For an Understanding of Video Games Genres through the Discourse of Players

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ABSTRACT

Since the popularisation of game and play studies in academic circles, the question of the generic categories of video games (FPS, TPS, survival horror, puzzle, action, etc.) has attracted the attention of many researchers and has gone through several paradigms. At first, many studies followed the path opened by literary and cinematographic studies, trying to formulate a set of criteria, notably formal, that would allow the determination of a game's genre outside of any historical consideration. Later, researchers postulated that a development studio has the power to determine the genre of its video game, in the same way that an author, a publisher or a filmmaker defines a generic label for his or her work (a label which is relayed by the press, a sort of intermediary pole). However, more recent research has shown that the generic classification of video games is a more complex social phenomenon, in which both the production pole (the development studios) and the reception pole (the players) intervene (Letourneux, 2005; Arsenault, 2011). Indeed, it appears that the producers' discourse is no longer sufficient to legitimise a generic label today. So our doctoral thesis will focus on how players manage to create, propagate and legitimise generic labels.

Several elements lead us to carry out this research. Firstly, unlike literary and cinematic genres, which are relatively fixed, video game genres are still being negotiated now, which allows us to have a direct view on the way they are stated. Furthermore, the generic hybridity of many video games tends to complicate debates within gaming communities (for example, there is a tendency to define a genre in relation to the game's themes, but also in relation to its gameplay; Burn and Carr, 2006; Arsenault, 2011). Moreover, video games today reach a vast public and have encountered numerous community phenomena, such as participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992; Raessens, 2005), fan cultures (Jenkins, 2006; Le Guern, 2002) and folksonomy (Petrucco, 2006): in other words, gamers establish by themselves the analysis of their practice and manage to collectively confer legitimacy to their discourse, notably through the use of social networks. In contrast, the video game's auctorial authority appears abstract, as a video game is the result of the work of a group of individuals hidden behind an impersonal enunciation (Metz, 1991; Badir and Provenzano, 2017). It is therefore complex to identify an enunciator of the discourse and, of course, of generic categories. Finally, our study will have as corpus five formats specific to the internet environment: wikis, posts, forums, evaluations and tags. These five formats have never been linked before, although they all represent a form of knowledge production industry (Sköld, 2017). Furthermore, it will be interesting to examine the influence of the discussion format on generic categorisation.

The reasons that led to the selection of these five formats are multiple: they are the formats most used by players to communicate in writing today, their online accessibility, their originally non-scholarly and non-journalistic nature, and the complementary views they offer on our problematic in terms of constitution and legitimisation of generic labels. Other common non-written formats (e.g. streams) were

not included in this study due to practical difficulties (e.g. capturing and storing extracts). However, we believe that an extension of our thesis could focus on these formats.

Three games will serve as transversal discursive targets for the study of these formats: *Resident Evil 4* (Capcom 2005), *Portal* (Valve 2007) and *Wolfenstein 3D* (id Software 1992). The first two games were selected because their generic categorisation is very complex and, even today, gamers continue to argue about which generic label suits them best. In contrast, *Wolfenstein 3D* is a precursor and archetypal FPS. This choice will allow us to compare the number of labels that exist for a type of game and to observe if differences appear in the argumentation.

In order to carry out this project, we have chosen to take a semio-rhetorical perspective which allows us to analyse the discourses from both an argumentative (how the players interact and debate with each other) and a narrative (how this debate is structured in time and space) angle. Moreover, such a method allows us to take into account the particular semiotic framework of the discourses studied (profile picture, waiting time between contributions, etc.).

The constitution of our corpus will be carried out in two successive steps. Firstly, we will list the generic labels of each target game using their main wikis and Steam Tags. Indeed, these two formats have a categorical indicator that facilitates the identification of genres. Secondly, the generic labels previously identified will be used as keywords in order to orientate searches in the other formats. Only speeches in French will be included. Indeed, our linguistic competence does not allow us to analyse precisely speeches in other languages. However, this restriction will feed our hypothesis on the elaboration of genres: the terms used by the players being largely derived from English and Japanese, it seems judicious to observe, in a written French discourse, the folksonomical effects of naming due to the borrowing from a foreign language.

Once the review has been carried out, our analyses of the corpus will be divided into three interdependent parts, which will be integrated into an Excel table (see appendix). (1) We will describe the discursive practices of generic categorisation in use within each format, in particular the macro-categorical criteria used by the players (thematic, aesthetic, narrative, gameplay-related, etc.). (2) The in-depth semio-rhetorical analysis of the corpus will reveal the co-construction of points of view (Rabatel, 2005; 2012) taking place between the various players. Indeed, a hierarchy regulates the interactions and plays a fundamental role in the argumentation around the generic categories. (3) Linked to the previous point, we will analyse how the *ethos* of players can influence their authority (Amossy, 2010; Peyron, 2012; Maingueneau, 2014; 2015). Indeed, we must consider that the perceived image of a player can play a major role in the configuration of discourses, depending on whether the player is more or less reputable within his community. Given the nature of our analyses, it should be noted that they will be entirely manual and will not use a crawler or other automation software.

The analysis of the cross-tabulations in our Excel table will enable us to obtain, for each format and for the whole, several statistics relating to the frequency of appearance of certain argumentative patterns. However, we will not reject the more atypical scenarios that may emerge from the overall interpretation of the results, as they contribute just as much to the understanding of the generic regulation mechanisms.

Having established a partnership with the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), the aim of our thesis will be to help this organisation in the management of its database (comprising more than 20,000 video games). Indeed, the generic criterion is nowadays preponderant in the research of average gamers, but also in the work of many researchers. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms behind the legitimisation of video game genres will help a wide range of socio-cultural actors in their task of preserving the medium. In addition, determining a new approach to generic categorisation, based on the conceptual categories articulated and legitimised by the players, will move away from seemingly industry-imposed standards and provide a classificatory model that will make sense to users. Finally, the interpretation of the results will make it possible to question the way in which gamers participate in the hermeneutics of the video game, shedding new light on the practices and discourses of gamers in circulation on the Internet.

FIGURES AND TABLES

Citation	Appellations mentionnées (M, défendues (D), réfutées (R) ou supprimées par rapport un état antérieur(S))	Modes d'énonciation des étiquettes : mention (M), reprise (R), déformation (D), calque (C) emprunt (E), néologisme(N)	Critères macro-catégories des étiquettes : thématique (T), narratif (N), esthétique (A) ludique (L), autre (A)	Configuration/échange : co/énonciation (CO), sous/énonciation (SOUS), différenciation (DIF)	Age/ou à base des informations du profil)	Maîtrise de la langue dans l'intervention : faible (F), basique (B) a la note (A)	Type de joueur(s) mentionné clairement) : occasionnel (O), régulier F), professionnel (P)	Notoriété : inconnu (I), connue la page (C), recommu au delà dela page (R)	Fréquence d'intervention de l'auteur sur la période observée : unique (U), rare (R), fréquente (F)	Statut adopté : descripteur(D), argumentateur(A) ou médiateur entre plusieurs intervenants (M)	Date et heure	
	Volet 1 : Modes d'énonciation et critères macro-catégoriels			Volet 2 : co-construction des points de vue	Volet 3 : *ethos* discursif et effets d'autorité						Métadonnées	
"Catégories : **Jeu de tir subjectif** Survival horror Jeu vidéo sorti en 2005"	M : Jeu de tir subjectif M : Survival horror M. Jeu vidéo sorti en 2005	M	L T A	/	/	B	/	I	R	D	26 03 2005 (16h16)	Markadet
"Le jeu est classé **"18+"** par le PEGI."	M : 18+	R	A	SOUS	/	B	/	/	R	D	26 03 2005 (16h23)	Markadet
"Resident Evil 4 est un épisode de la série de **jeux vidéo d'aventures et d'action survival horror** Resident Evil mettant en scène les agents de la Stars contre la société biochimique Umbrella." "Catégories : **Jeu de tir subjectif** Survival horror Jeu vidéo sorti en 2005	S : Jeu de tir subjectif D : Jeu d'aventures et d'action survival horror	M	L T	SUR	>30	B	F	C	F	D	26 03 2005 (23h28)	Céréales Killer
"Le jeu est classé « 18+ » par le PEGI. Ce jeu comporte des scènes très violentes et de nombreuses grossièretés (en espagnol, cependant...)."	D : 18+	R	A	CO	>30	B	F	C	F	D	09 04 2005 (15h26)	Céréales Killer
"Catégories : Survival horror Resident Evil Jeu vidéo sorti en 2005 **Jeu GameCube**"	M : Jeu GameCube	M	A	DIF	/	/	/	/	R	D	22 05 2005 (23h38)	Ludo Thécaire (bot)
"Catégories : Survival horror Resident Evil Jeu vidéo sorti en 2005 Jeu GameCube **Jeu playstation 2**"	M : Jeu playstation 2	M	A	DIF	/	B	/	I	U	D	01 07 2006 (01h37)	196,217,212,246
"Genre **Survival horror, jeu de tir subjectif** Mode de jeu **Solo**"	M : Survival horror M : Jeu de tir subjectif M : Solo	M	L T	DIF	/	/	/	/	R	D	11 10 2007 (18h38)	DumZiBot (bot)
"Genre Survival horror, j**eu de tir ~~subjectif~~ objectif**"	S : Jeu de tir subjectif D : Jeu de tir objectif	M	L	DIF	/	B	/	I	U	A	21 11 2007 (20h27)	83.153.92.200
"Genre Survival horror, **jeu de tir ~~objectif~~ subjectif**"	S : Jeu de tir objectif D : Jeu de tir subjectif	R	L	DIF	>30	B	F	C	F	A	21 11 2007 (20h27)	Céréales Killer
"Le jeu est considéré comme le meilleur **jeu d'action** jamais créé. Il est classé deuxième dans la liste des meilleurs jeux vidéo de tous les temps du magazine britannique EDGE, ce qui en fait une référence."	M : Action	R	L	SOUS	/	B	/	I	U	A	13 01 2008 (21h49)	82.242.89.32

Table 1: Sample of the three-part analysis: the *Wikipedia* pages of *Resident Evil 4*. Only certain quantifiable elements and metadata appear. Given the exploratory nature of the approach, the 'other' category of the macro-categories will evolve if too many occurrences of a criterion are found.

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