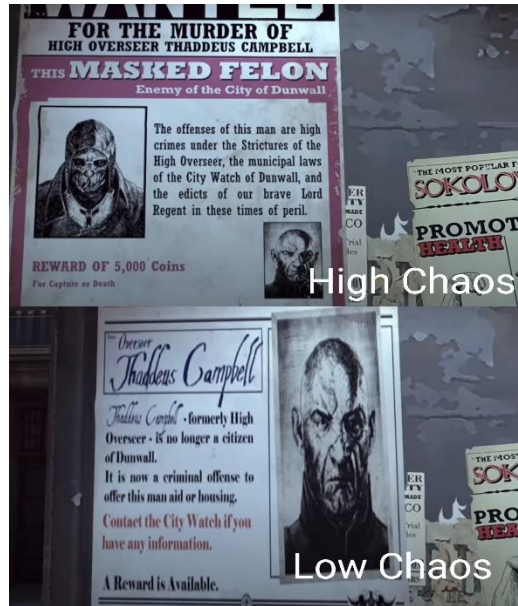


Fig. 1. High and low chaos contrast in *Dishonored*. Photo/Picture credit: Original

Moreover, realism manifests when games acknowledge and replicate the unpredictability of life, challenging players to adapt and evolve as they would outside the digital realm.

Games embracing realism cater to a maturing audience, one that seeks experiences resonant with their understanding of the world. This audience desires more than mere escapism; they seek reflection, introspection, and an opportunity to grapple with meaningful scenarios [9]. As the demarcation between the gaming world and reality blurs, players find themselves not just navigating a virtual landscape but confronting dilemmas, decisions, and situations emblematic of their external world.

3 *NieR: Automata*: A Deep Dive into Absurdism in Gameplay

Yoko Taro's *NieR: Automata* masterfully weaves an intricate tapestry of absurdism, existential thought, and meta-narrative techniques to draw players into a contemplative exploration of meaning and existence.

3.1 Narrative Exploration and Existential Themes

NieR: Automata's meta-narrative takes players beyond a linear story; it is an iterative experience that forces reconsideration of previous perceptions. Players don't merely progress through the narrative but relive it from different vantage points, uncovering

layers that question the nature of reality and storytelling itself. This cyclical encounter with the narrative, especially with its multiple endings, mirrors Camus' concept of the eternal return, the cyclical nature of life and struggle without definitive resolution.

A critical revelation in the game is the extinction of humanity. This realization becomes even more profound when juxtaposed against the fervent efforts of the androids to champion human civilization's cause. Their struggle, now seemingly in vain, evokes a poignant sense of the absurd—continuous effort in the face of apparent meaninglessness.

Analyzing Protagonists' Motivations. Diving into the motivations of the game's primary characters uncovers a rich tapestry of existential thoughts:

2B: As an executioner model, her initial stoicism is reflective of her duty-bound existence. However, as the narrative unfolds, her relationship with 9S brings forth complexities of emotion, duty, and free will. Her deep-seated anguish when she's forced, repeatedly across the game's different loops, to eliminate 9S after he comes close to forbidden truths speaks to the conflicts of preordained destiny versus personal desire.

9S: His journey from an inquisitive scanner model to a being consumed by rage and despair underscores the existential crisis of facing uncomfortable truths. The realization that his existence and memories are merely tools manipulated by a higher order deeply resonates with existential themes of meaning, purpose, and authenticity.

A2: As a renegade android, A2 showcases disillusionment and defiance against her creators. Her chosen solitude, driven by the betrayal she feels, echoes themes of alienation and the rejection of externally imposed values.

These protagonists, each imbued with their own motivations and aspirations, serve as philosophical conduits for the player. Their decisions and dynamics, framed within the overarching story, challenge players to contemplate profound themes of existence, identity, and autonomy in a universe that often seems oblivious to individual endeavors. Delving deeper into these notions, let us explore some illustrative examples.

The E ending, known as "End of YoRHa", shatters gaming norms, presenting players with a seemingly unwinnable bullet-hell sequence symbolizing the YoRHa project's data deletion. The challenge highlights individual effort's seeming futility. Players, bombarded with introspective questions, reevaluate their role in the game and life itself. Yet, the ending's beauty emerges as global players send encouraging messages, with their saved data offering collaborative assistance. Overcoming the challenge, players can sacrifice their saved data for others, encapsulating themes of unity in adversity, individuality in a vast universe, and the essence of altruism.

From a philosophical standpoint, the E ending is a potent manifestation of existential defiance. While the universe (or the game, in this context) may seem indifferent or even adversarial, there's an intrinsic human (or player) desire to find meaning, to connect, and to aid one another. The E ending doesn't just conclude a game; it offers an experiential insight into resilience, hope, and community. It suggests that even in the face of overwhelming odds and existential crises, there exists a possibility for unity, understanding, and collective transcendence.

3.2 Philosophy Embodied in Gameplay Mechanics

In *NieR: Automata*, every design choice and gameplay mechanic seem meticulously crafted to draw players deeper into the web of absurdist philosophy, inviting them to confront existential dilemmas head-on.

Relentless Respawn Mechanic and the Never-ending Cycle. One of the most striking philosophical quandaries posed by the game comes right at the onset. 2B's proclamation, "Everything that lives are designed to end. We are perpetually trapped in a never-ending spiral of life and death," is not merely a narrative statement; it's an ethos that permeates the very mechanics of the game.

When players traverse the intertwined stories of 2B and 9S, they're immediately met with a palpable sense of déjà vu, journeying through once-explored territories and reliving the same pivotal moments. This intentional replication isn't a mere design redundancy. Instead, it serves as a manifestation of existentialist musings on the cyclical nature of existence and the Sisyphean challenges that come with it. By revisiting the same events, players are submerged into the profound ennui felt by the protagonists, a weariness borne out of ceaselessly repeated struggles that may seemingly lack purpose or end. Beyond this, experiencing these narratives through varied lenses not only adds layers to the story but also reinforces the existentialist notion that truth and reality are not absolute; they shift and morph based on individual perspectives and experiences. In the game, it is the player's mindset about the game context that changes as the novelty of the first cycle of the game wears off.

The Act of Self-Destruction and Finding Warmth amidst Absurdity. In *NieR: Automata*, the self-destruct mechanic isn't just an attractive gameplay feature because it allows a character's clothes to burst open; it serves as a profound metaphor for the characters' deep-seated internal battles and the overarching existential themes of the narrative. As players grapple with the haunting choice to initiate a self-destruct sequence, they are steered by 9S. But here lies the narrative brilliance: when players resist the urge to activate the sequence repeatedly, 9S, in a moment of silent rebellion, covertly disables the self-detonation mechanism.

This subtle yet significant action from 9S speaks volumes. Throughout the game, the relationship between 2B and 9S evolves, marked by shared battles, intimate conversations, and moments of vulnerability. Their bond becomes a beacon of solace amidst the bleak backdrop of their existence. By choosing to override the self-destruction command, 9S is not only acting on his personal connection with 2B but is also challenging the cold, deterministic programming that defines their world. It symbolizes that, even within a universe steeped in the frigid logic of machines and overshadowed by existential bleakness, there remain pockets of warmth and humanity. Such moments assert that amidst the vastness of nihilism, genuine connections and emotional bonds can offer respite and even resistance.

Consciousness, Bodies, and the Question of Self. *NieR: Automata* constantly challenges the player's perception of identity and selfhood. The characters, essentially amalgamations of data, operate in a realm where bodies are interchangeable and transient. The gameplay mechanic of uploading data at save points, which allows the transfer of consciousness between bodies, raises poignant questions. If one's entire essence — memories, emotions, experiences — can be transferred or even edited like a mere file, what does it mean to be 'you'? Does the concept of 'self' hold any weight in such a scenario? Is identity anchored to the mind, the body, or is it an ever-evolving synthesis of both? By allowing players to grapple with these questions through gameplay, the game turns a typically mundane act, like saving progress, into a deeply introspective experience.

In conclusion, the brilliance of *NieR: Automata* lies not just in its captivating narrative but in how seamlessly it merges story with gameplay. Every mechanic, every choice, serves as a mirror reflecting profound existential themes, urging players to not merely play, but to introspect and question.

4 *Metal Gear Solid* Series: Realism in the Gaming Realm

Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid* series distinguishes itself in the gaming world with its rooted realism, weaving intricate narratives in the backdrop of real-world geopolitics and warfare. Instead of mere entertainment, *Metal Gear Solid* saga offers a reflective lens into global politics and the morality of individual choices. Through this exploration, we'll discern how this realism isn't just limited to the story but also intricately entwined in the gameplay mechanics.

4.1 Realistic Narrative Rooted in Geopolitics and Tangible Conflicts

In *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker*, the layers of geopolitics, personal narratives, and strategic gameplay create a tapestry that's deeply rooted in the realities of the Cold War era. Through its intricate storyline and gameplay, the game offers both an entertaining experience and an insightful exploration of a crucial period in world history.

Nuclear Deterrence Theory in Action. The *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* narrative, set in Central America in November 1974, delves deep into the intricacies of nuclear deterrence theory. The character, Hot Coldman, representing a hawkish stance within the US military, casts doubt on the efficacy of traditional deterrence. This concept fundamentally relies on three principles: the possession of nuclear weapons, the restraint from using them, and a guaranteed retaliation if threatened.

A poignant real-life incident that dovetails with Coldman's skepticism is the decision made by Vasili Alexandrovich Arkhipov, a Soviet naval officer, during the heart of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Aboard the Soviet submarine B-59, Arkhipov resisted authorizing a nuclear torpedo's launch against US warships, despite the crew

believing they were under siege. This critical decision is widely regarded as one that possibly averted a full-scale nuclear confrontation [10].

Coldman's assertions in the game mirror real-world dilemmas tied to the principle of assured retaliation. While deterrence theory posits that guaranteed retaliation would deter a primary strike, the unpredictability shown during Arkhipov's decision amidst the Cuban Missile Crisis underscores the capriciousness of human judgment under duress. His choice was grounded in the realization of the cataclysmic aftermath a retaliatory attack would initiate, not merely for the primary adversaries but for global civilization. The game masterfully encapsulates this unpredictability and moral quandary, interrogating the soundness of a deterrence strategy contingent on predictable human retaliation.

Central America as the Strategic Chessboard for Peace Walker Deployment.

"The 'Peace Walker' in the *Metal Gear Solid* series isn't just a futuristic fantasy; it's a strikingly realistic representation of the evolution of nuclear deterrence. Designed as an autonomous nuclear weapon system, it boasts bipedal mobility, enabling it to navigate varied landscapes from the thickets of dense jungles to the bustling streets of urban centers. What truly sets it apart from conventional nuclear platforms, and emphasizes its real-world significance, is its advanced AI. This artificial intelligence can independently decide to launch a retaliatory nuclear strike. Such an autonomous decision-making process means that even in the event of compromised command structures, retaliation is guaranteed, reflecting the paramount importance of assured response in nuclear deterrence strategies.

Within this realistic framework, the choice of Central America as the backdrop for 'Peace Walker' isn't merely coincidental:

Geographical Proximity to the U.S.: Central America, being closer to the U.S., acts as an immediate strategic threat. For the U.S. during the Cold War, a mobile nuclear platform, like Peace Walker, stationed within striking distance, would be a major deterrent, echoing the psychological effects of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

The Evolution of Mobile Nuclear Deterrence and Central America's Geopolitical Landscape: Traditional nuclear deterrence strategies largely revolved around fixed silos or foreseeable bomber pathways. However, "Peace Walker" introduces a shift, mirroring real-world evolutions towards mobile platforms, such as nuclear submarines, which emphasized less predictability and enhanced survivability. The 1970s Central America, characterized by political upheavals ranging from coups to revolutions, provides a fitting setting for this. Here, "Peace Walker" is not just a weapon; it becomes a symbol of superpower interventions, adding layers to the ongoing geopolitical game.

Melding Technology with Environment for Concealment: Central America's dense rainforests, much like the rugged terrains of Eastern Europe and Asia during the Cold War, offer natural concealment benefits. They don't just serve "Peace Walker" as a shield but amplify the challenges for intelligence operations, reminding players of the tactical considerations that real-world landscapes impose.

In positioning "Peace Walker" within Central America, the game masterfully juxtaposes fictionalized military technology with the tangible strategic dilemmas of

the Cold War, underscoring a philosophy of reality in warfare and how advancements in military technology might impact political power dynamics, societal stability, and individual agency.

Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker is not an isolated example of the *Metal Gear Solid* universe touching on the complex dynamics of geopolitical and international tensions. Whether it's the Soviet war in Afghanistan during 1984 in *Metal Gear Solid: The Phantom Pain* or, as depicted later in *Metal Gear Solid: Guns of the Patriots*, the escalating third-party forces and shadow governments that are distorting the world's situation, all of these works offer insightful explorations into the reality of the national conflicts that have taken place and prompt reflection with strong logical hypotheses about the evolving power dynamics.

4.2 The Extension of Realism in Game Mechanics

In video games, mechanics shape how players navigate and engage within the game's universe. The *Metal Gear Solid* series, renowned for its geopolitical narratives, aligns its gameplay mechanics to these themes, offering tangible challenges. By doing so, players become more than observers; they actively grapple with the complex geopolitical scenarios presented.

Strategy Over Firepower. *Metal Gear Solid's* gameplay often rewards careful planning and strategy over indiscriminate combat. This mirrors real-world military operations where strategy often trumps sheer firepower. As a result, players are encouraged to think critically about their approach, fostering a deeper connection to the on-screen actions and their potential ramifications.

Resource Management. In titles such as *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, the management of resources, personnel, and base development is not just a gameplay feature, but a reflection of realist philosophy. Within the game, players are tasked with making decisions on how best to allocate their resources, mirroring the real-world challenges of nation-states. The emphasis on maintaining supply lines, ensuring troop morale, and acquiring vital assets can be seen as a representation of the realist emphasis on power, security, and the constant competition for limited resources. This constant balancing act of resource management in the game reinforces the realist view that actors, whether they are states or individuals, must navigate a world of scarce resources and perpetual threats, making strategic decisions to safeguard their continued existence and dominance [11].

Decision-Making within a Fixed Narrative. While many modern games employ branching narratives with multiple endings, the *Metal Gear Solid* series distinctly adheres to a single, fixed narrative. This design choice serves several purposes:

Inevitability of War: The unchanging outcome in *Metal Gear Solid* often showcases the tragic and inevitable consequences of war and conflict. Even as players

make countless decisions throughout the game, the broader narrative remains unchanged, illustrating the inexorability of certain geopolitical outcomes. This mirrors real-world scenarios where, despite individual efforts and choices, larger geopolitical machinations and historical forces can dictate the course of events.

Historical Fidelity: By adhering to a single narrative, the *Metal Gear Solid* series can maintain a consistent storyline that aligns more closely with real-world events and their interpretations. This approach lends an air of authenticity and gravitas, as players experience events that, while fictionalized, resonate with actual historical narratives.

Guided Reflection on War and Conflict: A fixed narrative allows the game developers to guide players through a carefully curated storyline, designed to provoke specific reflections on the nature of war, espionage, and geopolitics. Instead of exploring myriad potential outcomes, players are led through a singular, deeply impactful journey, where they confront the consequences of war, the morality of espionage, and the weight of leadership.

This steadfast adherence to a singular narrative in *Metal Gear Solid*, far from limiting player engagement, deepens it. It serves as a poignant reminder of the realities of war and geopolitics, where individual actions, no matter how significant, often unfold within larger, immovable frameworks. The weight of this realization, coupled with the intricate gameplay mechanics, reinforces the series' commitment to melding entertainment with a profound reflection on the nature of conflict in our world.

5 Realism and Absurdism: The Intersection of Philosophy and Game

NieR: Automata and *Metal Gear Solid*, though both intellectually challenging games, navigate players through different philosophical terrains. The former delves into the realm of existentialism, while the latter unravels the complexities of real-world ethical quandaries.

In *NieR: Automata*, due to its entirely fictional world, art that creates a profound sense of alienation, and the cold robotic settings, players are plunged into an existential void—a vast space of moral ambiguity. Because the protagonist's characterization seems to lack "humanity" at the beginning, the guidance received by the players during the game lacks clear right or wrong, good or evil. The humans, who once could define good and evil, have been extinct in the game. All the tasks and slogans about "For the glory of mankind" are merely directives from superiors, lacking actual power. This embodies the Absurdist notion that life's inherent meaninglessness requires us to create our purpose. The game's challenge isn't just to endure the void, but to rebel against it, reminiscent of Albert Camus' concept of the "absurd hero".

This feeling of emptiness both liberates and confounds. It's liberating because players are not bound by any pre-defined political or human moral constraints. They can ruthlessly eliminate enemies without contemplating the motives behind their actions, mirroring the main characters' daily routines. Players won't face objections

from their in-game teammates for such cruelty, as these teammates are robots as well. The confusion arises because the game lacks clear moral guidance. The endless cycles do not bestow profound societal expectations upon players or characters. Thus, players face the possibility that their actions, no matter how well or ill-intentioned, might lack any broader significance or impact. This void reflects existentialist philosophy, suggesting that life lacks inherent purpose, and meaning isn't something that's given but must be constructed or chosen by the individual. The challenge of the game is not to navigate a predefined moral landscape but to create a pattern that adapts to the chaos.

In contrast, *Metal Gear Solid* provides players with a tangible maze instead of a void. This maze is intricate, filled with paths representing different ideologies, political situations, and moral choices. Each path exists in our world and is present in the education and learning of countries based on various ideologies. These paths either lead to real-world outcomes or further extensions based on reality. Every step taken in this maze bears the mark of tangible reality and possesses significant actual power.

This tangible power both constrains and guides players to new directions. Players cannot transcend reality and will be bound by the education they received since childhood, leading to biases in their gameplay. For instance, someone who grew up in a socialist country might be irritated by parts of the game that criticize the Soviet Union. However, the game doesn't favor any country or war. Ideologies aren't black and white, but varying shades of gray. This forces players to reconsider their education, the world around them, the authenticity of societal grooming, and the duality of media propaganda. These reflections prompt players to reassess their life stances and moral frameworks, learning to navigate them better.

NieR: Automata constantly challenges players' understanding of reality, blurring the lines between genuine existence and simulated facades. In contrast, *Metal Gear Solid* delves into the domain of political machinations, deceit, and influential propaganda, emphasizing the malleability of perception when dictated by the powerful. The former stimulates internal rumination on actions' inherent value, while the latter underscores the real-world implications and aftermaths of decisions.

6 Broader Implications and the Gaming Community's Perspective

Video games have transcended the boundaries of mere entertainment platforms to evolve into interactive mediums with the potential for profound philosophical exploration. However, this evolution has sparked debates within the gaming community.

6.1 The Debate: Gameplay vs. Philosophical Undertones

Balancing engaging gameplay with deep philosophical narratives has consistently been a point of contention in game design. Central to this debate is whether video

games should focus on playability or deeply embed philosophical layers without compromising the core gaming experience.

Bogost sees games as tools not just for entertainment, but also for artistic and rhetorical engagement [12]. This view suggests that narratives can elevate the gaming experience, turning it from a mere pastime into an art form that encourages reflection and contemplation.

Many gamers and reviewers appreciate titles like *NieR: Automata* and *Metal Gear Solid*, particularly for their dense philosophical elements that amplify the gameplay. This added depth turns the experience into a philosophical odyssey.

However, concerns emerge from sections of the community, fearing that excessive philosophical narratives might overshadow the primary gaming goal: entertainment. Gee believes games can be mediums for experiential learning, harmoniously blending critical thinking and entertainment [13]. The key lies in achieving a balance where both philosophical themes and gameplay mechanics coexist, enriching each other.

6.2 The Evolving Role of Video Games in Philosophical Discourse

Once perceived as mere leisure tools, video games have transformed as their narratives have grown in depth, introducing a potential for genuine philosophical engagement.

Sicart emphasizes that video games are not just frivolous activities; they possess inherent ethical and philosophical dimensions [14]. Games such as *NieR: Automata* and *Metal Gear Solid* exemplify this notion. These games offer more than intricate storylines; they challenge players' beliefs and moral compasses. This shift in narrative design has broader societal implications, these narratives are tailored to encapsulate multifaceted themes and concepts. Games become conversational platforms, spurring players to discuss and reflect on topics from existentialism to socio-political dynamics.

With this evolution, games are repositioned in societal context. They emerge as intersections of art, entertainment, and philosophy. The blending of play, introspection, and profound discourse is becoming more seamless.

The future of video games appears promising, merging artistic representation with thought-provoking narratives. Games will likely be not only sources of amusement but also mediums for introspection, understanding, and resonance with real-life concerns and existential dilemmas.

In conclusion, the synthesis of gameplay with profound philosophical narratives is a significant shift in the gaming landscape. This progression mirrors society's aspiration to weave entertainment with enriching discourse. Video games are poised to push boundaries, redefining interactive storytelling's essence.

7 Conclusion

The intersection of gameplay and philosophical discourse in contemporary video games illustrates a transformative moment in the medium's evolution. Historically

relegated to the realm of simple entertainment, video games have burgeoned into platforms for deep contemplation and introspection, becoming as impactful and relevant as traditional literature and cinema.

Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid*, with its grounding in realism, and *NieR: Automata*'s embrace of the absurd, underscore the potential for video games to tackle intricate philosophical conundrums. Their narratives, imbued with a dance between the absurd and the real, serve as testimonies to the depth and breadth of contemporary game design. By navigating the dichotomies of entertainment and introspection, these titles have bridged divides, marrying amusement with a profound sense of reflection.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the broader context of these games within the gaming community. The infusion of philosophy into gameplay has sparked fervent debates about the delicate balance of playability and narrative depth. To realize the medium's fullest potential, there must be a harmonious coexistence of both elements, ensuring games remain accessible while provoking critical thought.

Looking forward, we envision a gaming realm where these philosophical undertones are not mere additions, but foundational elements that shape the core of the interactive experience. Such a future promises a new wave of informed gamers, who, armed with a controller, embark on journeys of self-discovery, intellectual challenge, and engagement with the world's most pressing questions.

As we move into this new era, it is incumbent upon game designers, scholars, and the global community to foster an environment where video games continue to evolve and flourish. This aspiration not only enhances the medium's legitimacy but also positions it as a pivotal tool for discourse in the 21st century. The canvas of interactive storytelling is vast, and we are only beginning to uncover its true potential. Let us embrace this journey with open minds and a shared vision for a future where games are celebrated as a harmonious blend of art, entertainment, and profound philosophical exploration.

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