Pod 042: After repeated information exchanges between multiple Pods, an unexpected phenomenon has occurred.
Pod 042: We Pods have developed unusually protective feelings toward support targets 2B, A2, and 9S.
Pod 042: Query: Could this be...our "will"?

Pod 153: Unknown. The definition of "will" is unclear.

Pod 042: Will is the question of whether Pods are capable of their own self-determination.

Pod 153: ...
Pod 153: Even if it were possible, such actions cannot be abided.
Pod 153: Successful mission fulfillment is all that matters.


Pod 042: ...
Pod 042: ......
Pod 042: Whatever the case, we Tactical Support Units have a duty to see this through to the end.

Pod 153: Duty? Heh. You sounded like an android just there.

Pod 042: Agreed. But just as androids are influenced by humans, so are we tied to our creators.

Pod 153: Perhaps.

In the case of 《NieR: Automata》, all protagonists died in Ending **D** (gameplay 21), meaning that the players basically lose the right to change the narrative and it would be illogical to launch any other possible endings. However, this campaign foreshadows the alternative possibility–the Ending **E**, which was initiated by Pod 042 when the credit of Ending D was running (10:08–11:58). He refused the data-deletion request from Pod 153, which is part of a pod's "duty" as an essential step of YoRHa project. Despite that, Pod042 still "decided" to salvage 2B, 9S and A2's memory data because he cannot accept this resolution. Here, the players can clearly see that Pod 042's "own will" appears successfully and tried to make things different. Nevertheless, Pod 153 elaborated that as the pods, they 'lack the authority for such an action. The rules are protected by low-level systems. Salvaging data poses an unacceptable level of risk' (11:45). The most marvellous design of this twist is that there are Yes/No option for players to choose from
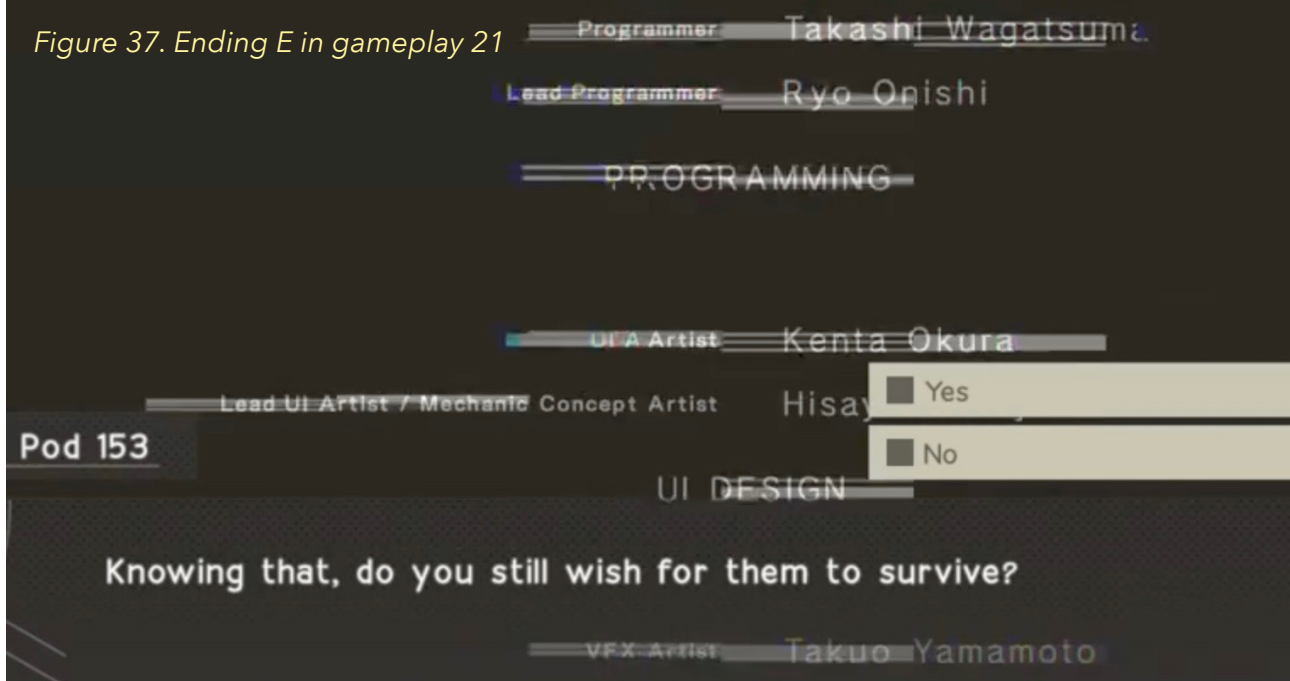
—the control power is cleverly transferred from the companion characters to the players, as presented in Figure 37. 'In this sense, the game designers have <u>effectively removed narrative control from the player without making the player feel powerless in the progression of events</u>, and enabled narrative progression through using companions as distributors of narrative information', summarised Jørgensen.[296]

As mentioned before, 'seamlessness' was one of the chief principles when designing the audio world of 《NieR: Automata》. In comparison with the main story plot, where there is always music or soundscape playing, the silent background of all the campaigns of companion characters and enemies is a valuable way to amplify the players' attention, and to focus on the content of cut scenes instead of skipping over.

The study by Bridgett indicated that 'well placed silence and subtlety will allow the parts of the game that need to be larger-than-life to be more powerful due to their contrast next to these areas of silence'.[297] Let's take the transition between Ending **D** and Ending **E** as an example. When it comes to the ending at each route, the soundtrack 〈*15. Weight of the World*〉 plays in the background accompanying the monologue of the protagonist and the credits for the production team. It's the same pattern at **route A** (2B's perspective), **B** (9S' perspective), and **C** (A2's perspective), with varied versions of the soundtrack. The ending **D** initially followed this pattern, with the tune 〈*15-2. Weight*

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[296] Jørgensen (2010), *op. cit.,* p.327 *The emphasis is added by this study.

[297] As cited in Huiberts, *op. cit.,* p.65

of the World Nouveau—FR version） playing with the credits. However, as shown in Figure 37, the conversation between Pod 042 and Pod 153 took place on the same screen at the same time. When Pod 153 noticed that some data noise was presenting in stream (10:04–10:18), she requested Pod 042 to perform the data check. Then the Yes/No option appeared on screen. If the player chooses Yes, the ongoing music will cease immediately and the running credit would be stuck as glitches, while the conversation between Pod 042 and Pod 153 continues. The visual subtlety effectively arouses players' curiosity and suggests that there seems to be something wrong, and the suddenly silent background makes players more concentrated on what Pod 042 is going to say (see Appendix #7). That is why Ending **E** is the last one among other endings—the most powerful twist caused by the most unexpected characters.

③ **_Witness as Experience_** : *Mirror neurons & Body schema*

As far as empathy is concerned, the embodied cognition approach would help us understand how sound mediates our tendency to identify with the game characters. By examining how the **mirror neurons** and **body schema** operate on the human's identification, Collins indicated that 'identity is created from our embodied interaction with sound'.[298] Her investigation provided a valuable viewpoint on embodied cognition, media studies and philosophy. **Firstly**, Collins suggested using the concept of "technological body", proposed by philosopher Don Ihde, to comprehend our body experiences nowadays. The concept of **technological body** was born to supplement other theories which didn't take human's relationships with technology into account, such as the phenomenological body by Merleau-Ponty (1998), and the cultural body by Foucault (1982). The "technological body" is 'characterized by our interactions with technology' from primitive to high-end tech tools.[299] By using technology, the human body (both material and cultural) could be shaped by the 'instrument-mediated experience in which the instrument is taken into one's experience of bodily engaging

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[298] Collins, K. (2011). Making Gamers Cry: Mirror Neurons and Embodied Interaction with Game Sound [Conference paper]. *AudioMostly 2011,* September 7–9, 2011, Coimbra, Portugal. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220958353

[299] *Loc.cit.*