Conference Paper

What Can Genre Tell Us? Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain

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Abstract

Genre is known to be one of media to communicate between the game designer and game players. Genre could give powerful impact to the game players because it makes the game players familiar with the game with the similar genre to play. Through genre, the game designer and maker could use it to gain the players' heart so that they can spread their ideas imbued in their games. Metal Gear Solid Game series which was firstly played in 1987 has been promoting the anti-nuclear possession since its release. This paper has a purpose to reveal what makes this last series of Metal Gear Solid game, MGSV: The Phantom Pain, can be accepted widely by game players by observing its genre and this paper also aims to discover how the game designers, through the game, promoted the anti-nuclear war, which becomes a hot issue again nowadays, by using multimodal genre analysis.

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1. Introduction

Genre is defined as the set of rules which enable the member of the discourse community – the expert members of a certain genre which has common knowledge to share (Jones, 2012: 10) – to communicate each other through that works (Bhatia, 2007: 112) and it is possible to these expert members to exploit and even to add their creativities in that genre without violating the certain boundaries in particular genre (Bhatia, 2013: 52). Because of its importance function in communicative event, the experts of this community try to make their works in tune with the common genre known by other members by applying the "move structure" (Jones, 2012: 9). Violation of genre is used to achieve a certain effect to the discourse community (Bhatia, 2013: 52) in order to get more attention (Jones, 2012: 47), moreover, mixing genre will be more appealing (Utin, 2016: 46) for creative media.

Combination of several genres in video games has a purpose to arise the attraction of video games players; yet defining genre of the videogame might be rather complex

than defining genre of film or other media because of its interactivity (Grodal, 2003: 142; Apperley, 2006: 7) and its *Cybertext* element which makes the reader of video game the player and the reader altogether in which their performance is called *ergodic* and non-*ergodic* (Aarseth, 1997: 1). These terms, *ergodic* and non-*ergodic*, are to define the effort makes by the "reader" of the *Cybertext* which make them do something beyond what the common reader of literary text does or in other words, these terms show that the reader of *Cybertext* do three activities in three ways, seeing, hearing, and playing at same time which resonate their daily cognitive function in real world (Grodal, 2003: 130) Therefore, it cannot only see the characters, settings, and story line of the video games, or but how to play video games should be taken into consideration as well (Clearwater, 2011: 44-45). All of these elements are called combining narrative and ludological element in video game (Frasca, 2003: 222) as one of the approaches to determine the video games genre.

In categorizing video game, researchers such as Wolf (2001), Bates (2004), Apparley (2006), Elliot et al (2012), and Heintz (2016) have done an attempt to determine the video game genre by applying different methods. The first method is by examining the interactivity element in categorizing video games done by Wolf (2001:115), and Apparley who also considers other three aspects such as platform, milieu, and mode but in that paper, Apparley used terms which is more recognizable by video game players and made it different from what Wolf done (Clarke et al, 2015: 449), and Bates who takes into account the game nature such as game character, game story and attributes (2004: 39-94). The second method of categorizing video game is by asking the game players and this method was done by Heintz (2016: 56) and add genre mapping to the video game examples (Ibid: 59); while Elliot et al although their paper aimed to assess the problem of video game playing (PVP) by using genre as its predictor (2012: 156). Clarke et al proposed the alternative method in determining the video game genre by observing the prototype, family resemblance, and examples (Clarke et al, 2015: 457).

From those three methods, apparently the first method done by Wolf (2001), Bates (2004), and Apperley (2006) uses multimodality in genre analysis which has been impliedly applied because of interactions and interactivity emphasis (Apparley, 2006: 10). Although there are two perspective regarding to genre, i.e. social semiotic perspective and social action perspective (Bateman, 2008: 183-4), the first perspective seems more suitable for analyzing the video games because of its comprehensiveness related to how the communication in genre built by integrating language, image, and music or called multimodality (Ibid, 184) (Van Leeuwen, 2013: 1418). In analyzing video games using multimodality, it is called ludonarative (Toh, 2015: 2). The term "ludo" which

refers to how the game play and "narrative" which stands for how the story appears in form of cutscene to build the motivation to the video game players (Toh, 2015: 2). The ludo-narrative dimension which is proposed by Perez-Latorre, Olivia, and Besalu covers three representations of semiotic resources such as representation of character/player, representation of fictional world, and representation of activities (2016: 595), and to observe the system-gameplay dimension they also offers three resources 1) gameplay units: structure, 2) gameplay units: development and 3) overall view of gameplay design (Perez-Latorre et al 2016: 599).

However, the recent studies about Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain do not focus on the genre of this video game, but they focus on how woman are pictured in this video game, which took the example of second character called Quiet (Harris-Lowe, 2017: 42); how to find the meaning of the videogames in which one of this part discuss the narrative aspects of the video games such as repetition of story and goal of *Ico* in this video game (Althoff, 2018: 21); and on how this video game concern in the language danger as the representation of the real world, especially the use of English as Lingua Franca (ELF), which appear in the video game as the main enemy of the protagonist, Venom Snake (Hall, 2018: 82-4). Then, this article aims to reveal the ideology besides the language danger discussed by Hall (2018) by using social semiotics as its approach to define the genre of this video game and to find the bending and blending in the 'move' structure (Jones, 2012: 9) of this video game.

2. Method

Since the purpose of this article is elaborating the genre of the video game, the moves of the video game was analyzed (Jones, 2012: 44) and social semiotics approach in describing the ludonarative aspects (Perez-Latorre et al 2016: 589) of the Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain, it took text, image, and sound as the data (Bezemer and Jewitt, 2010: 183) as the nature of multimodality (Van Leeuwen, 2013: 1418), but in this case the critical analysis can be used in the multimodal discourse analysis (Ibid, 1420) because video games can contain ideology (Hayse, 2014: 445) which can be imbued in in the manipulation rules, goals and possibility in the video games (Frasca, 2003: 232). In collecting the data of the video game, the fourth step in doing multimodal research adapted by Bezemer and Jewitt (2010: 185-187) was used. These four steps are elaborated in this following paragraph.

The first step was collecting the recorded video from YouTube to observe the video game mechanics, narratives, and ludology aspects; the second step of this method was

viewing the recorded video both sound and image to see the different and similarities between Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain (MGSV TPP) and other video games, which share similar theme and perspective, i.e. military and third-person; then the third step was taking the sample data which shows that two selected video games based on Steam (2019) share the same genre with MGSV TPP and also that this video game support the anti-nuclear movement; and the fourth step was transcribing and analyzing the data which related to captured video games images, texts, and sound supporting the purpose of this article.

Two steps were applied in analyzing the data from the recorded video games mentioned. The first step was to define the moves structures from the captured images from the recorded video games in YouTube. After defining the moves structures of the video games, the second step was to find the genre bending and blending in MGSV: TPP video game by using social semiotics approach because this approach could cover wide range of aspects in the video game which was used to analyze MGSV: TPP video game. The audiovisual narrative dimension was used to describe the story built (Perez-Latorre et al 2016: 592) in the video game MGSV: TPP which appears in cutscene and post-playing session after missions, and the ludo-narrative dimension was used to elaborate the detail representation of the video game (Ibid, 2016: 593). Furthermore, the system-game-play dimension was used to explain how the video game mission type and how character solves the problem in the video game (Perez-Latorre et al 2016: 595); then, the designer-player dimension was used to explore the interpersonal signification (Ibid: 2016: 592).
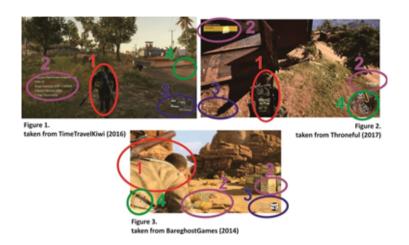
3. Finding and Discussion

The first section of this part is divided into two subheadings namely 1) Genre of MGSV TPP, 2) Genre Bending and Blending in MGSV TPP game design. All of these subheadings are necessary to elaborate how the genre of MGSV: TPP is bended and blended with another genre to conceal the ideological perspective behind this video game.

3.1. Genre of MGSV: TPP

To define the genre of this video game, the other video games which are categorized similar to this video should be taken into account to obtain the prototyopical moves (Jones, 2012: 45) in this type of the video game. These moves could be seen in the Figure 1, 2, and 3 below which were labeled with number 1-4 in different colors in order

to be visible. MGSV: TPP games (in Figure 2) apparently has rather similar texture with *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Wildland* game (in Figure 3), and both of them have different texture from the *Sniper Elite 3* (in Figure 4) game. It could be caused by the different epoch of those game stories have. The video game in Figure 1 has time –

Figure 1.
taken from TimeTravelKiwi (2016)

Figure 2.
taken from Throneful (2017)

Figure 3.
taken from BareghostGames (2014)

line story in World War II and Cold War (Schneider, 2015) and the video game in Figure 3 has timeline story in World War II (Perricone, 2017). Although those two games, MGSV TPP and *Sniper Elite III*, are in the same timeline story, MGSV TPP, as the last series of *Metal Gear Solid* video game, was made more futuristic because it was inspired by recent technology of the game making process (Hosie, 2015). Meanwhile, the video game in Figure 2 which appears with more advanced gear takes the setting in 2019 (Battlefield Timeline, n.d.).

Although those three video games have different in certain aspects, they actually share the common structure which is called 'moves structure'. The number 1 label and oval shape circle colored in red are showing that those video games are considered third-person game because the player can see the character and also was included in action games genre (Bates, 2004: 39; Apperley, 2006: 15). However, this term 'action', according to Arsenault, could no longer be considered as genre because it has broader sense and can almost include every game which challenge the player to sensory and motor skills (Arsenault, 2014: 225), and this video game, MGSV: TPP could be categorized into action-adventure game because in this game the character should direct to particular space or area in the mission, and defeat enemies (Ibid, 229). The number 2 labeled in purple circle, shows the pop-up text which informs certain information to the player, while number 3 circled in blue displays the item, weapon, or other tools brought by the character. The number 4 labeled in green gives direction to the player in form of map in *Sniper Elite III* and in *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Wildlands*; yet, in *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, the direction is shown in form of yellow

circle which is labeled in map from idroid (a communication device to upgrade items, to start missions, and even to customize weapons). At least, these four labels exist in the third-person shooter, and action-adventure game. In further development, these action-adventure games either third-person or first-person perspective has unique icon (either reverse triangle or dots) which functions to identify the enemies using binocular and detection label (adopted from Farcry 3 term detection meter which means that enemy detect the character) and shot label which shows where the direction of enemy attack. This genre in game system also offers wide area of maps and many alternatives to accomplish the missions.

3.2. Genre Bending and Blending of MGSV TPP Game Design

To discover the genre bending and blending in this game, the social semiotics approach is used because it covers both narrative and gameplay aspects. With this approach, this article could show how this action-adventure game bends and blends with another genre. First this elaboration is summarized into a table adopted from Perez-Latore et al (2017: 592).

From the table 1, above, this video game has blended the action-adventure game with romantic nuance when the main character, Punished 'Venom' Snake, has to lose his partner in war named Quiet, who is actually a woman attacking this main character in the beginning of story. This female character appears in the video game in mission 14: Cloaked in Silence and disappear in mission 45: A Quiet Exit (Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain, 2015). In this mission 45, Quiet tells a message to Snake that she wanted to express her feelings if only Snake share the same language as hers (KefkaProduction, 2016). This video game also blended its genre with comedy when the character should rescue the director of this game, Hideo Kojima in side op mission 112 and also should use 'Chicken Hat' when the character dies frequently to make the enemy difficult to see it (Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain, 2015). The other genre blending of this video game is that this video game adopts the hunting games because the character should fulton the enemy (send the requested animals to Mother Base using balloon fulton or wormhole fulton), and could use card box to camouflage (Ibid, 2015).

The genre bending of this video game is that this video game violates the nature of action-adventure video game which always emphasizes on violence and killings. However, the system-gameplay of this game demand the player of this video game not to kill enemy brutally because every enemy has potential ability to become the new recruits and it can be known by labeling the enemy using binocular (Metal Gear

TABLE 1: Analytical Dimensions of Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain The table is adapted from Perez-Latore et al (2017) and the content is taken from the gameplay of the video game (Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain, 2015)

Analytical Dimensions		
Audiovisual Narrative	This video game started with Punished 'Venom' Snake/Phantom Big Boss was hospitalized for nine years and then he is saved by a man named Ishmael, the true Big Boss who make 'Venom' Snake thinks that he is the true Big Boss; and in the attempt of avoiding the man of fire (a man who is literally on fire), both of them are helped by Ocelot and 'Venom' Snake starts the mission to seek revenge to Skull Face who demolished their mother base in the previous game, *Metal Gear Solid V Ground Zero*. The main character of this game is Punished 'Venom' Snake who is pictured as a bearded man with handlebar moustache, splinter metal in shape of horn in the head, and bionic arm which are caused by helicopter accidents in previous game. He is also known as the living legend by his enemy. The fictional world in this game is taking the Cold War event in dessert landscape in Afghanistan and grasslands landscape of Africa and in certain points, there are several guard post and headquarter enemy base. In the last of this game, Punished 'Venom' Snake lost his partner in war, Quiet who has fell in love with him proved by her bonding level when this character is frequently used in missions and the defeat of 'Sahelanthropus', the 24 m height bipedal tank armed with nuclear and Skull face.	
Game Design	**Ludo-narrative dimension**	The characters in this video game are not only Punished 'Venom' Snake, but other characters who can be recruited during missions, e.g. main missions, side ops mission, and FOB mission (only available when online). All of these characters have particular ability according to their levels, and the game mechanics of this game is how to accomplish the mission in most effective way. The weapons which could be carried in all mission except in subsistence mode missions are in various types such as handgun, assault rifle, shotgun, sniper, bazooka and other items and each type of weapons has three styles, DMG (damage), STN (Stunned), and ZZZ (tranquilizer) except bazooka. With more advanced silencer, this game emphasizes on stealthy and non-lethal weaponry except to defeat enemy helicopters, Skulls (men and women infected by vocal cord virus and armed with lethal weapon), and Sahelanthropus.
	System-gameplay dimension	The gameplay units of this game is highly recommended in stealthy action because in order to get 'S' score in every mission, the player should not kill, retry, use reflex (when suddenly detected by enemy), and make the enemy in alert status as the bonus points. Other points such as total playtime, hits taken, tactical takedowns, headshots become the main scoring aspects. The upgrade system is only for items and weapons; for characters, they will be upgraded when they get 'S' score in at least 3 missions if these characters starts from A+ level. The defeat condition of this game is when the character is dead during the mission for ordinary missions; detected during 'total stealth' missions; and running out of time during FOB missions. Overall, this video game emphasizes on non-lethal use of weapon in order to find new recruits for Diamond Dogs troops and also to save the animals to increase heroism by using fulton device.
	Designer-player dimension	The uniqueness of this video game is that in side ops list mission, the character has to rescue a special prisoner, Hideo Kojima.

Solid V: The Phantom Pain, 2015). Moreover, this video game also promoted on stealing and disarming the enemy nuclear weapons in FOB missions because when the character/player intentionally builds or makes nuclear weapon in idroid device, the heroism score of the character will decrease -50,000 and when the character/player disarm the nuclear weapon it only obtains +1000 for heroism score; it could make the main character also has horn-like splinter metal and soaking-blood uniform to symbolize an evil who killed many lives (edepot, 2015). This also means that Hideo Kojima supports no killing actions, and non-lethal weapons even in the midst of battlefield.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

This video game, Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain does not only provide the new experience to the player in action-adventure game, but this video game also informs how dangerous nuclear weapon is through its cutscenes, missions, and actions through this video game. Besides, this video game also promotes the use of non-lethal weapons even during a war, except fighting against inhuman such as zombie (the Skulls), and gigantic robot (Sahelanthropus) which actually does not exist in the real world. Hideo Kojima, as the director of this game also offers laugh and jokes even in war theme video game, by making the players to use 'Chicken Hat' when they dies repeatedly and even he also offers 'water pistol' as a choice to deceive the enemy when point the gun to the enemy and provides sleeping gas bomb and mine to tranquilize the enemy. Although this article has tried to define the genre of this video game, Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain, the other point of view and perspective could be proposed in analyzing this video game. When reader asked question why the writer categorize this video game as action-adventure without including the term open-world, the answer is that the term 'adventure' seemingly could include the term open-world too because the word 'adventure' will include wide range of area in the mission. Nevertheless, the other perspectives are expected to open the horizon and gates of video game analysis so that the video games produce could become new and good literacy for the next generations.

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