

# “Deja Vu”, an excerpt of Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes

By: Don Evans



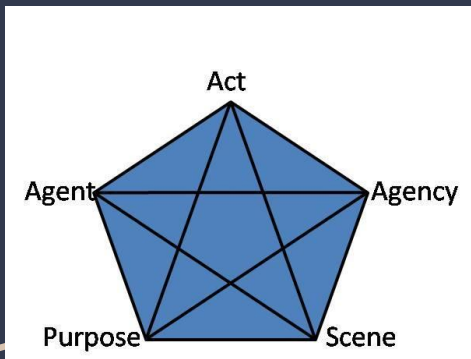
Today I will be analyzing “Deja Vu”, an excerpt from a video game called Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes created by video game designer Hideo Kojima.

Gaming is often discussed at length in terms of immersion (where the player of the game feels like they are an active piece of the narrative and a meaningful part of the game’s world). However, beyond immersion, there are rhetorical messages that game designers try to communicate with the player.

To understand what perhaps one of these messages mean, I will draw on Kenneth's Burke's dramatism pentad for my research, along with two of Jean Beaudrillard's four stages of reality. I've chosen Deja Vu specifically because I believe the message to the player is more readily accessible. I've also recently experienced playing it, and thought it would be fun and interesting to analyze. Through Dramatism and its effectiveness especially in breaking down narratives, we will extrapolate the

deeper messages found within Deja Vu, and to come to a greater understanding of what Kojima wanted his ideal player to gain by completing and ruminating upon this experience.

# Burke's Dramatic Pentad



ACT: What happens or takes place

SCENE: Context or background of the action

AGENT: Person or persons who perform the act

AGENCY: Means through which action takes place

PURPOSE: Reason an action took place

Before we get into the rhetorical situation, we'll briefly review Burke's Pentad.

The pentad is five ways of examining any situation rhetorically. Act is what happens or takes place. Scene is the context or background of the action. Agent is a person or persons who perform the act. Agency is the means through which action takes place.

And purpose is the reason an action took place. (Borchers, pg. 181) Each of these can be connected one to another and help us obtain information about our scenario.

Additionally, if we take into consideration two of Baudrillard's four stages of reality (Borchers, pg. 325), we can pull alternative meanings from the excerpt. This will

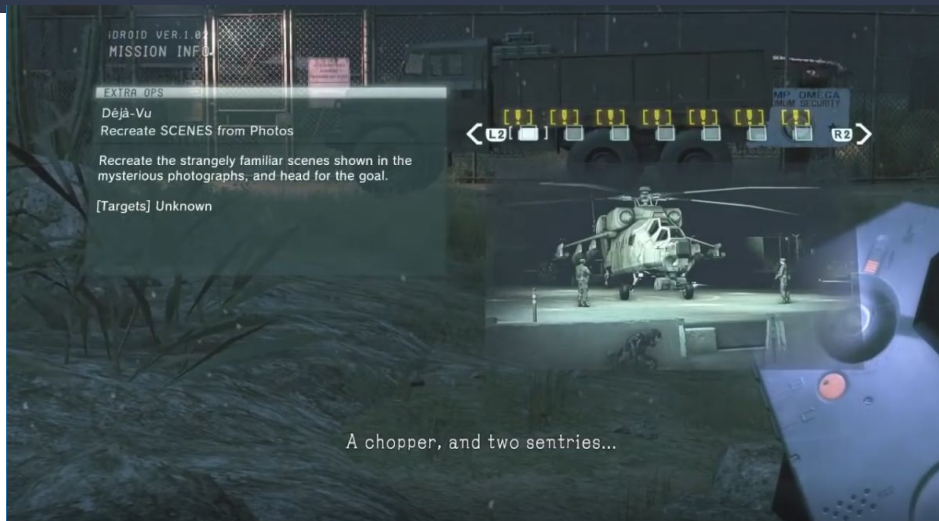
become more clear as we examine the situation. First though, a backdrop of history:

# Ground Zeroes



Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes, was released as a feature filled, first look into Kojima's next title, the soon to be named Phantom Pain. The main character, Big Boss or Snake, infiltrates a top secret military black site, and is tasked with completing various objectives such as "rescue the P.O.W.'s", "Destroy the Anti-Air Turrets", "Take down the Targets", and "collect the intel". However, there is one mission which stands out from among these, and it's a mission called "Deja Vu", a mission that's only unlocked after you've collected a certain amount of secret items hidden throughout the game.

# Deja Vu



Deja Vu was very much created for the fans of the franchise, particularly those who played one of the first entries in the series, the original Metal Gear Solid released on the Playstation console in 1998. In Deja Vu, Snake is tasked with recreating scenes from photos given to him by one of his commanders, Miller. The photos he is to “recreate” are all references to particular scenes and events that happened in the first game. While recreating these scenes will be fun for the longtime fans, those who pay close attention to the details hidden amongst these scenes will notice that Kojima is trying to get the players attention and send them a message.

# The Pentad and the Narrative

1st Stage of Reality: It's just a video game

2nd Stage of Reality: It's a vehicle for a message

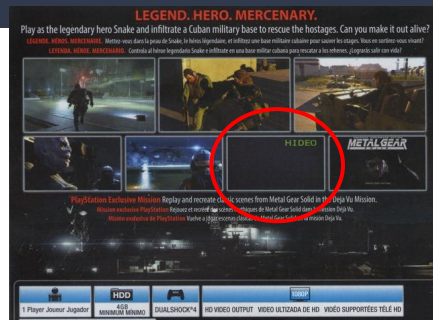
## Narrative standpoint

Act - What happens	Recreate Scenes from the photos
Scene - Context	Miller gives Snake the mission
Agent - Who	Snake (recreates the scenes)
Agency - Means through which action takes place	Scene Photos show clues of where to go
Purpose - Reason Action took place	Gather intel on the enemy base

Deja Vu, at the first stage of reality, suggests that it is as it appears, nothing more than a video game, and this fact is confirmed through the pentad:

Now, if we examine Deja Vu at Baudrillard's second stage of reality, suggesting that the game is perhaps masking a reality, we are met with an entirely different perspective with potential for rhetorical messages to bloom. We'll talk more about these relationships as we come across them. Kojima as a game designer wants to make these messages as easy to access as possible, and thus, he tries to get the players attention beyond the game, by breaking the players immersion. He wants the player to know they are playing a game and that there's something more to gain from playing rather than just consuming it as a basic form of entertainment.

# Conversing with the player to break immersion



Snake, it should be on the back of the disc case.

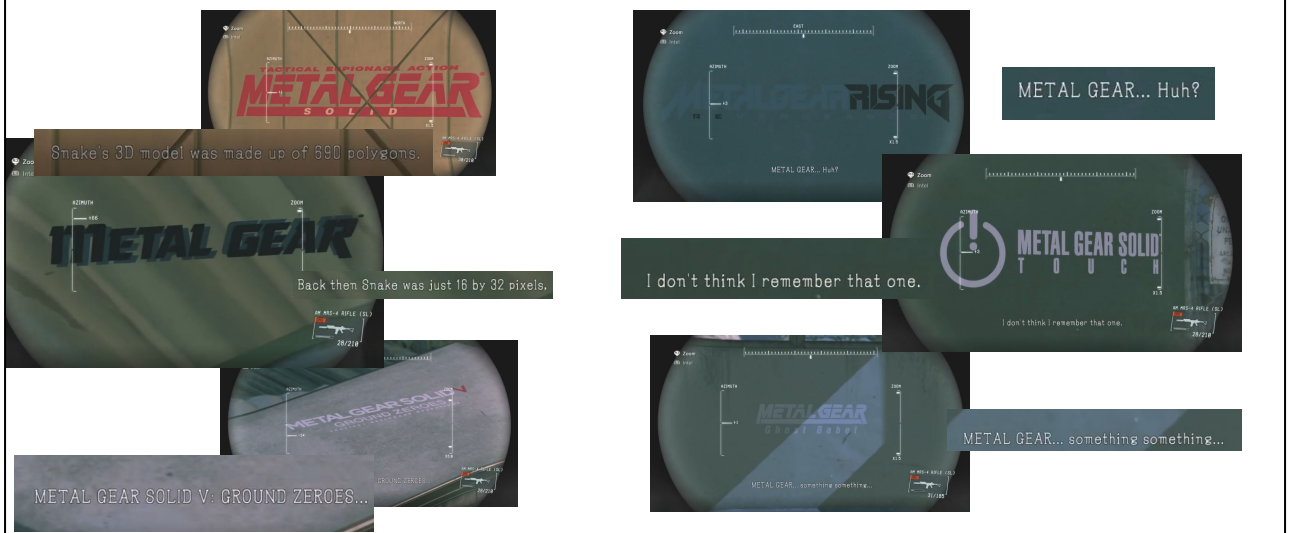


The first instance in Deja Vu where the player's immersion is broken could be when supporting character Miller is talking to Snake about the photographs. When he gets to the last one, Miller remarks "Hm, the last photo's missing. Oh, sorry, I forgot it. Snake, it should be on the back of the disc case. Or what about the manual? There's gotta be a clue somewhere". The player becomes aware that Miller is not talking to Snake, but to them. Snake in this moment is no longer the agent in our pentad breakdown; the player is the agent. Miller, again is the scene, except this time creating a break in player immersion. Kojima continues to use symbolism to keep the player thinking beyond the game world, through comments from the characters, and real world markings and logos found throughout the military site. Again, the purpose of this is to continue to keep the player in a state of broken immersion, engaged and thinking about the game's subtle messages and their consequences on the real world,

which we'll get into soon.



# Logos/Markings/Symbols of Previous Games



The player might have noticed at this point in the mission that logos of previous Metal Gear titles are located all around the military site, again, breaking the players immersion. If Snake looks through his binoculars on some of these logos, Miller will triumphantly announce the games title, tell fun facts about the game in question, like how many polygons or pixels Snake is made of in that game, or say a quotable line from the title. There are some game logos however, that Miller will not comment on. Stringing together the commonalities of logos the characters talk about v.s. Not, we can conclude that if the game was **not** directed by Hideo Kojima, Miller will not comment, and instead react in an unusual manner saying lines like “Metal Ge-What?!”, “Looks like nothing special”, “Metal Gear, something something”, “I don’t think I remember that one” and “Hm, guess that can’t be right.” Only games directed by Kojima will give a positive response from the characters. At the first stage of reality,

this narrative would make no sense. Snake, a military operative, running around an enemy base appreciating or not appreciating graffiti with his friend Miller? But if we observe the events from the second stage of reality and assume it's a vehicle for a message, taking a step back to look through the mind of the player, not the characters, perhaps we can glean some meaning from this? What could it mean for the player that only specific symbols elicit a positive response? Is it just that Kojima is being egotistical and wanted the player to know that if he did not direct it, it is not a good Metal Gear game? No. (although aside, that tends to be true, but that's not the message being conveyed here)

# Erasing Symbols : Agent -> Act -> Scene ?



But every one of them  
will always be with you.

You might be able to erase the markings,  
but the memories will never disappear...

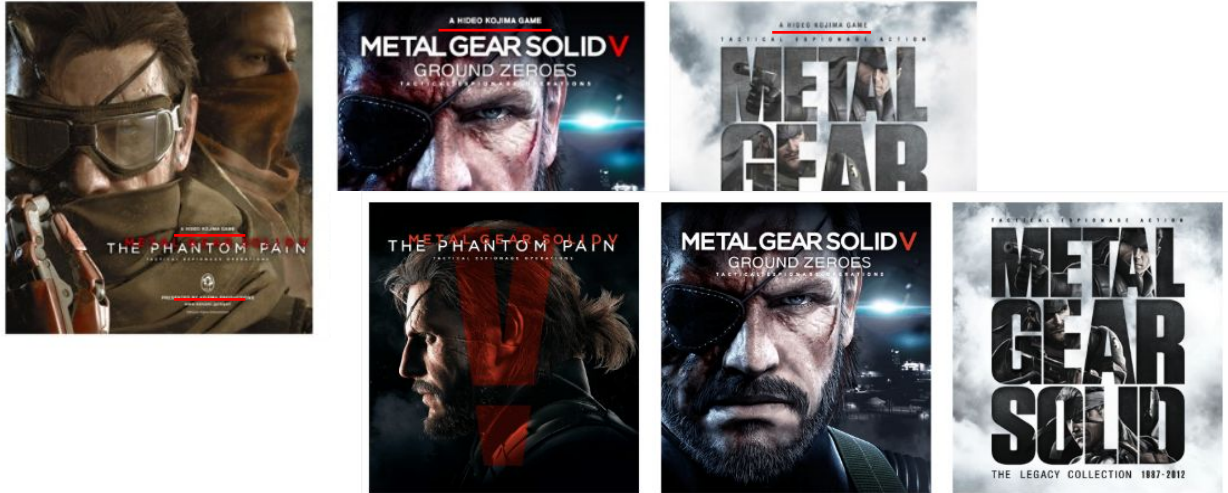
There's a particular storage shed where Snake can pick up an AM MRS-4 Rifle, equipped with a black light. Besides the gun, is the logo for the original Metal Gear Solid. When the light is aimed at the Metal Gear Solid logo, it disappears. Miller gives some dialog and urges Snake to find more symbols. As Snake erases more symbols (or markings), Miller gives us fascinating dialog: "You might be able to erase the markings, but the memories will never disappear..." Now, if Snake attempts to erase a marking categorized in the group of titles not directed by Kojima, the logo will not disappear. Similarly to before with the contrast between fact and No fact markings, Miller will speak with alternative dialog such as: "Shining the light does nothing, huh?" Markings identified as being directed by Kojima, are given facts and positive character dialog, yet are able to be erased. Markings identified as not directed by Kojima do not elicit a positive response, yet cannot be erased. What can it

all mean? The player (agent) is causing the disappearance of markings (act) perhaps because it's just another facet of the game (scene)? But what is the purpose, where is the message? How do we conclude the pentad ratio of agent, act, scene, etc.?

After the player has erased all of the markings Miller concludes with "You did it, you erased all the markings. But every one of them will always be with you." With that, I'll explain what I think is going on here.

I believe that the player, as Snake erases the markings, is a symbolic message from Kojima, that in the near future he will be fired from his parent company, Konami. And that Konami plans to erase all traces of Hideo Kojima from their company. Now, here's why I think that:

# Warnings for the Future



Deja Vu was playable on 1 May 2014. A year later in March 2015, Konami, Kojima's employer, began erasing Hideo's name, and production studio (something that has been a staple of all of his games) off of the marketing and promotional materials for the upcoming Phantom Pain. On 9 October 2015, it's publicly announced that Kojima had been fired from Konami. Konami keeps all of the rights to the Metal Gear Solid franchise, a series that Kojima spent his entire life creating. It was a shocking event. And I think it gives light to the existence of the oddities included in that strange Deja Vu mission in Ground Zeroes.

Deja Vu is very clearly meant to mean something to the player. It's a love letter from the games creator to his fans, elegantly warning those who have supported him about a future where Kojima and his particular style of Metal Gear Solid games will no longer exist. He has enjoyed creating for such an incredible community that has

continued to love his stories for over a decade and here, he shows it. In *Deja Vu, Snake*, owned by parent company Konami, erases the very titles and works which made him recognizable worldwide. In its rhetoric we find the message, that the bonds and memories formed between the player, the creator, and the games will never disappear. I find it all very poetic.

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That's it. Thank you