

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Video games have rapidly become one of the most popular choices of entertainment for people. According to the “Entertainment Software Association,” the trade association for the video game industry in the United States, the U.S. gaming industry’s annual growth rate has been more than 10 percent. This rate of growth is greater than that of the U.S. economy, which was less than two percent during the period from 2005 to 2009. Unlike movies or music, a video game allows its players to interact while playing which makes the players more engaged. Interestingly, this technique helps tremendously in video games to convey messages to the receivers better when compared to other types of entertainment. Video games allow the players to take on various character roles such as a professional athlete, soldier, criminal, or even a wizard in an ancient world, all of which are simulated by the game (Leonard 1).

Among various games on the market, *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*, published by Konami Computer Entertainment in 2007, can be considered as one of the most successful games in the history of gaming based on its high score from several video game rating institutes: 10 out of 10 from both IGN (Haynes) and Gamespot (VanOrd). One element which has significantly helped this game to be very successful is its interesting and intense storyline written by Hideo Kojima, the producer of the game. The players take the role of an elite war hero called “Solid Snake,” who is a member of the resistance group which fights against the overwhelming power of the artificial intelligence system called “the Patriots,” a system that has used military power to take over the world secretly (Kojima).

Significantly, the story of the game, the fighting between binary opposing groups, corresponds to Marxist theory in terms of the struggle between classes. According to Karl Marx, the famous German social theorist who was the founder of Marxism, there are two classes in capitalist society: the ruling class called the “bourgeoisie” and the working class called the “proletariat.” The bourgeoisie is the class which takes advantage of the proletariat in order to control production to economically empower themselves. This brings suffering to the proletariat from being taken advantage of by the superior class, the bourgeoisie. Eventually, it forces the oppressed to set themselves free from the tyranny of the superior class thus leading to social revolution as a solution (Marx, “Manifesto” 14-21).

In order to study the Marxist ideas in the game, it is necessary to observe the dialogue between the characters. For example, the following excerpt is the conversation from the scene “Solid Snake,” where the protagonist initially runs into an arms dealer named “Debrin.”

Snake: Looks like you're doing pretty well for yourself.

Drebin: You might say that... What with the war economy and all... and the System clamping down on things. System codes are the law now... And control's essentially absolute... Paving the way for fat profits, if... You're willing to bend the law. Demand keeps on growing thanks to the war economy. I sell ID guns to the PMCs [private military companies] and state armies... and naked guns to terrorist groups and paramilitaries. And these ID guns can't be sold on the black market. System's practically a license for us arms dealers to print money. Privatizing the military's made the PMCs big and bloated. And the fatter the PMCs get, the line between civilian and soldier is gonna get real blurry. Sooner or later, the whole damn human race is gonna be green collars. More like, we're all gonna be fighting proxy wars. But hey... This war economy puts the food on my table. You're a green

collar too, aren't ya? Yeah, it's in your eyes. You've seen a lot of combat (Copaciu act 1).

In this dialogue, the character Debrin, who is an authorized arms dealer for ArmsTech Corporation, is talking about the immense income that he has gained from selling the unique weapons of his company on the battlefield. Also, he mentions that the popularity of SOP system, which has also been introduced by his company and that the increasing demands of private military for proxy wars around the world are helping his company gain ever more and more income. Eventually, players would know that the ArmsTech Corporation that Debrin is working with is secretly manipulated by an artificial intelligence called “the Patriots.” The information in this dialogue describes “the Patriots” as the capitalist or the bourgeois class in Marxist terms which uses its unique ownership and control of the means of production, ID guns manufacturing, to earn profit from the war economy market.

Furthermore, visual analysis of several in-game cut scenes are undertaken in order to acquire additional data that support the study. Thus, Charles S. Peirce’s theory of sign is employed in this study to interpret the hidden information from the game’s footages.

For example (see fig. 1), this footage is taken from the scene in which the PMC’s force, hired by the capitalist faction, is hunting down the militia including the protagonist “Solid Snake.” In this figure, a PMC’s attack-helicopter and the weapons being held by the militia and “Solid Snake” are “iconic signs” showing the difference in class between the more powerful and the less-advanced weapons respectively. These are considered to “iconic signs” because the viewers can tell the meaning at first glance. Next, several corpses of downed militia on the ground represent an “indexical sign” because the fatalities of the militia caused by the superior fire power of the PMC sequentially inform the audiences that the PMC faction is more powerful than the militia. Finally, the higher position of the PMC’s attack-helicopter over the militia is a “symbolic sign” showing the ruling power that the capitalist has over the lower class.



Fig. 1. Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots Review
from Jeff Haynes; *It's coming right for us! Run!*;
Ign.com; 12 Jun. 2008; Web; 16 April 2014.

Accordingly, this research aims to study the ideas expressed in the video game *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* on both verbal and non-verbal elements based on two frameworks: Marxist theory and Peirce's theory of signs.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

To study the ideas represented in the story and footages of the game *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* through the use of Marxist theory and Peirce's theory of signs.

1.3 Application and Education Advantages

It is hoped that the findings from this study can provide a better understanding of the concept of the binary opposition between classes in Marxist theory through the dialogues and footage of video game. According to Marxist theory, class struggle in society is originally caused by the greed of the superior class and this in turn ultimately leads to the uprising of the inferior faction in the end. Therefore, the application of Marxist ideas in this analysis of the video game can provide an example case which can

better produce awareness and explain various conflicts in a society which are owe their origin to this bipolar opposition arising from the exploitation of one class by another.



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