The Persuasive Aims of *Metal Gear Solid*: A Discourse Theoretical Approach to the Study of Argumentation in Video Games

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Abstract: The paper is aimed at proving the hypothesis that multimodal construction in video games can follow specific discursive aims in the process of persuading game players. In order to prove this, we have performed a multifaceted analysis which elaborated the ways in which different modalities in a representative video game combine so as to convince the player to act, play, and perhaps think accordingly. The multimodal approach employed in the paper combines the notion of discourse aims and the rhetorical and argumentative structure of *Metal Gear Solid*, and analyses different narrative strategies and verbal cues, as well as the overall interface, control, and gameplay. The results suggest that verbal and textual cues combine with audio-visual elements and highly specific gameplay strategies in order to refrain the player from killing enemies. This might indicate that video games are likely to possess a great persuasive power, as they are both multimodal and highly interactive.

Key words: discourse analysis, video games, persuasion, discourse aims, multimodal argumentation

1. Introduction

The current study aims to approach the video game *Metal Gear Solid*, a cult Hideo Kojima's video game released in 1998, with a multimodal discourse theoretical perspective in order to examine its persuasive power and rhetorical strategies. *Metal Gear Solid* is known for communicating a set of intriguing political and socio-cultural messages and a rather complex socio-political narrative, which incorporates various real-world military and geopolitical issues (Iovanovici, 2010; Noon and Dyer-Witheford, 2010). Seen as a typical example of the genre of stealth games in which the usually unarmed players are motivated to avoid their antagonists through hiding and stealth rather than fighting them (Den of Geek, 2013; IGN, 2015), *Metal*

Gear Solid can generally be seen as providing a particular view of warfare and the use of, or rather dispense with, weapons in game fights in favor of a more peaceful dispute and confrontation with the enemies. We hypothesize in this paper that the video game and its multimodal construction follows specific discursive aims of persuading the players to follow this specific position and to convince them to act and play accordingly. We think that it is mainly the particular discursive structure of the game and its specific multimodal, often seen as filmic (Parkin, 2014; Stanton, 2015; Wolf, 2012), design which features particular rhetorical strategies and argumentative patterns which, in a second step, go beyond the usual context of playing the game and might furthermore affect the recipients' attitude in general.

For the analysis of these strategies and patterns, we contextualize this paper within the context of multimodal discourse analysis and, in particular, the context of multimodal argumentation. Multimodal discourse analysis, an approach which deals with how meaning is constructed and conveyed using different semiotic resources and modes (and frequently different media) of communication, has taken different courses in the last two decades and is still evolving as an exceedingly interdisciplinary research field in the humanities and beyond (cf. Bateman, Wildfeuer and Hippala, 2017). Our paper attempts to contribute to adding video games to the wide array of popular multimodal texts such as magazines (e.g., Conradie, 2011; Machin and Thornborrow, 2003), films (e.g., Prince, 1993; Bateman and Schmidt, 2012; Wildfeuer 2014), comics (Bateman and Wildfeuer, 2014; Saraceni, 2000; Stainbrook, 2003; Stamenković and Tasić, 2015), media and mass media (e.g. Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; van Dijk, 1985), or other types of audiovisual texts (Page, 2010), which have all been approached in ways similar to the study of verbal texts and their meaning-making attributes. With the aim of finding out more about the multimodal construction of meaning in *Metal Gear Solid,* the paper also aims at adding

a new perspective to existing studies of video game discourse (e.g., Aarseth, 2014; Aarseth, Smedstad and Sunnanå, 2003; Bell, Ensslin & Rustad, 2014; Cover, 2006; Ensslin, 2012, 2014, 2015; Paul, 2012; Pérez Latorre, 2015; Rhody, 2010; Ryan, 2006; Toh, 2015a, b).

A further and rather new branch within this context is the study of multimodal argumentation which takes as a starting point the fact that contemporary argumentative communication draws critically on visual and multimodal entities and that these entities play a significant role in the construction of rhetorical patterns and the argumentative structure of media artifacts, promotional material, and in the general context of politics, for example. The interest in the notion of a 'visual argument' has thus been growing continuously and a number of recent publications on this topic confirm the up-to-date status of the argumentative analysis of multimodal texts (cf. Birdsell and Groarke, 1996, 2007; Hill and Helmers, 2004; van Belle et al., 2013; Kjeldsen, 2015; Rocci and Bockarova, 2016 forthcoming, Tseronis and Forceville, 2017 forthcoming).

For the analysis of several scenes and situations from Metal Gear Solid, we will use a combined approach focusing, on the one hand, on the notion of discourse aims (cf. Kinneavy, 1971) and, on the other hand, on the analysis of the multimodal meaning-making patterns as well as the rhetorical and discursive structure of the video game. In our opinion, Kinneavy's theory of discourse provides adequate tools for the analysis of discursive aims in video games as modern media − for three main reasons: (a) his detailed account of the persuasive aim, which is in the focus of our article, (b) the fact that he linked the referential aim to reality and describing the world around us in a scientific or nearly scientific way, and (c) the fact that Kinneavy's own examples include non-linguistic elements, which can be seen as an early attempt to approach what today is addressed in multimodal analysis. The article will first cover different aspects of

military and geopolitical themes as elaborated within the realm of video games, which will be followed by an overview of the features of *Metal Gear Solid*, as a prime representative of video games that encompass geopolitical issues. We will then present the basis of the theoretical framework for our analysis, with Kinneavy's theory of discourse and multimodal discourse analysis being its main strongholds. The central part of the article presents our methodology and analysis, which ought to cover elements constructed by different semiotic resources as they combine in persuading the player against war and warfare.

2. Military and Geopolitical Themes in Video Games

The incorporation of real-world military and geopolitical themes and referents into video games and their narratives, of which *Metal Gear Solid* is a prime example, is by no means a recent development. Ever since the medium's inception, traced by some researchers to computer projects developed at US universities such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Stanford University in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter, 2009; Mantello, 2012; Power, 2007), video game developers have never shied away from depicting war and combat, even if such depictions have not always been presented in high definition graphics as they are today. In fact, one of the earliest instances of the medium is often considered to be the space shooter *Spacewar* (1962), developed by a team of MIT students lead by Steve Russell. In the decades following *Spacewar*, as technology advanced and the medium became internationally popular (and commercially viable) as a vehicle of entertainment and narrative, game developers increasingly began to embrace and exploit real geopolitical events and entities for story purposes, blending them with concepts and ideas from the domains of armed combat and military conflicts already present (but also ever-evolving) on the mechanical level,

particularly in the genres of first-person shooter (FPS), real-time and turn-based strategy, and action-adventure games. Such a combination has proven particularly lucrative: one of the most prolific FPS franchises, Activision's *Call of Duty*, has amassed over US$10 billion in sales as of 2014 (Poeter, 2014), while the entire *Metal Gear* series of games has sold in excess of 40 million copies (Beck, 2014).

Having in mind their staggering sales figures and popularity, what is worrying about these and similar franchises is the fact that their narratives have been not only thematically inspired by actual conflicts, but also often constructed with the help of experiences and expertise of those who took part in said conflicts – "black ops soldiers and paramilitary contractors" (Mantello, 2012:270). While such partnerships might result in a factually richer ludic experience and greater immersion, they are inherently problematic from narrative, discursive, and didactic standpoints, due to the fact that the resulting games often end up "favor[ing] the status quo for commercial reasons and because those relying on assistance from the military or from veterans may face editorial constraints imposed by these advisors" (Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter, 2009, as cited in Schulzke, 2013:213). In this regard, war- and military-themed FPS games drawing on actual global conflicts and military operations, both contemporary and historical, are a particularly unsettling example due to their presentational bias: the player typically experiences these games solely from the perspective of Western soldiers (Schulzke, 2013), especially during the games' narrative-driven single-player campaigns.

To claim that this stance is common to all FPS video games – or, for that matter, all games about modern warfare – would be reductive and doing the medium as a whole a disservice; there are video games which seek to examine, subvert, and/or outright criticize

militaristic ideologies and the notion of unconditional Western supremacy[1]. However, the sheer number and commercial popularity of games whose treatment of real-world geopolitical power relations stops at their decontextualized and dehistoricized replication, and, by extent, enforcement, represents a distressing trend. According to Power (2007), when it comes to games centered around romanticized portrayals of war, "the simplification of cultures and history is in itself a form of violence" (p. 286). Enacted on the ludic and narrative levels alike, this violence, as well as the games which feature it, is in dire need of debate within the field of game studies. The striking absence of cultural analyses of this nature, noted by Boellstorff (2006) nearly a decade ago, has been somewhat alleviated in recent years, aided in no small part by game-specific analytical frameworks and ideas, such as Ian Bogost's (2007) notion of *procedural rhetoric*. Machin and van Leeuwen dedicated a chapter to video game war discourse in their *Global Media Discourse: A Critical Introduction* (2007). In the book, the authors present the main topics of media globalization theory, and apply these to specific case studies of media globalization. One of these case studies, called "Discourses of war" (pp. 74–104), investigates discourses in *Black Hawk Down* (both the movie and the game *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*), which is followed by a comparison with *Special Forces*, the Hezbollah game. In the process, the authors employ parts of van Leeuwen's (1996) 'social actor' analysis to discuss how the key belligerents (the US soldiers, Aidid, the Habr Gedir militia and the Somali civilians) are represented – here they apply the notions of deletion, individualization and collectivization, names and titles, and categorization. Machin and van Leeuwen (p. 86) developed a 'quest'

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[1] One such example is *Spec Ops: The Line*, a third-person military shooter which, according to Keogh (2013), functions as "a reaction against the totalising myths of technological and ethical superiority that military shooters and their players uncritically perpetuate" (p. 14); another is, by its author's own admission, the *Metal Gear* series as a whole (Parkin, 2014).

discourse schema that organizes how the movie and the game conceptualize war. Within this 'special operations discourse' schema, the main participants pursue a set goal, and on the way they face various setbacks. In the process, they are helped by the tools of technology. The elements of this schema are the following: statement of goal, technological support, objectives, approach, engagement, setback/partial achievement of mission/achievement of goal. The schema of the game analyzed in this paper, *Metal Gear Solid*, largely complies with the one proposed by Machin and van Leeuwen.

With regards to this, it should be mentioned that games in the *Metal Gear Solid* franchise have been far from neglected by scholars, who have investigated subversive depictions of military power, imperialism, and cultural hegemony both in particular games (Higgin, 2010) and in the series as a whole (Noon and Dyer-Witheford, 2010). We think that our linguistics-driven analysis of the discourse aims in a landmark video game such as *Metal Gear Solid* will act as a very much needed contribution to this ongoing exploration into the expressive, persuasive, and critical effects and capabilities of the medium of video games. To start, we will, in the next section, present the main features of *Metal Gear Solid*, in order to show which particular aspects make it a perfect candidate for the type of analysis we are aiming at.

3. *Metal Gear Solid* – An Overview

Originally released on Sony's *PlayStation* console in 1998, *Metal Gear Solid*, the first 3D title and canonically the third game in the decades-spanning *Metal Gear* series[2], is widely considered to be one of the most important and influential video games of all time, praised both

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[2] The first two games in the series, *Metal Gear* (1987) and *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* (1990), were 2D military action-adventure stealth games, originally released on Microsoft's MSX2 home computer.

by critics (IGN, 2002; Parish, 2010; Wilson, 2012) and audiences (Shuman, 2015). In mechanical terms, it is a third-person action-adventure stealth game. The player controls a special forces operative by the name of Solid Snake[3], tasked with neutralizing a renegade US Army special forces unit, FOXHOUND, who have taken control of the fictional island of Shadow Moses off the coast of Alaska and are threatening a nuclear strike on the United States. Solid Snake is aided by a team comprised of his former commanding officer, a doctor, an agent of the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) specializing in nuclear weapons, a survival coach, and a data analyst, with whom the player can communicate via the in-game radio called Codec. Although the game features an array of handguns, rifles, missiles, and explosives, most of which were modeled and named after real-world weaponry, the game actively discourages the player from killing enemies[4]. If Snake is seen or heard, the player will not be able to use the game's radar to see enemy movement, and enemy troops will go into Alert mode and try to hunt down and kill him. Instead, the favored way of progressing through the game is staying out of the line of sight of troops and cameras – a philosophy shared by most, if not all, games in the *Metal Gear* franchise.

The legacy of *Metal Gear Solid* seems to rest on two achievements. Firstly, the game's aforementioned focus on stealth infiltration and avoidance of detection made it stand out among many other action-adventure games of its time, which favored open combat, and helped to codify the very genre of stealth games (IGN, 2005; Maragos, 2013). Secondly, with its long, plot-heavy cutscenes and frequent, fully-voiced expository dialogues, the game represented one of the first

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[3] Often referred to in-game as simply "Snake".

[4] Weapons are, however, necessary to defeat the bosses in *Metal Gear Solid*, as well as during certain scripted encounters with regular enemies which shall be discussed later in the text; therefore, they must be utilized to complete the game.

instances of employing traditionally cinematic techniques for the purposes of narrative presentation in the medium. These modes, in turn, facilitated a revolutionary exploration of mature narrative themes (nuclear proliferation, the effects of nature and nurture on the development of human beings, and the morality of genetic engineering, among others (IGN, 2000), which represented a significant step in the building of the intricate, conspiratorial geopolitical storyline for which the franchise is now known. From an analytical standpoint, this combination of (at the time, and in the genre) unorthodox game mechanics and a complex socio-political narrative presented in a cinematic style, coupled with the game's tendencies towards self-reflexivity and metafiction, makes it ideal for a discourse-based analysis of the kind we are attempting, and which might help shed some light on how video games communicate with those who play them.

For this, the following section of the paper will present the current trends in video game discourse studies, as well as the basics of Kinneavy's theory of discourse, and our approach to the game's multimodal analysis, which will allow for a thorough examination of the game's aspects in the section that will follow.

4. Theoretical Framework

Before proceeding to cover several other approaches to discourse in video games, we should first reflect on the communicative specificities of the medium itself. According to Espen Aarseth, any communicative analysis of computer-based media needs to take into account "the unique dual materiality of the cybernetic sign process" (1997: 40), i.e. the fact that the cybernetic sign consists of the internal level of code and external level of representation, both of which are equally essential, and each of which exists independently of the other. As a subcategory of what

Aarseth calls *cybertexts*[5], video games signify not only via their semiotics (multimodal feedback regarding the game world and game state), but also via their mechanics (the engine which facilitates actions in the game) (Aarseth, 2014: 488); though both of these layers can communicate ideological meanings (sometimes even distinct and contradictory meanings), the process is by no means a simple one-way transmission, since the players always actively reconfigure and renegotiate the meanings of the game during the act of play (Aarseth, 2014: 490). Therefore, games can be examined as empirical objects in light of their two key elements, *the game structure/mechanics* and *the game world/semiotics*; gameplay is realized via the interaction of the player with these two elements of the game object (Aarseth, 2014: 488). We analyze this interaction with and the interpretation by the player by examining the discursive structures of the dynamically unfolding video game discourse, which, in general, reveal both the narrative as well as argumentative structures of the discourse.

Video game discourse studies seem to be a growing field within game studies – a number of authors have addressed various aspects of the discourse of games, with some, like Valentina Rao (2011), even openly advocating for the use of Kinneavy's theory of discourse aims to determine the rhetorical strategies and effects of particular games and game genres. One example of work done in relation to war treatment in video game discourse has already been mentioned (Machin and van Leeuwen, 2007). A more substantial contribution to the field of video game discourse studies has been the concept of *procedural rhetoric* forwarded by Ian Bogost (2007). Building on Janet Murray's (1998) definition of procedurality as arguably the core component of computer artefacts, Bogost defines procedural rhetoric as "the practice of persuading through

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[5] Aarseth defines cybertext as "the wide range (or perspective) of possible textualities seen as a typology of machines, as various kinds of literary communication systems where the functional differences among the mechanical parts play a defining role in determining the aesthetic process" (1997: 22).

processes in general and computational processes in particular" (2007: 3) which involves the creation of dynamic frameworks of behavioural rules and processes for the purposes of persuasion and expression (2007: 29). For Bogost, video games are a medium which is particularly well-suited for the deployment of procedural rhetoric, because of a characteristically high degree of procedurality, expressivity and interactivity (2007: 44-45). Viewing video games in light of procedural rhetoric enables us to read them as representations of particular perspectives and worldviews, as encoded within the rules system which is then actively navigated by the player in the act of playing the game. It must be said, however, that not all games employ procedural rhetoric for the purposes of persuading the player; Bogost classifies those games which are particularly adept at persuading through processes, regardless of the purpose for which they were produced, as *persuasive games*, whose goal is "to support or challenge our understanding of the way things in the world do or should work" (2007: 59).

Christopher Paul's (2012) approach to video game discourse is dubbed *wordplay* – it represents an approach which applies the tools of rhetorical criticism to examine elements of video games. Paul uses this concept to address several issues: the words within and surrounding video games, the design and coding of games, and the practices of play in games. Wordplay, according to Paul, should facilitate analysis of how games persuade, create identifications, and circulate meanings, and besides this, it should also tell us why specific aspects of video game discourse matter. Paul's wordplay is "a critical approach designed to better understand how video games work, what they mean, and what factors frame how we think about video games" (Paul, 2012: 2). Astrid Ensslin (2015) starts from the fact that the discourse of games involves different layers of communicative interaction and multiple types of social actors. According to her, the most important group of actors participating in the discourse of games are the players

themselves. They are followed by industry professionals (developers, producers, publishers, etc.), admitting that they partially (and naturally) overlap with the players. Her third group of social actors includes "journalists, politicians, educators, parents, activists, and other media stakeholders who engage in debates about games, game play, and […] the alleged effects of game play on people's health and behavior" (Ensslin, 2015: 1). Ensslin adds that the representational aspect of the discourse of games has to be viewed from the perspective of the language and multimodal designs of games. Video games communicate with their audience by means of user interfaces, backstories, instructions, and scripted dialogues. At the same time, Ensslin (2015: 1) believes that "in order to analyze these diverse modes of representation appropriately, a wide range of discourse-analytical methods can and need to be used." This is one of the reasons why we decided to employ a framework that had not been employed in the domain of video games, but proved to be valid in approaching some other types of multimodal artifacts. Ensslin (2012: 105–116) also introduces the notion of metaludic discourses, identifying within them three kinds of gamer discourses – the discourse of 'cool' (video games being desirable in-group behavior), the discourse of fun (capturing the entertaining element of video games) and the discourse of appreciation (relating video games to passion and emotional involvement in gameworlds). In an attempt to investigate how the different modes of video games combine to create a multiplicative meaning for them during gameplay, as well as how players understand the relationships between narrative and gameplay, Weimin Toh (2015a, b) introduces the ludonarrative model, based on Dena's (2010) polymorphic fiction model. Toh proposes that players understand the structure of games (narrative, gameplay and ludonarrative relationship) differently, which, in turn, leads to the various pathways that they take during gameplay. The *ludonarrative* aspect in the center of this theory refers to the implied "whole" of

every video game – it includes both the gameplay ('ludo') and the story ('narrative'). Toh mentions that there are cases in which one of these elements is not necessarily foregrounded. The elements of the proposed ludonarrative relationships include ludonarrative dissonance, resonance and alienation (all of which are divided into subcategories). The ludonarrative level in Toh's setup is multimodal and transmodal, whereas causal relations can be realized through different concepts. The gameplay interaction is facilitated and constrained by the rules and the cognitive interpretation of the narrative (which is not always present). Rules are, according to Toh, subdivided into constitutive and regulative. The former enable players' actions and they are exemplified by the gameplay mechanics, walkthrough, and ultimately cheat codes, whereas the latter control or facilitate players' actions and include the gamer community and friends (and as such are more related to multiplayer games) (Toh, 2015a: 213–214).

Our analysis will be related to the current proposal in several ways. Firstly, with regards to Aarseth's (2014) model of game components, we shall examine both the semiotic and the mechanical layer of *Metal Gear Solid* to show how the game's anti-war arguments are, for the most part, presented quite congruently in both layers. In light of Bogost's (2007) theory of procedural rhetoric, our analysis of the mechanical layer of *Metal Gear Solid* in particular will hopefully also show that it can indeed be classified as a persuasive game. Our approach will, in Paul's (2012) terms, address words within and surrounding *Metal Gear Solid*, its design, the practices of play. When it comes to Ensslin's (2015) terminology, it will involve the elements of the interface, the game's backstory, explicit and implicit instructions, as well as scripted dialogues. Finally, given Toh's ludonarrative proposal, we will try to refer to the implied whole of the game, and include both the gameplay and the story. In order to try out another general framework in the analysis of video game discourse, we opted for Kinneavy's theory of discourse

(1971), which has proved to be particularly fruitful for discourse analyses of several multimodal artifacts, as many of its facets have been created in a way which allows us to apply them to different media (Stainbrook, 2003; Stamenković and Tasić, 2015). Stainbrook's (2003) *Reading Comics: A Theoretical Analysis of Textuality and Discourse in the Comics Medium*, for example, proved that Kinneavy's exploration of discourse aims is applicable to the medium of comics, and it is likely that it possesses adequate tools for analyzing different modes of communication such as feature and animated films, TV series, and video games. The focus of Kinneavy's approach to discourse analysis in a number of his studies was mostly on the so-called 'discourse aims' (Kinneavy, 1969, 1971). In Kinneavy's terms, aims represent the effects the discourse is intended to produce to and in the recipient. He divides these aims into four basic categories: expressive, referential, literary and persuasive – each of them is related to one component in the process of communication:

(a) Discourse with an *expressive* aim reveals some aspect of the personality of the rhetor (producer), whereas in these uses the recipient and the referential components can become insignificant. The one who communicates the message becomes the dominant part of the message itself. Kinneavy (1971: 61) lists the following as good examples of expressively-aimed discourse: journals, diaries, gripe sessions, prayers, minority protests, manifestoes, declarations of independence, contracts, constitutions of clubs, myths, utopia plans, religious credos, etc.[6]

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[6] Kinneavy's expressive aim corresponds, for example, to Jakobson's (1960: 354) emotive function of language, aiming at a direct expression of the speaker's attitude towards what he or she is talking about. In general, there is indeed a strong connection between Kinneavy's and Jakobson's approaches. We thank the anonymous reviewer for helpful comments. Further correspondences could, for instance, be found between Kinneavy's referential use of language and Jakobson's expressive function or between the literary use and the poetic function.

(b) The *referential* (expository) aim, or *the reference use* of language shows the ability of the language to reproduce or replicate reality. Within this discursive aim, facts about the reality in question are simply transmitted from encoder to decoder in a way that can be plainly informative. In case the message is systematized and validated, this use can be labeled scientific. If the reality is not known but is being sought instead, we are talking about the exploratory use of language. The following belong to the referential use of language: dialogues, seminars, definitions, diagnosis, (some) news articles, reports, summaries, etc. (Kinneavy, 1971: 61).

(c) If the work itself is the focus of the process, Kinneavy calls this use of language the *literary* one. In this use, "language calls attention to itself, to its own structures, [...] worthy of contemplation in their own right" (Kinneavy, 1971: 39). This, of course, does not mean that reference, personality, and persuasion are absent from this type of discursive aim. Kinneavy exemplifies this aim with the following types of communication: short stories, lyrics, short narratives, ballads, folk songs, drama, TV shows, movies, jokes (Kinneavy, 1971: 61).

(d) Finally, the last use of language, focused on the recipient (reader, listener, audience, or, in our case, video game player), is called *persuasive* or rhetorical. In this type of discourse, the rhetor can "distort the picture of reality which language can paint in order to get the [recipient] to do something or believe something (as in dishonest advertising or some political speeches)" (Kinneavy, 1971: 39). The crucial facet of this discursive aim is that rhetor, reality, and language are usually all directed at the accomplishment of some effect in the recipient. Kinneavy's examples of persuasive discourse include advertising, political speeches, religious sermons, legal oratory, and editorials (Kinneavy, 1971: 61).[7]

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[7] Despite the fact that these aims are all clearly defined, the very lists of examples Kinneavy indicates that these categories are fluid in application, and they can, and almost always will overlap, while one aim might remain

Hypothesizing the rhetorical power of *Metal Gear Solid*, this particular aim will be our main analytical focus now, implementing the rhetorical analysis of the basic meaning-making aspects of the game as well as its discursive structure. For this, we will show the different ways in which *Metal Gear Solid* focuses on the player in an attempt to elicit from him or her a specific conviction or emotion or, more generally, cause some effect in the recipient. In order to do this we will be looking at the game's various semiotic resources as well as the overall discourse structure of the game to look for elements of three different kinds of arguments which can make persuasion possible – the ethical, the pathetic/emotional, and the logical/seemingly rational argument, all three of which stem way back from Aristotle (Kinneavy, 1971: 238–249) and for which we will give further explanations below.

We will analyze these types of arguments with the help of several frameworks developed for the analysis of filmic and other multimodal texts (cf., e.g., Bateman and Schmidt, 2012; Bateman and Wildfeuer, 2014; Wildfeuer, 2014). These frameworks make it possible to describe how recipients make sense of the audio-visual information provided in a multimodal artifact in terms of inferences and hypothesis-construction and with regard to the overall coherence of the multimodal interplay[8]. They thus help us describe how meaning in the multimodal discourse can

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more dominant than the others. Overlapping of aims will frequently cause interference, while in some other cases, different aims can function parallel to each other without jeopardizing each other. The division between aims is there just to allow us to study them in a more systematic way. At the same time, Kinneavy's aims may seem at least partly reminiscent of what Halliday labels *metafunctions* (e.g., Halliday, 2003). However, we have opted for Kinneavy's terminology due to the fact that the persuasive aim we want to focus on does not entirely correspond to one single metafunction as proposed by Halliday – it contains the additional aspect of "swerving" one's attitude regarding the realm the text describes.

[8] Coherence is understood here as the logical conclusiveness of the semantic and pragmatic structures at work in the game and during its unfolding. This means that even if the structure of a game play is contradictory at some point and initiates hypotheses that might later be withdrawn by the recipient, the dynamic development of this

generally be constructed from the information given by several semiotic resources, including both an analysis of the verbal language as well as the audio-visual representation of content. A second step then is the analysis of the narrative, and in this case also rhetorical, structure of the unfolding discourse of a film or video game. We will explain further details of these analyses when examining some examples below; however, in our analyses, we will mostly focus on the second step, the description and analysis of the respective discourse structure which, by its dynamic unfolding of the game, supports the embedding of several arguments.

5. Persuasive Aims and Rhetorical Patterns in *Metal Gear Solid*

Given the maturity of socio-political narrative themes we find in the game, including the ones of warfare, nuclear weaponry, genetic engineering (among others), the game itself more than potently addresses the recipient in an anti-war manner, which might indeed sound paradoxical, given the fact that the game can be characterized as a military game. However, the very fact that the game actively discourages the player from killing a significant number of enemies, testifies the anti-war attitude generally observable in the overall structure of the game. We will now elucidate in further detail the particular types of arguments to be found in the unfolding of the game, both with regard to the verbal level as well as the level of the interplay of several semiotic resources.

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structure still results in a coherent interpretation. In our analytical example, contradictions do not play a role; this is, however, often the case for complex multimodal structures and a more comprehensive empirical analysis of further video games will reveal these kinds of structures.

5.1 The logical/seemingly rational argument in *Metal Gear Solid*

The logical argument achieves persuasion by presenting an idea that is seemingly rational (see Kinneavy, 1971: 245–249). Kinneavy's description corresponds to the general understanding of multimodal arguments as "the rhetorical and pragmatic effect[s] of the audiovisual discourse. In its action, this discourse reveals the consistency of rational argument and the efficiency of persuasive force" (Alcolea-Banegas, 2009: 270). Following the general idea of multimodal argumentation, we do not see these arguments as explicitly propositional arguments with the proposition expressed verbally or (audio-)visually, as defined by Blair (1996). Even though paintings, drawings, films and video games have a general ability of conveying meaning in terms of their semantic content, their argumentative patterns become clear only by analyzing their discursive structure and specific textual cues prompting the recipient's inferences, which we will outline in the following and, first, from a rather general perspective on the game as a whole.

It is, on the one hand, mainly the game's overall gameplay design which is brought to the player dynamically and which provides its main rational idea by featuring logical and rational arguments. From the very beginning, the player is explicitly (verbally) or implicitly (non-verbally, and mostly visually) instructed not to kill an enemy unless it is completely necessary. The implicit[9] instruction is achieved through different aspects of visualization and game controller usage. If, for instance, the player encounters three or four enemies on the screen, this makes it clear that he/she shall not use a weapon, but rather try to use one's wits to sneak past them. In Figure 1, we see a typical *MGS* scene in which Snake (and thus the player) is

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[9] According to Paul (2012: 33) subtle forms of persuasion can sometimes be more powerful than the explicit ones.

surrounded by three enemies (marked as red in the small area map on the top right) – assaulting any of them in even a slightly conspicuous manner would incite a red alert which is why the player has to resort to different stealth methods of outwitting the enemies. Over time, the player becomes aware of what he or she is allowed to do with the joypad, and the whole stealth concepts gets so interwoven with the general gameplay that we can talk about an almost tactile (or even embodied) modality – what one shall or shall not press becomes almost so natural that one stops reasoning about it consciously.
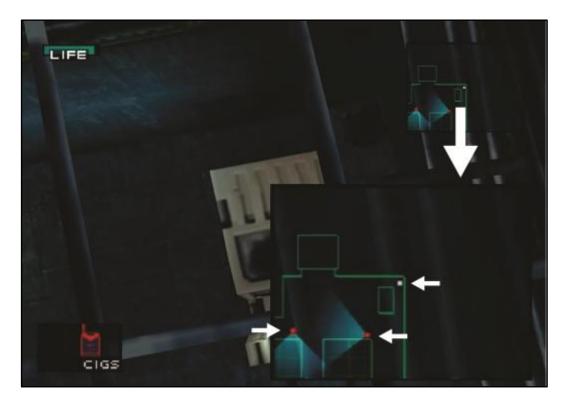

Figure 1: A typical scene from *Metal Gear Solid* (screenshot)

This type of "ludic conditioning" of the player is all the more impressive considering the contradiction between the prescribed method of gameplay and the possibilities and actions afforded to the player. As the game progresses, the player gets access to more and more powerful weapons, with the help of which it becomes easier to fight one's way through the waves of

enemies even while in alert mode. As an active and involved participant, the player needs to perform several different kinds of ergodic work (cf. Aarseth, 1997) across several layers of meaning-making. It is thus a configurational work of playing the game and manipulating the unfolding situations during gameplay, which is always performed with the help of the game's specific interface. A player who is tempted to do so, however, will soon find that enemy soldiers do not stop appearing or attacking; with limited health and ammo at their disposal, the player who chooses to fight as opposed to hiding will eventually be outgunned. The continual foregrounding of non-violent game mechanics and the limited usability of a wide arsenal of weapons at the player's disposal can therefore be said to be strategies of procedural rhetoric, employed in the game with the purposes of communicating a pacifist message.

Another way in which the game spurs the player towards non-violence is the ranking system present at the end of the game: in order to get the highest rank, codenamed "Big Boss", the player needs to complete the game in one go, without saving his or her progress, and exercise extreme caution throughout the game in order to minimize the number of alerts and kills. Barring cheat codes and other similar tools and devices, such an achievement is only possible if the player has complete mastery of the layout of the game and complete control over Solid Snake, arguably attained over the course of several playthroughs. In other words, by the very nature of its ludological structure, *Metal Gear Solid* presents pacifism as a procedural argument, not as the path of the weak or the inexperienced, but rather as a difficult, time-consuming and ultimately rewarding approach which requires a great deal of training and restraint, since even a single mistake can result in failure.

Despite the fact that *Metal Gear Solid* is only one of many sequels in the original game series *Metal Gear*, the idea of working or fighting against the superweapon Metal Gear is still

dominant and is in particular visually supported in the game. For instance, the game often uses a specific representation of this superweapon, which is embedded in the game's narrative in several scenes. One example of such a representation is shown in the following:

Figure 2: Screenshots from a typical dialogue scene in *Metal Gear Solid*, followed by a representation of the superweapon Metal Gear

While the characters are talking about Metal Gear Rex, a projected sequence is embedded showing an obscured display of the object (see shot 4 in Figure 2). This sequence features a dynamic tracking shot of a camera filming Metal Gear in the underground maintenance base, but at the same time being modified by an overlaying strong color filter blurring the realistic representation and making it hard for the player to recognize the object. The voice track of the dialogue between the characters continues and gives some further details of how to handle the weapon and what to do next to find it.

For the presentation of the seemingly rational argument that this weapon is dangerous and need to be destroyed, the interplay of the various representations in terms of their rhetorical

structure plays an important role. By displaying the weapon and its context as a so-called projection[10] of the dialogue between the characters, it is represented as a subordinated entity to the main structure of the game and its narrative (see Figure 3 below). It is in particular the specific contrast in the layout of both representations (that of the dialogue and that of the object) which indeed give further details about this object, but at the same time display it as something obscure and shadowy. As Figure 3 shows, the subordinated structure thus functions as a specific representation of the weapon in question, which does in fact not present its strength or power or a way to use it for destruction.

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[10] "Projection is when moving from one unit to another, we also move from a participant in the film, text, comic, etc. to the 'mental world' of that participant" (Bateman & Schmidt, 2012: 169) or a more general ‚mental world' as the one depicted here. Bateman & Schmidt furthermore outline: „Instances of filmic projection can either constitute a straightforward process of 'sensing' some phenomena or objects of perception that are contiguous and continuous in time and space with the participant, in which case we have the filmic structure called a point of view shot (cf. Branigan, 1984), or the phenomena can be remote in time or space, as in the case of memories, premonitions, dreams and so on [...].
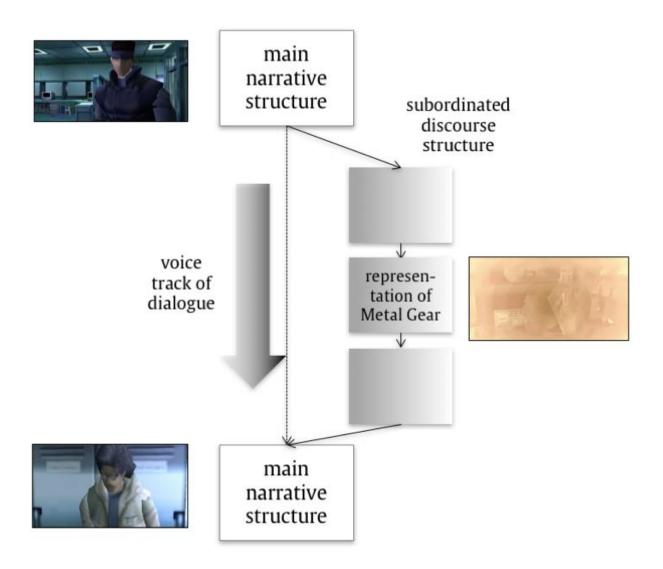
Figure 3: Discourse structure of the dialogue scene in *Metal Gear Solid*, featuring a subordinated structure representation of the superweapon

This representation of Metal Gear is used several times in the unfolding of the game, always in a very similar way to the above shown example. Since its actual representation therefore does not become clear throughout the game all until the final part, the weapon, as one of the main narrative entities in the whole game, remains vague and inexplicit for a long time – this is a fact that supports the general attitude of the game towards weapons and the context of

warfare. First, we get an obscured display of the weapon, then the player moves around the weapon as it remains blurred and unclear, and once the enemy (but not the player!) activates it, it becomes finally both visible and dominant. It is particularly important here that it is not the ergodic work of the participant which activates the weapon, but that it is the enemy in the game who does so. Even though the participant is forced to behave somehow in this situation, he/she is not able to influence the activation by his/her own work. The player's representational perspective is thus dominant here. Afterwards, the player battles the very weapon, and in the end has another fight on the remnants of the weapon. All this symbolizes the gradual growth of the threat epitomized in Metal Gear REX – a powerful nuclear-armed bipedal tank, which has to be destroyed in the end (and which is also in line with the overall logical argument within this aim).

5.2 The ethical argument in *Metal Gear Solid*

According to Kinneavy, we find the ethical elements not only in representations of some sense of morality, but also in those of knowledge of reality or the rhetor's portrayal of him/herself as a person who would not deceive the audience. As Kinneavy (1971: 238) underlines, the rhetor of the discourse "must appear to have a practical knowledge about the reality at issue, he [or she] must seem to have the good of the audience at heart". In particular the notion of the good sense, good will or good moral character is explained in further detail by Kinneavy as "making clear to the members of an audience that he [or she] has good intentions towards them" (p. 239). This exactly represents what has been outlined within argumentation theory as the rhetor's aim of conveying reasonable arguments in a discourse, as described, for example, by van den Hoven and Yang (2013):

„We can summarize this argumentative approach as the assumption that the rhetor is oriented towards argumentative reasonableness. [...] The meaning of this interpretative principle is that we assume the rhetor to be aware of the fact that his audience expects him to act in a reasonable manner. Therefore all elements in all modes of the discourse can be understood by the analyst as an attempt by the rhetor to keep up the impression that he [or she] meets this expectation [...].” (van den Hoven and Yang, 2013: 407)

For the case of *Metal Gear Solid*, the game features several occasions on which the characters, which can be seen as representatives of the rhetor, discuss destruction, aggression, mortality, and nonsense as related to warfare. They thus do not only express with this a certain sense of morality, but also directly reflect the situation of the game as compared to that in reality. By expressing their own perspective, they encourage the player to think about his/her attitude in contrast or in comparison to the one reflected in the game. Snake's words, for example, inform us not only about his attitude towards warfare, but also about some aspects of human nature:

Snake: Listen, Meryl. Everybody feels sick the first time they kill someone. Unfortunately, killing is one of those things that gets easier the more you do it. In a war, all of mankind's worst emotions, worst traits come out. It's easy to forget what a sin is in the middle of a battlefield (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5.3 "I'm like you... I have no name").

Snake adds that "[t]here are no heroes in war. All the heroes I know are either dead... or in prison. One or the other," whereas Meryl says that she "was a fool, [she] wanted to be a soldier. But war is ugly... There's nothing glamorous about it" (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5.4 Life and Death). In particular this personal statement of the character Meryl contains the ethical aspect of negotiating war as something negative and with negative influences on your life or the lives of others. Sniper Wolf, one of the renegade members of FOXHOUND, shares Meryl's and Snake's view of war, explaining that "watching everything through a rifle's scope" she could "see war, not from the inside, but from the outside... as an observer", in which she "watched the

brutality... the stupidity of mankind through the scope of my rifle" (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5.6 Love on the Battlefield).

Apart from the arguments that war habits are rooted in our nature, the discourse of the game mentions other factors, linked rather to nurture than to nature factors, which have their role in causing and maintaining war – these can be classified into the ethical and probably rational kind, given the fact that various entities are accused of supporting war (which is usually immoral), based on some seemingly rational facts. Although these facts are related to the reality construed by the discourse, they in fact serve as a parallel or a warning related to our reality. In *Metal Gear Solid*, warfare is related to scientific discoveries, so as to point out that scientists are also partly responsible for the general madness of war – we can see the ways in which war is able to abuse scientific work, and in which blind ambitions lead scientists towards taking part in war operations. Doctor Hal "Otacon" Emmerich, the chief engineer of Metal Gear REX, admits that science is frequently blinded by war: "You're right. We have to take responsibility. Science has always thrived on war. The greatest weapons of mass destruction were created by scientists who wanted to be famous" (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5.3 "I'm like you... I have no name"). Moreover, through the character of the president of ArmsTech, Kenneth Baker, increased revenues by weapons manufacturers are seen as a byproduct (and sometimes even a cause) of war:

> Snake: Anyway, the terrorists have both codes now.
> Baker: Those boys are totally insane. They wouldn't hesitate to launch.
> Snake: I agree. But what do they really want?
> Baker: Who knows? Maybe they're like us in the arms industry... always looking forward to the next good war.
> Snake: Well I'm not going to let these maniacs start a war today. Do you still have the card keys? (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5.3 "I'm like you... I have no name").

As far as the overall attitude towards warfare is concerned, the end of the spectrum definitely belongs to Liquid Snake, Solid Snake's twin, a former leader of FOXHOUND, and *Metal Gear Solid*'s main villain – he represents those who practically identify themselves with war and warfare:

> Liquid: A world here warriors like us are honored as we once were... as we should be.
> Snake: That was Big Boss's fantasy.
> Liquid: It was his dying wish! When he was young, during the Cold War, the world needed men like us. We were valued then. We were desired. But things... are different now. With all the liars and hypocrites running the world, war isn't what it used to be... We're losing our place in a world that no longer needs us [...] After I launch this weapon and get our billion dollars, we'll be able to bring chaos and honor... back to this world gone soft. Conflict will breed conflict, new hatreds will arise. Then, we'll steadily expand our sphere of influence (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5.10 Confessions of a Dangerous Mind).

Even though Liquid's attitude towards war is generally favorable, his words, coming from the key antihero of *Metal Gear Solid*, still serve the original persuasive peacemaking aim, which endures throughout the franchise.

It should be noted, however, that Metal Gear Solid features a few instances of unabashed aestheticized violence, both on the semiotic and on the mechanical layer, which seem to complicate its overall anti-war message. Boss fights, during which the player has to use the weapons accumulated during the course of the game, are often characterized by visceral action and copious displays of blood, both during the fights themselves and in the cutscenes which frame them. A particularly jarring example of mechanical violence which the player is forced to commit is the scripted fight alongside Meryl against a wave of enemy soldiers, which, provided that the player has managed to avoid detection until that point, represents the first proper combat situation in the game. As the player forced to kill enemy after enemy, he/she can also hear Snake

spurring on Meryl to stop thinking and start shooting as well. It should be noted that this is one of the rare gameplay sequences where violence against "ordinary" (i.e. non-boss) enemies absolutely has to be committed for the player to progress through the game. The fact that the scripted sequence is prefaced by a conversation between Snake and Meryl, in which he disparages her for acting like a rookie who has never shot a person, enables it to be read as a procedural initiation of the player into the militarized world of the game; the effect is only compounded in a talk between Meryl and Snake soon after the fight, in which Snake chastises Meryl for thinking that combat simulations are the same as real war. On the one hand, the sequence could be read as an example of what Noon and Dyer-Witheford refer to as the series' trademark ambivalent portrayal of war, as part of which messages of opposition towards nuclear weaponry and the global dominance of the US are contradicted by the games' militarism and instances of hyper-violence (2010: 76). However, if we take into account the conversations which frame the gameplay sequence in question, we can also interpret it as a commentary on behalf of Kojima and his team that acts of simulated violence in a virtual environment, no matter the faithfulness of their representation both in semiotic and mechanical terms, cannot do justice to, nor prepare one for, the act of shooting and killing someone in the real world. While this is a potentially contestable standpoint, further analysis of which is beyond the scope of this paper, it nonetheless enables us to look at the procedural combat sequence and the cutscenes which frame it as a very powerful, complex instance of ethical argumentation made by the game, one whose message aligns with the game's overall themes.

On the visual level, this observing perspective is strongly supported by several scenes of the game in which documentary material about the discussed topics is used as embedded scenes. One example of such a scene is given in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Scene from *Metal Gear Solid* in which documentary material is embedded

In this example scene, it is the character Kenneth Baker (president of ArmsTech; shown in shot 1 in Figure 4) who is supposed to be freed by Snake and who later talks about the threat of the nuclear war which is "greater than it's ever been". While he describes the increasing amount of nuclear fuel and plutonium and the problems of storing this material, the shots shown in Figure 4 and similar ones are accompanying his voice and the continued dialogue between him and Snake. These pictures with musical underscore are realistic representations of nuclear weapons, test scenarios and storage environments and invite the recipient to create direct associations to what he or she knows from his/her real world. By showing so-called "Key Visuals" (Ludes, 2011) which function as equivalents to keywords and have the potential to call for an immediate interpretation on the basis of historical or cultural knowledge, the rhetor here proves a certain knowledge or reality going beyond the limits of the game and directly associating the game scenario with the real world. By rejecting the fact that the Nuclear Age ended with the turn of the millennium, as the character Snake argues in the story, the

documentary material supports and proves this rejection and presents several visual evidences. It is again the specific rhetorical structure of the discourse as well as the representational perspective of the player which enable these associations and interpretations by embedding the scenes as subordinated structures to the unfolding dialogue, see Figure 5. In this case, the ergodic work of the player explicitly involves the construction of these associations and interpretations, but no further interaction with the discourse.
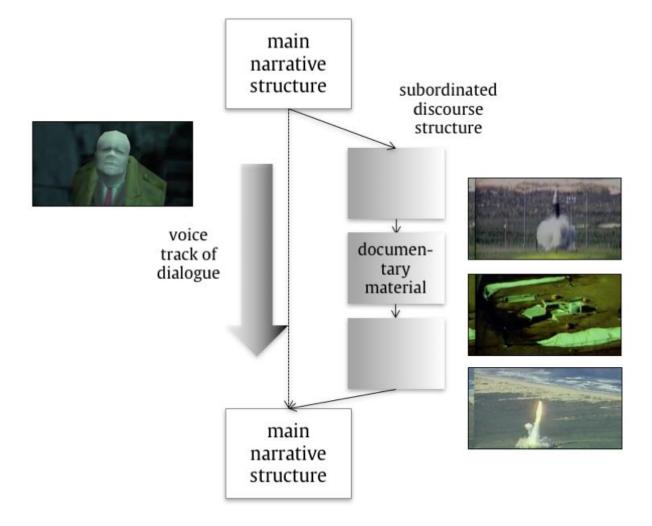

Figure 5: Discourse structure: Embedding the scenes as subordinated structures to the unfolding dialogue

5.3 The pathetic/emotional argument in *Metal Gear Solid*

The pathetic argument is, according to Kinneavy, related to achieving persuasion through arousing emotions in the audience (cf. Kinneavy 1971: 241–245). The list of emotions that are related to this aim provided by Aristotle is still largely applicable to present-day discourses – these include anger, calmness, friendship and enmity, fear and confidence, shame, kindness, pity, indignation, envy, and emulation. Kinneavy notes that the analysis of the emotional appeal is still at a common-sense stage, and that modern motivational research in advertising, psychology and in analysing groups and individuals shall be applied to discourse analysis in a systematic fashion. According to Kinneavy, emotional appeals account for a large portion of past and present persuasive techniques, whereas propaganda, religious rhetoric and commercial advertising have underscored the importance of this argument to a large extent. Nevertheless, different elements of the pathetic argument are still used within the persuasive aim in different media, though they tend to be more subtle in video games. We take this general idea as a starting point to discuss the expression of emotions in *Metal Gear Solid*. The following analysis is a first tentative way of approaching this topic in further detail.

As a first example for the use of emotional arguments, take the quotations given in the section on the ethical argument above. In the quoted lines, it seems that the persuasive effect is achieved by a combination of both the emotional as well as the rational argument. The characters that take part in the conversation seem to possess knowledge on warfare, while the general overtone is imbued with rather negative emotions. On the other hand, Psycho Mantis, a psychic mastermind and also a former member of FOXHOUND, believes that war is inevitable, i.e. it is, more or less, coded in the human DNA:

Mantis: And each mind that I peered into was stuffed with the same single object of obsession. That selfish and atavistic desire to pass on one's seed... it was enough to make me sick. Every living thing on this planet exists to mindlessly pass on their DNA. We're designed that way. And that's why there is war [...] Humans weren't designed to bring each other happiness. From the moment we're thrown into this world, we're fated to bring each other nothing but pain and misery (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5.4 Life and Death).

The scene in which this monologue is given (see Figure 6) works intensively with a cinematic style of representation which features, on the one hand, close up-shots of the characters involved, in particular shots of Snake listening to Psycho Mantis, and, on the other hand, dynamic camera movements showing the whole setting and situation in which Psycho Mantis is lying on the ground.

Figure 6: Screenshots from the scene with Psycho Mantis

Psycho Mantis' voice and his monologue are in the foreground of the scene and the player is invited to fully focus on what he says. The scene can thus be characterized as a rather intensified display of the emotional discourse which enables the recipient to

fully immerse into this situation and develop his/her own emotions of sympathy or antipathy.

At another point even Snake admits that war is basically inevitable, as he claims that "as long as there are people, there will always be war" (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5.10 Confessions of a Dangerous Mind). These arguments appear as belonging to the seemingly rational kind – at the same time, their frightening overtone makes them emotional at the same time. Besides the particular characteristics of the voice, the visual representation of this scene, which only shows a point of view-shot of Liquid's back, wounded and discussing with Snake (see Figure 7) in a rather dark setting, supports the emotional focus on the voice track and its argumentative content in that it does not point the recipient towards other details of the scene or lets him pursue specific actions. Furthermore, the colors of the setting are rather warm and create a comfortable environment; the quiet but little action in this scene contrasts the preceding fighting scene and concentrates on the dialogue. Again, the player is invited to immerse into the situation, to follow the dialogue between the two characters and to develop his/her own attitude towards war.

Figure 7: Screenshot from the scene in which Snake and Liquid are discussing war

As the examples above illustrate, *Metal Gear Solid* presents its emotional arguments regarding war and conflict in quieter moments of reflection, often at times when, notably, the player's direct control over Snake is taken away from him/her. However, perhaps the most striking instance of employing procedural constraints for the purposes of persuading the player is a brief scene which takes place during the fight with Metal Gear REX, in which the player is afforded *partial* control, and yet prevented from changing the outcome in any way. Near the end of the fight, an earlier boss enemy and a former friend of Solid Snake, Grey Fox, attempts to aid Snake but gets pinned against a wall by REX, piloted by Liquid Snake. What begins as a typical cutscene segues into a real-time situation, rendered through the viewfinder of Snake's missile launcher, in which the player is given a choice of attacking either Liquid Snake in the cockpit of REX or Gray Fox, having been told that a missile directed at either target would likely kill both. In an example of what Miguel Sicart would call *authored agency* (2016), the player is free to move back and forth between the two targets, and even to attempt shooting at them, but in case the player does decide to pull the trigger, Snake will simply comment that he is not able to shoot,

leaving the player forced to listen to the speech given by Gray Fox just moments before his death, which is again rendered as a very cinematic scene. By switching from a cinematic (i.e. the representational, semiotic layer) to a real-time ludic situation with limited control and back again, the game effectively leaves the player doubly powerless, both as a viewer and as an agent. The sequence in question invites contemplation on behalf of the player not only regarding the violence which he/she witnessed, but also the actions which he/she was *unable to take* to prevent said violence, resulting in an outcome more complex than the ones effected by tools of visual or textual rhetoric alone, and one which, furthermore, qualifies *Metal Gear Solid* as a procedurally persuasive game.

Within this central section of the paper, we have focused on the logical/seemingly rational, the ethical and the pathetic/emotional argument and combined Kinneavy's notion of discourse aims and the analysis of the multimodal meaning-making patterns in order to show how different modalities combine in persuading the player against warfare. The following section will explore some basic interactions existing between the persuasive aim and the remaining three discursive aims in Kinneavy's theory (expressive, literary and referential).

6. Other Discourse Aims in *Metal Gear Solid* and Their Interactions with the Persuasive Aim

Within this section of the article, we will attempt to outline the elements belonging to the remaining three discursive aims, which we encountered in our investigation of persuasive clues, and see how each of them, in its own right, helps to support and strengthen the game's persuasive effects. The first among them is the *expressive* aim, which shall reveal some facets of the encoder's (creator's) personality. As we are inevitably bound to Solid Snake's perspective of

the world we are presented with in *Metal Gear Solid*, we may take a look at the expressive discursive aim on the level of the *implied encoder*. In this sense, we may pay attention to several "confessional" lines in the game's dialogues (as in *Metal Gear Solid* there is no journal or logbook form we sometimes find in video games), where we discover certain features related to Solid Snake's personality. For instance, during the briefing session, among other things, we find out that Snake considers himself to be rather difficult to deal with: "With my personality I don't have too many friends"; that he is "no patriot," and that he feels he does not owe "anything to this army or this country" (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5.1 Briefing). As it becomes clearer that he is of a fairly bitter character, in one of his conversations with Meryl, we realize that, along these lines, he does not like being tutored: "I appreciate your help from before. But... I don't need lectures" (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5.3 "I'm like you... I have no name"). Snake also admits that is not aware that he has a twin and that he does not "have any family. No wait, there was a man who said he was my father..." (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5.4 Life and Death). All of these quotes point to the fact that he is not family-bound in any regard. But, all this goes to an even more extreme extent when we learn that Snake "never fought for anyone but [him]self", and that he has "no purpose in life. No ultimate goal" (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5.4 Life and Death). Snake's relation to life becomes even more puzzling in the final section of the game, when we hear him saying "I only felt truly alive when I was staring Death in the face. I don't know, maybe it's written into my genes," "Maybe it's time I live for someone else," and "I think it's time we look for a new path in life" (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5. 11 The Escape). When contrasted with the initial exchanges between himself and the other characters, which portray him as a hardened, apathetic soldier, Snake's end-game realisation that life could be constructed and enacted outside of combat, as something to be enjoyed and shared with others rather than

simply endured in isolation, represents a transformation which gives further credence to the game's anti-war argument. In much the same way that the game mechanics condition the player to take a pacifist approach, the events which Snake experiences during the course of the game's narrative serve to bring about his reconceptualization of life and living – one which, in line with the game's overall themes, is portrayed as antithetical to combat and war.

The next aim we shall look at is the *literary* one. According to Kinneavy, the defining characteristics of literary discourse are the stylistic and structural beauty of its poetic images which can be appreciated by the decoder in their own right. With this in mind, "pure" literary discourse is very rarely present in *Metal Gear Solid*. Instead, literary language can often be found as a contributory part of discourses which are predominantly persuasive (serving to present the game's core tenets to the player). A typical example would be the "death speech" of Vulcan Raven, one of the members of FOXHOUND and a late-game boss. His speech is full of poetic imagery, symbols and metaphors, but this embellished language ultimately serves the purpose of warning Snake about the dangerous, violent nature of his conflict with his twin brother, Liquid. In a broader sense, the speech also reaffirms some of the game's main narrative themes – the physical and psychological ramifications of war and combat:

> Raven: Just as the Boss said... it is my existence which is no longer needed in this world. […] But my body will not remain in this place. My spirit and my flesh will become one with the ravens. In that way I will return to Mother Earth who bore me. Snake! My spirit will be watching you... understand? […] You are a snake which was not created by Nature. You and the Boss... you are from another world... a world that I do not wish to know. Go and do battle with him. I will be watching from above. […] In the natural world, there is no such thing as a boundless slaughter. There is always an end to it. But you are different. […] The path you walk on has no end. Each step you take is paved with the corpses of your enemies... Their souls will haunt you forever... you shall have no

peace... Hear me, Snake! My spirit will be watching you! (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5.7 The Truth)

The final discursive aim we shall analyze is the *referential* one, which, according to Kinneavy, is dominated by the subject matter being discussed ("reality talked about"). *Metal Gear Solid*'s exploration of complex socio-political themes is facilitated by the fact that its diegetic world and narrative (set in the year 2005, seven years into the future from the time of the game's release) are both grounded in factual events and entities from the latter half of the 20th century. There are abundant references to real-world conflicts, scientific projects, and political organizations and institutions, among others, to be found in the game. While, at times and in isolation, these real-world referents seem to serve no purpose other than to increase the plausibility of the game's narrative as well as the player's sense of immersion, they nonetheless represent vital elements for the communication of the game's core pacifist tenets on a macronarrative level. In epistemological terms, the narrative of *Metal Gear Solid* is best understood as *faction* – it is characterized by a strong interplay of fact and fiction, so much so that the line between the two can sometimes become blurred, especially to players not versed in the storylines of the two preceding games in the franchise. The game's persuasive potentials stem from the careful and deliberate construction and presentation of the diegetic world as a viable adjunct of the real world; with that in mind, it is all the more important to single out some relevant examples of the referential use of language found in the game, and to see how these contribute both to the credibility of the game's world and Kojima's overall message.

Out of the three subtypes of referential discourse (informative, scientific, and exploratory) mentioned earlier, by far the most prevalent one in the game is the informative

discourse. The in-game conversations, especially those conducted with members of Snake's support team via the Codec radio, are replete with references to people (Charles DeGaulle, Lao-Tze, John Milton, Leo Durocher, etc.), works of literature (*Macbeth*, *Paradise Lost*, *To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time,* etc.) places (Anchorage, Alaska, Lop Nor, China, Rhodesia, etc.), historical and political events (The Watergate scandal, the First Gulf War, the START II treaty, etc.) and other factual information. For example, whenever the player obtains a new weapon, he or she is instructed to contact NEST's military advisor, Nastasha Romanenko, for information about the weapon in question. All but one of the weapons[11] found in the game are modeled off of real-world weaponry, and, accordingly, Nastasha provides the player with detailed, factual descriptions of their characteristics (round calibre, rate of fire, range, accuracy, etc.) which often sound as though they were lifted from a user manual:

> Nastasha: That is a FAMAS. It is a bullpup style assault rifle. It is durable and easy to use. Very resistant to overheating, it is a reliable weapon with smooth action. It can fire up to 1,000 rounds per minute. On full auto, you will empty a 25 round magazine in a few seconds. […] Those are Claymore Mines. Unlike other mines, which are planted underground, claymores are set up above ground and are designed to produce maximum damage in a wide-fan shaped area. When they go off, they spray seven hundred 1.2 millimeter steel pellets in a 60 degree pattern much like an oversized shotgun. (*Metal Gear Solid*: Codec content).

The Codec conversations with Nastasha and other members of Snake's support team effectively imbue the game with a distinctively encyclopaedic quality: in briefing Snake, his support team is actually briefing *the player*. The prevalence of informative discourse helps to situate the game's narrative within the (arguably, Western) political, military, and cultural

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[11] The issue of weapon manipulation in video games has recently been addressed by Weimin Toh (2016) – his discussion involves weapon customization performed by the player, weapon upgrades voluntarily performed by the player, and weapon upgrades performed solely by the game.

paradigms of the time, and to give it a sense of realism and credibility so often lacking in games of a similar kind, which, in turn, helps the game's pacifist message resonate all the more strongly.

In addition to informative discourse, *Metal Gear Solid* also features examples of exploratory referential discourse, characterized by its dialectical quality. The characters often engage in philosophical discussions on the nature of morality, war, and genes, among other topics. These discussions are frequently framed by evoking examples of real-world events, which are, in turn, interweaved with the diegetic events in the *Metal Gear* series (see also the analysis above). Much like in the case of informative discourse, the factual basis for in-game contemplations between characters enhances narrative plausibility. However, to a much greater extent than the relatively simple informative discourse, the exploratory referential discourse in *Metal Gear Solid* is often ideologically charged – that is to say, it is utilized by the characters to further their points and convince Snake (and by extension, the player) of the validity of their actions and goals. Exploratory language is at the center of many of the game's conspiratorial conversations, which drive the plot forward, contribute to worldbuilding, and serve as a tool for characterization by revealing the agendas of different characters:

> Baker: In other words, there is plenty of nuclear material and scientists for making a bomb. We live in an age when any small country can have a nuclear weapons program.
> Snake: What about the other superpowers?
> Baker: Russia and China still maintain a significant nuclear presence. Complete nuclear disarmament is an impossibility. To maintain our own policy of deterrence, we need a weapon of overwhelming power.
> Snake: You mean Metal Gear.
> Baker: You know our industry suffered quite a blow as a result of the cut-backs in military budgets, due to this so called "peace".

Snake: I remember hearing a lot about mergers and take-overs among the big weapons makers.

Baker: Yes. And after my company lost their bid to produce the Air Force's next fighter jet, the Metal Gear project was out last ace in the hole. That's why we pushed to have Metal Gear developed as a black project.

Snake: Black project?

Baker: Secret projects paid for by the Pentagon's black budget. You can avoid a lot of red tape [and] get a great lead-time on your weapons production. And no one can bother you. Not even those bleeding heart liberals on the military oversight committee.

Snake: Bribes.

Baker: I prefer to think of it as good business. (*Metal Gear Solid* transcript: 5.3 "I'm like you... I have no name")

Conversations such as this one, between the ArmsTech president Kenneth Baker and Solid Snake, are emblematic not only of *Metal Gear Solid*, but of the entire Metal Gear series. In fact, it would be reasonable to claim that, from a narratological standpoint, the series owes its enduring success and legacy to Kojima's idiosyncratic blend of fact and fiction, which we have also shown with the multimodal analysis of the various discourse structures unfolding in parallel to each other (see figures 3 and 5). Predicated on the use of referential language and images and scenes from real world material, *Metal Gear Solid*'s narrative examines the meeting place of business, war, morals, genes, and ideologies, both national and personal, and manages to function as an effective commentary on contemporary Western politics and culture in its own right, while at the same time serving as a congruous complement to game mechanics in order to further strengthen the game's overarching anti-war sentiments.

7. Conclusions

Starting from our initial hypothesis that multimodal construction in video games can follow specific discursive aims in the process of persuading game players, we have completed a multifaceted analysis which elaborated the ways in which different modalities in a representative video game combine so as to convince the player to act, play, and perhaps think accordingly. The multimodal approach combining the notion of discourse aims and the rhetorical and argumentative structure of *Metal Gear Solid* showed that, as verbal and textual cues combine with filmic elements and highly specific gameplay strategies, the player is not only constantly reminded that killing enemies is not a good decision and driven towards resorting to sneaking past those who might hurt him/her, but also warned about the devastating effects of warfare. This points at the fact that video games possess a greater persuasive power than perhaps any text form mentioned in Kinneavy's lists, as they are both multimodal and highly interactive. The persuasive aim in *Metal Gear Solid* is achieved not only by means of persuasive narrative strategies and verbal cues or the overall interface, control, and gameplay, but also through the specific rhetoric structure of the audio-visual representation and scene construction, particularly featuring subordinated structures with documentary material embedded in the narrative or a specific representation of the main narrative entity. The example analysis we pursue here then invites to analyze further video games with similar or different structures in a more corpus-based and empirically valuable approach to find out more about the different semiotic resources as well as their narrative and rhetorical structures used to convey their meanings. The *Metal Gear* franchise could potentially be compared to other anti-war video games (e.g. *September 12th: A Toy World*, *Trinity*, or *DEFCON: Everybody Dies*) in order to see which techniques are more effective in delivering messages positioned against warfare.

Given the diversity of modern video gaming, the variety of its genres, gameplay and graphics, this paper ought to serve as a call for new approaches that would examine different video games and messages delivered through them. *Metal Gear Solid* is only one of the numerous examples of video games that carry messages going far beyond the realm of the game itself. Other video games might also require introducing additional and/or different theoretical constructs, or might require alternations of the framework we have used here. Additionally, they might focus on other types of discursive aims and look at the interactions among aims from a different perspective. This is why we believe that establishing the corpus of video games within the field of (multimodal) discourse analysis might be beneficial when it comes both to video game studies and the study of discourse.

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