JAPANESE CULTURE THROUGH VIDEOGAMES

Rachael Hutchinson

Japanese Culture Through Videogames

Examining a wide range of Japanese videogames, including arcade fighting games, PC-based strategy games and console JRPGs, this book assesses their cultural significance and shows how gameplay and context can be analyzed together to understand videogames as a dynamic mode of artistic expression.

Well-known titles such as *Final Fantasy, Metal Gear Solid, Street Fighter* and *Katamari Damacy* are evaluated in detail, showing how ideology and critique are conveyed through game narrative and character design as well as user interface, cabinet art, and peripherals. This book also considers how 'Japan' has been packaged for domestic and overseas consumers, and how Japanese designers have used the medium to express ideas about home and nation, nuclear energy, war and historical memory, social breakdown and bioethics. Placing each title in its historical context, Hutchinson ultimately shows that videogames are a relatively recent but significant site where cultural identity is played out in modern Japan.

Comparing Japanese videogames with their American counterparts, as well as other media forms, such as film, manga and anime, *Japanese Culture Through Videogames* will be useful to students and scholars of Japanese culture and society, as well as Game Studies, Media Studies and Japanese Studies more generally.

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A note on Japanese names and sources

Japanese names are used according to Japanese convention, with the family name first and given name second – Kojima Hideo rather than Hideo Kojima, for example. For gamers used to the English name order, this usage will underscore the idea that the games under discussion are Japanese works. There is one exception to this rule – I use Japanese character names according to how they appear on screen in the arcades distributed to Western markets, for example Kazuya Mishima rather than Mishima Kazuya.

In the bibliography, Japanese works are listed according to the language in which I used them. Works by authors such as Murakami Haruki and Kirino Natsuo are widely available in English, so these are listed by English title only, with the translator clearly indicated. Academic works by Japanese authors are also listed according to the version I used, for example works by Etō Jun and Maeda Ai are listed in Japanese, but works by Ueno Chizuko are listed in English, with the translator clearly indicated. In the case of translated works, the publication date of the original version is indicated in square brackets.

Japanese game titles which consist of one word, untranslated for English release, are kept as they are (*Ōkami, Kessen*) with an explanation of the meaning in the text. If the game title is a katakana rendering of English words, (*Fainaru fantajii, Metaru gia soriddo*) I have used the English. Other games are discussed using the English title, with the Japanese in brackets at first mention, for example *Nobunaga's Ambition (Nobunaga no yabō)*.

A note on spoilers

Although popular fan sites and blogs typically try to avoid 'spoilers' – revealing important plot points and/or endings to videogames – this is not possible for this project. Critical analysis of texts involves taking the meaning of the whole text into account. Just as one cannot grasp the whole meaning of *Jane Eyre* or *Thelma and Louise* without analysing the end of the text, the full meaning of *Final Fantasy VII, Metal Gear Solid, Ōkami* or *Yakuza 2* cannot be discussed without revealing the plot. On the other hand, most of these games are now considered old or canon, and their plots well known, freely disseminated on the internet through wikis and walkthroughs. Gamers particularly sensitive to a certain series are encouraged to play the game first before reading the analysis.

Abbreviations

FMV	full motion video
FPS	first person shooter
JRPG	Japanese role-playing game
LARP	live action roleplay
MMORG	massively multiplayer online role-playing game
NES	Nintendo Entertainment System
NPC	non-player character
PVP	player-versus-player
RPG	role-playing game
SNES	Super Nintendo Entertainment System
SNK	Shin Nihon Kikaku, Japanese game manufacturer

Introduction

On 22 August 2016, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō appeared at the closing ceremony of the Rio Olympic Games to announce that Tokyo would host the Summer Olympics in 2020. It was a surprise appearance in two respects – first, it was impressive that the Prime Minister had chosen to make the announcement in person, and second, he appeared as Mario, the well-known videogame character from Nintendo. Abe's appearance was preceded by a short film sequence projected in the stadium and on televisions around the world, in which the Prime Minister, sitting in a taxi trapped in heavy traffic, fretted about getting to Rio on time. In a solution worthy of videogame magic, Abe morphed into a cartoon Mario figure, exited the taxi, dove into a large green pipe in the middle of the road, travelled through the pipe at supersonic speed, and arrived in Rio just in time. A real pipe appeared out of the ground in the centre of the Rio Olympic Stadium, sound effects from *Super Mario Bros.* echoed around the arena, and Abe was suddenly standing atop the pipe, draped in a red cape and wearing Mario's iconic red hat. It was as if the American President Barack Obama had dressed up as Master Chief, super-solider of the Halo series. Never had I imagined that a sitting head of state would appear at an international sporting event in the guise of a videogame character. But if any head of state would do such a thing, it would be Japan's.[1]

Japan is home to some of the largest videogame development companies in the world – Nintendo, Square Enix, Konami, Sega, Namco Bandai and Capcom to name a few. The games produced by these companies span many different genres – role-playing games, fighting games, stealth action shooters, turn-based strategy, and so forth. The richness and diversity of the medium is significant. I believe that these games should not just be seen as market products but as artistic works and cultural artefacts, that can tell us much about the culture of the place of origin. Japanese games are not only highly regarded for their production standards, but also sell millions of copies annually across the globe, drawing players in with their unique perspective on universal human ideas. In this book I will argue that deep-seated Japanese attitudes and values are not only visible in the content of these videogames, but can also be experienced first-hand by the gamer, giving great insight into Japanese culture.

While there has been much discussion recently on what exactly constitutes a 'Japanese game,' given the global distribution and worldwide corporate structures

of the Japanese games industry,[2] I will use the term 'Japanese game' to mean a videogame developed by studios incorporated in Japan, with their head offices located in Japan as well. This means the big 'triple A' studios I just mentioned, as well as smaller development companies like Atlus and Clover Studio. Games developed and released by these companies are known worldwide as 'Japanese games,' even though much of the work on the game may have been completed in Shanghai or Toronto. A game developed by one of the Square Enix subsidiary overseas offices is still perceived and welcomed as a 'Square Enix game,' and massive franchises like *Final Fantasy* and *Kingdom Hearts* bear the unmistakable stamp of the corporation, from art style and narrative structures through to peripheral materials such as game manuals, computer wallpaper and downloadable content.

Martin Picard's use of the term '*geemu*' to set the Japanese videogame apart from its Western cousins is useful, drawing attention to the fact that in Japan, videogames are often developed in close association with other media forms.[3] *Manga* (comics), *anime* (animation) and *geemu* (games) often form a set, and fans of specific titles will usually buy all of these products in order to better enjoy the 'world' of that particular story. *Geemu* are part of the 'media mix', including light novels, live-action feature films, television series, magazine specials and other popular narrative forms, as well as the echoes of narrative and characterization found in the endless layers of merchandising – figurines, plush toys, lunch boxes, backpacks, clothing, and whatever other items can possibly be purchased to enrich one's everyday life with reminders of a favourite series.[4] Stories told in modern Japan are told across many different kinds of art-based and consumer-based media. We can look at this as a multilayered yet unified narrative that achieves great depth and complexity with every additional item that is introduced to the mix. We can also see it as a splintered, refracted vision of modern Japan, well-suited to the upheaval and turmoil of Japan's disjointed twentieth century.[5] Although the 'media mix' is therefore a useful way of understanding the Japanese arts and art industries, I will be focusing more narrowly on the games themselves in this book.

I see each game in itself as an artistic expression, which can teach us much about the culture in which it was formed.[6] Conversely, I believe we can learn a lot about a culture through its artistic works, in this case videogames. The term 'culture' means many different things to different people, but I will use it in the following ways.[7] First, culture indicates the material objects that surround us in our environment, from items in the home to the architecture of the home itself. Second, culture denotes the popular arts and artistic traditions of a certain place – in Japan's case, this includes manga and anime, *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints and calligraphy, kabuki and Noh drama, sumo wrestling and the martial arts, *enka* ballads and karaoke, and so forth. Third, and most amorphous, culture comprises ways of thinking and ways of doing, often according to age-old traditions. This includes values, attitudes and beliefs which take shape through religion and social customs, and which are shaped in turn by historical, political and economic forces. 'Culture' in this sense can include prevailing attitudes about

family responsibility, death and the body, war memory, or racial bias. Terry Eagleton recently described culture as 'a kind of social unconscious' (2016: viii), hard to articulate but nonetheless shared by people who see themselves as a unified group. Culture is thus bound up in identity, a sense of who 'the Japanese people' are and how they think and act.

Culture and videogames are thus related in a number of different ways. Videogames depict environments and objects with which the player can interact. Videogames draw on the fine arts as well as computer code to portray people and places on-screen, and are themselves artistic objects. Videogames also reflect the 'social unconscious,' expressing the ideas, assumptions and anxieties of their designers. Just as literature and film have long been regarded as 'texts' through which we can access the broader cultural attitudes and ideologies of a particular time and place, so can we regard videogames as 'texts' that are also a product of their social, historical and political contexts. The videogame is now one of the major narrative forms through which social and political issues are critiqued and problematized by Japanese artists. Like film, literature, pop music, and other contemporary narrative forms, videogames express complex ideas of national identity and belonging, as well as social and political critique. The relationship between the Japanese videogame and 'Japan' is thus the relationship between a text and its context. My aim in writing this book is to provide a critical analysis of Japanese videogames through a focus on culture, demonstrating that videogames are a recent but significant site where identity formation and cultural negotiation are played out in modern Japan.

Games and cultural meaning

Videogames are a fairly new medium, with roots in the 1950s and the Golden Age of the arcade in the 1980s. Arcade videogames existed alongside pinball machines, many of which expressed ideas and narrative themes through cabinet art, figures on the field of play, and game objectives. Early Japanese shooters such as *Space Invaders*, *Time Pilot*, and *Galaga* explored universal themes of invasion, war and the pleasure of kinetic movement. With *1942*, however, games took a more realistic turn, simulating the wartime experience of battling over the Pacific. Even in these early years, game developers expressed both ideology and social values in the games they created.[8] Designers operated within the limits of corporate interests, game engine capabilities and the memory available for each platform, to produce games that were not only fun and adrenalin-filled experiences for the player, but also carried some kind of story, challenge or original environment to develop immersion and involvement. It is therefore necessary to take game design and gameplay dynamics as well as narrative themes into account when studying games as 'texts.' This book is not purely a narrative study of game stories, but an overall consideration of the videogame as a specific medium that involves the player in specific ways in order to convey meaning.

The matter of ideology in games has been much discussed in the academic literature, with terms such as 'digital rhetoric' used to examine how game

designers convey messages, attitudes or values to the player-audience.[9] Literature, film, manga, and anime are specific kinds of narrative that produce different effects on the audience through the use of words, illustrations, placement of panels on the page, camera angles, drawn movement, editing techniques, and so forth. Theories of consumers' readership or spectatorship abound. While on one level it seems reasonable to assume that the consumer 'gets the message' of the text by reading or viewing it, the dynamic processes of message-interpretation are also tied to media-specific methods of message creation and conveyance. This is equally true for the game text, which involves the player in specific ways to immerse them in the gameworld and experience the narrative first hand. Gameplay dynamics such as decision-making, item use, and character identification create a sense of immersion in the gameworld and engagement with its ideology.

Ian Bogost argues that videogames are an expressive medium with unique capabilities to persuade players of embedded ideology through 'procedural rhetoric' – conveying ideas through the coded regulations of gameplay dynamics rather than written or verbal text (2007: 28–29). While the term 'procedural rhetoric' has been criticized as unstable in the way that different scholars have used it over time,[10] I find it a useful reminder that game designers use *all* the aspects of a game to convey meaning – not just narrative, visual representations or exploration of 3D space, but also coded limitations on what the player can or cannot do, how the player is rewarded or punished for certain actions in the game, how objects in the gameworld can be used, traded, sold or weaponized, and so on. Gonzalo Frasca (2003) expressed this idea in terms of 'simulation rhetoric' and behavioural rules, governing what the player is able to do in a game (manipulation rules), what the player must do to progress or win (goal rules), and how the player might be able to change and modify the game themselves (meta-rules). Ideology is expressed not only through representation and narrative events, but also through all these rules operating in synchrony on the player's actions.

Looking at rhetoric from a software standpoint, Eric Freedman (2012, 2019) argues that the more we try to argue for the underpinning 'ideology' of a game, the more we run up against the limitations of the game engine itself, as the engine determines everything that the developer is able to achieve in the game as played. User data is also significant, as players often find ways to play the game that extend its possibilities far beyond the designers' original vision.[11] It would certainly be useful to study the Japanese game development process in detail through a situated observation of industry practice, or the Japanese gamer community in terms of their own meaning-making regarding different genres or styles of games. A more Japan-based study would also take more account of Japanese videogames released only for the domestic market, and analyze how these differ from those released overseas. The very broadness of the subject 'Japanese videogames' suggests many different approaches, which I hope will be taken in future research. For the current project, I am not undertaking a history of Japanese game developers, or a study of Japanese game players, but a qualitative

analysis of the games as cultural texts. Interviews with game designers, critical and fan reviews, and internet discussion boards will be used as evidence for the perspective of developers and players, but otherwise the analysis is based on my own gameplay – much as a literary analysis depends primarily on the critic's interpretation of their own reading of the book, or film analysis depends on careful viewing of the material. A basic premise of this study is that videogames represent and perform Japanese culture in ways that can be analyzed and deciphered by players and scholars, showing how Japanese culture is depicted and dispersed through this fast-growing and popular medium.

A 'cultural ludology' approach is useful for this study, as it incorporates the role of culture in understanding games as meaning-making systems.[12] Taking the national origin of games into account, Phillip Penix-Tadsen defines videogames as 'activities with rules that take place in a specific semiotic system and create meaningful experiences for the player in relation to the cultural context in which they are played as well as the cultural scenarios they portray' (2016: 6). In this book, I will be focusing more on the cultural context of living in modern Japanese society – more specifically in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries – rather than examining gamer culture or fan audiences in Japan.[13] The 'cultural scenarios' the games portray are my main interest, as well as how players have taken meaning from playing the various scenarios in light of what was happening in Japan at the time the game was made. It is also interesting to consider the different impact of a game like *Final Fantasy VII* at home in Japan in 1997, versus an American player encountering the game for the first time in 2017. In this way games can provide a window to the past as well as to another culture.

It is also helpful to consider genre when thinking about the cultural meaning of specific game titles. Arcades in Japan tend to be organized by game genre, with a shooter section, claw section, rhythm section and so on.[14] In a store selling game cartridges or discs, action-adventure games would similarly be grouped together while fighting games would be on another shelf. This benefits the store owner in terms of convenient shelf-packing as well as the consumer, who can browse similar titles before making a final selection. These days, we find games organized by genre in online stores and platforms, such as Steam or the PlayStation Store. But much narrative content is also linked to genre. Games in the shooter or strategy genre, for example, are more likely to be about war. These games are often concerned with narratives revolving around war memory, Japan's experience in war, values associated with being a good soldier, and so forth. Games in the action-adventure or fantasy genre, on the other hand, have a longer narrative structure and are often quest-based, involving relationships between people in a questing party, motivations for defeating evil, human responsibility in wielding power, and so on.[15] Dating simulations and visual novels tell us much about expectations in gender roles, including what lies within or outside the social norm.[16] Fighting games include stereotyped representations of people from different nations, with attitudes towards race and culture deeply embedded in the visual and kinetic portrayals of each character.[17]

In this way, some generalizations may be made about genre and content. But of course, there will always be outliers and exceptions to these. For this reason, it is useful to examine games according to their thematic focus, examining a wider range of games across and between genres to see how designers have tackled particular issues and social problems.

Looking back over 50 years of games from Japan, we find a wide range of artists and writers working in and across different genres and categories of games to reflect, and reflect on, Japanese contemporary society and what concerns the Japanese people. Taking a cultural reading across genres, we can see various concerns and anxieties leap out as consistent topics of Japanese videogame narratives: war and war memory, colonialism and the colonial legacy of the Japanese Empire, nuclear power (used for both energy and weapons), bioethics and bioengineering, social breakdown, and the mission to define the Japanese 'Self,' questioning and solidifying notions of Japanese identity, culture and history. We can pick any one of these concerns and track them across different mediums, platforms and genres in the Japanese videogame industry. While studies abound of the narrative-heavy JRPG (Japanese role-playing game), I aim to recognize and discuss the thematic content and cultural meaning in a range of genres. In this, I hope to provide a counterpoint to the criticism of shooters and fighting games for their 'lack' of narrative, by showing that much meaning is conveyed in their design and gameplay, as well as the different narrative structures that inform these genres.[18]

The JRPG has attracted much scholarly attention for its 'textual' or 'literary' nature, with tightly structured linear scripts, deep psychological character development, and the sheer length of the text, with many games taking 50–100 hours to complete. The length of such games is certainly comparable to a work of literature in the sense of a constructed narrative. The JRPG has often been analyzed thematically through close readings of scenes, which I will perform in this book as well.[19] But games have media-specific qualities that set them apart from other art forms. Playing a game is very different to reading a book or watching a film, no matter how involving those pursuits may be. When a game script and description is printed out and read like a book, the plot complexity and fast pace seem overly intricate and confusing. This is because it takes a lot more time to play through a scene than to read it. The best analogy may be the experience of reading through a dramatic play on the page, versus seeing the play performed. There are pauses in the acting, changes in scenery and costume, and musical interludes that simply do not come across on a purely textual level. Similarly, a game is played over a long period of time. A '40-hour game' will actually take much longer than 40 hours to play, when we consider loading times and the replaying of difficult scenes. The save system in the game console will not count replays of failed game sections, only the final successful playthroughs of specific scenes. So when I say I have just reached the '100-hour mark' in *Ōkami*, I have actually spent many more hours than this sitting in front of the console and manipulating the controls in order to achieve 100 hours' worth of saved progress in the game. This makes the convoluted plots and deep character development more manageable and understandable – playing the same scene over and over

gives the player a deep understanding of character motives and backstory. Playing through the vast sprawling narratives of the *Metal Gear Solid* series is completely different to reading the game scripts, and makes much more sense as a coherent and cohesive text.

The other media-specific element of videogames compared against other art forms is the player's embodiment within the gameworld. While this experience is different depending on the game's dimensionality – an avatar moving across a 2D background will give a different effect to one moving through a simulated 3D environment – it is generally accepted that the player connects with their avatar or character in a process of identification. In narrative-heavy games with deep characterization, the player will experience a feeling of close identification with the main character, knowing on one level that they are 'just playing a game' but also feeling as though they *are* that character, speaking to other characters and developing relationships within the gameworld.[20] In fighting games the relationship may be more complex, with the player at once feeling as though they *are* in the battle arena fighting against an avatar-opponent, and also as though they are the puppeteer or manipulator of their own character, trying to win a real-world tournament.[21] While both genres provide a sense of deep involvement and immersion in the gameplay and game environment, the JRPG and other narrative-based games have something that the fighting games do not – decision-making and player agency.[22] Decision-making strategies that can affect the outcome of the role-playing game involve the player deeply in the story and sometimes make the player complicit in negative actions of the main character, problematizing certain issues and drawing the player's attention to their own role in the narrative process. When a player embodies the main character of the narrative, the game becomes a truly lived experience. This makes the thematic concerns of the text stay in the reader's mind long after the game is finished, achieving even greater impact. One of my main arguments in this book is that games are thus highly effective media in terms of social critique.

On the other hand, simulations and fighting games explore cultural themes in a different way. While thematic content is certainly present in the game, it is delivered and experienced primarily through visual representation, with a much stronger win–lose dynamic that informs all gameplay and progress. For example, in this book I will analyze the themes of bioethics in *Tekken* and colonialism in *SoulCalibur*. But these themes are delivered not so much through narrative development and player-character embodiment – or even player-character identification – but primarily through visual and kinetic representations of the characters themselves, including their 'stage' or the background scenery that accompanies that character as their field of battle. Because the narrative structure of these games is non-linear, the character design becomes a greater site of conveying meaning to the player – quickly and obviously, designed for a much faster pace of play. When we talk about the game 'text,' therefore, there are many more elements to consider than just the storyline. In other words, the game 'text' is not equivalent to the 'text assets' of the game script and onscreen interface, but indicates a much larger and more complex cultural object.

Games, texts, and discourse

I have been talking about games as 'texts' here for two reasons. The first reason is to emphasize the nature of videogames as artistic works with meaning and something to say about the world in which we live. As a gamer and an academic in the field of Japanese Studies, I see similar themes and social problems being examined in videogames as I have seen in other artistic forms, like literature and film. The great preoccupation of the Japanese *shishōsetsu* or 'I-novel' was how to live as an authentic individual in the rapidly changing society of Japan's twentieth century. But many scholars of the I-novel would not be aware of the fractured identities and psychological struggles of well-developed characters in the *Final Fantasy* or *Metal Gear Solid* series. One motivation for writing this book is thus to make Japanese Studies scholars aware of this rich narrative form, and to add videogame examples to the discussion of characterization and themes in Japanese cultural production. I think it would be useful and interesting to compare Cloud Strife from *Final Fantasy VII* with Utsumi Bunzō from Futabatei Shimei's *Ukigumo*, or Solid Snake from *Metal Gear* with one of Abe Kōbō's tortured victims of modern society and scientific advancement. A consideration of nuclear power in Japan should include not only *Black Rain* and *Godzilla*, but also *Metal Gear Solid*; a discussion of war memory should likewise include *Fires on the Plain*, *The Wind Rises* and *1943: Battle of Midway*.[23] In writing this book I hope to bring the two fields of Japanese Studies and Game Studies closer together, providing game examples for scholars of both disciplines to study further. Some scholars like Mia Consalvo, Ben Whaley and Paul Martin have taken account of the Japanese context in studying Japanese games, beginning to address an otherwise large gap in the literature.[24] That such a gap exists at all seems strange, considering the strength of the Japanese games industry in the global marketplace.

The other reason I refer to games as 'texts' is to open the door to seeing games as part of a broader discourse, a commentary on society made by a wide range of artworks at any particular time or place. In thinking about the relationship of any text to its context, there are many approaches and frameworks that help us situate an artwork in its milieu. The text-context relationship is a contentious topic, discussed feverishly in scholarly works of the 1960s and onwards.[25] While 'strong textualists'[26] like Jacques Derrida saw literature and other artistic works as an independent, sealed unity, which may be studied only by a purely intrinsic approach, contextualists such as J.G.A. Pocock, Quentin Skinner, Michel Foucault and Hayden White thought of the text as so permeated with cultural signifiers and modes of meaning production that its context was actually embedded within it (White 1987: 212). In my work on Japanese literature, film and manga, I have always taken a contextualist approach. The people reading or otherwise consuming a text may be shaped by the same cultural practices that informed the production of the text, or perhaps they may encounter the text from a different temporal or geographical context. To examine the cultural meaning of a videogame text is to analyze the ways in which players might encounter and understand it, which necessitates an understanding of the historical milieu.[27]

One way of thinking about text and context comes from linguistic analysis, where the text is seen as representative of a larger language system. Language, as J.G.A. Pocock pointed out, is not the only context which gives a text meaning, but it is a promising one, a possible approach to the problem. The text becomes an act of communication, an utterance in a paradigmatic language system, written at a moment in history when that paradigm system is in the process of transformation. The language in which the text is written is concerned with idioms, rhetorics, modes of discourse: ways of speaking about the subject which are created, diffused and employed in a specific period. In this approach, once the historian grasps the language system (*langue*), they proceed to the specific text-act (*parole*).[28] In other words, the singular act of artistic creation, described as *parole*, can be seen as a small, discrete expression of a broader *langue*, a language shared by people of a certain time, place and culture. Michel Foucault expressed a similar idea by using the term 'discourse,' indicating both the text itself and also the sum of all the power structures underlying the text that made it possible and brought it into being. Discourse may be understood as a speech act that carries within it expressions of identity and power, forming and being formed by social and political structures in the real world.[29] Relating this to Game Studies, the videogame may be seen as a constructive act, reflecting and reflecting on real-world ideologies and ways of thinking about contemporary society and events.

Of course, Derrida and Foucault were writing at a time when videogames did not exist. I often wonder what these post-structuralist scholars would make of a game like *Katamari Damacy* or *Metal Gear Solid*. One thing that their scholarship cannot take into account is the complex interwoven mesh of hardware, software, interface, engine, aesthetics, narrative, diffuse authorial structure and finally player choice and action that goes into what we call a 'videogame.' It is not a straightforward 'text' by any means. The element of player involvement and the dispersive nature of product development in the videogame medium means that game narratives cannot be treated like literary works with one author. Some argue that player actions can change the game to such an extent that we should think of players as co-authors.[30] The text that the player experiences is more like a collaboratively authored narrative, which changes with each playthrough. In terms of development, games tend to be more like a cinematic work, with a director and many people responsible for different elements of the final text. 'Authorship' of the text is diffused since different teams work on each aspect of the game – battle mechanics, scenario, rule coding and programming, text assets and dialogue, as well as cinematics and visual design. While more than 100 people may work on a *Final Fantasy* game, that team is a small unit in the development company Square, whose management oversees the series and considers aspects such as market appeal and target audience. Accordingly, we cannot analyze the social critique of *Final Fantasy VII* as the expression of one person's ideas, values and attitudes. Rather, the critique is an amalgam of the ideas, values and attitudes of a group. Where a 'text' in cultural studies is seen as a single utterance of a broader discourse, I would argue that one game text

can manifest broader social discourse in and of itself. In this sense, a single videogame may itself be understood as a discursive structure.

Examining games as discursive objects is not new – Ken McAllister (2004) sees games as meaning-making systems with their own 'grammar,' discursive systems that can be analyzed through the lens of rhetoric and dialectics. In this view, games as a function of the broader *langue* are 'always already embedded in their sociocultural context' (2004: 29). Ideologies and assumptions of the game designer are written into the game as part of the development process, through the quotidian, day-to-day design of particular actions in the gameworld as well as larger, fundamental ideas about society and human relations. McAllister's vision of the 'computer game complex' includes the game text as well as the mass culture of consumer and industry, with dialectical processes acting upon audience, text and designer/author all embedded in society. As such, he advocates a broad, 'multiperspectival approach' to the study of computer games (2004: 42), to do justice to the complexity of the object of study. Similarly, Christopher Paul examines games as cultural objects that 'persuade, create identifications, and circulate meanings' through a discursive system (2012: 2). Paul acknowledges that language, words and symbols in games 'have the power to persuade, shape meanings, and aid in the construction of our perspectives and beliefs,' so a rhetorical analysis can best study 'how knowledge and situated truths are established in and surrounding games' (2012: 6). Where McAllister calls his object of study 'gameworks' and Paul uses the term 'wordplay,' both take the approach of linguistic contextualism to understand games as discursive objects. Paul also advocates methods of 'big rhetoric' in analysing the huge discursive systems of the game industry and audience, but ultimately settles on the practical approach of using case studies, investigating specific elements of games to show how they interact with their context (2012: 12–13). Following the paths of these and other scholars, I will also examine specific game titles as case studies rather than analysing the Japanese game industry as a whole.

Like other narrative forms, games may be seen as media artefacts that are in themselves 'speech acts' that do something, enact something, and accomplish something with cultural meaning; and also as part of a much bigger overarching *langue* or discursive structure. The main thing that sets these game texts apart from literature or film, manga or anime, is that games are meant to be played and experienced. In this, I believe that a game is not just a part of discourse, but that playing a game may also be described as discursive practice. The player is always in action, activating the game scenario and bringing it to life through their choices and agency, while narrative progression is achieved through their own level of skill. If games are part of social discursive structures by virtue of their commentary on that society, they are also products of society, and betray the power structures of that society in their narrative, theme, tone, representation of people and identities, and hierarchical structures embedded in the game's behavioural rules and software. As discursive structures, games are cultural products that carry ideology and political dynamics within them; as discursive practice, games connect deeply with the player who enacts their ideology with

every step of progress towards every save point. If political dynamics lie within and behind the production processes of games, they may only be revealed through gameplay, necessitating a player and a player's actions.[31]

Approaching Japanese videogames

Many of the games discussed in this book have sold millions of copies worldwide, and while some bear the unmistakable stamp of Japanese aesthetics in their anime-style character design (anything by Nomura Tetsuya springs to mind here), other games like the *Metal Gear Solid* series feature blond, blue-eyed characters who look Caucasian, with game environments and settings ranging from the USA to Russia, Liberia and Brazil.[32] A global marketplace and broad target audience make many game products seem *mukokuseki*, or 'culturally odourless,' lacking visual or linguistic signifiers that point obviously to the country of origin (Iwabuchi 2002). For this reason, many games I discuss in this book have been analyzed by Game Studies or Cultural Studies scholars for their game dynamics, themes, characterization, level design and so forth, but not so much as 'games about Japan.'[33] Conversely, the contributions of scholars from Japan who write about videogames have not made a distinct mark on Game Studies as a broader field. As Picard and Pelletier-Gagnon (2015) point out this is primarily a function of language, as much of the Japanese-language scholarship is not available in English translation.[34] By studying *Street Fighter* and *Metal Gear Solid, Final Fantasy* and *Legend of Zelda* as 'games about Japan,' I hope to shift the focus, bringing the Japan-specific elements of the games to more prominence in future analysis and utilizing the Japanese scholarly perspective on the games to broaden our understanding of not only these specific games, but also other Japanese games not discussed in this volume.

Because this book is about Japanese games, of course these are texts that were originally produced and released in the Japanese language. I am writing this book in English, however, so I will not be quoting extensively from the Japanese-language text. In any textual study, certain key words and phrases shed light on important details, such as major themes, turning points and character development. Therefore, at times I will analyze specific words and how they have been translated into English, and the different meanings given to the audience over time. In the process of text-asset translation and localization from Japanese into English, it is inevitable that errors will occur. Perhaps the most famous is the line 'All your base are belong to us' from the 1992 Sega Megadrive port of *Zero Wing*.[35] Another great example is found in Ted Woolsey's English translation of *Final Fantasy VII* for the first PlayStation console, in 1997. The alien being called Jenova says one line in the entire game, which in English included the blinding error 'beacause'. This is now a well-known meme, along with other 'Woolseyisms.' But one serious gamer took it upon himself to re-translate the entire text of *Final Fantasy VII* from scratch. It took him five years, and the results are available on the Qhimm Forum online.[36] For other game series, fans have spent years compiling encyclopaedic wikis that detail the

minutiae of different translations from version to version. These make compelling and sometimes amusing reading, and may easily be found by searching the internet for 'translations of [insert game title here].'

A careful study of these translations and retranslations will show that characterization, more than anything else, is affected by the text. Much of the narrative in role-playing games is delivered through dialogue, and much of the character development also occurs in soliloquy or interactions with other characters. As an example, the translations of Squall's dialogue in *Final Fantasy VIII* give him a very blasé and uncaring attitude. Where the original Japanese text has him reacting to other characters with a range of lines such as 'I can't believe you're a professor!' (*nante kyōshi da!)*; 'Not particularly' (*betsu ni*) or 'That was my fault/I'm sorry' (*warukatta na)*, all three of these lines are rendered as 'Whatever' in the English translation.[37] Similarly, Kain from *Final Fantasy IV* sounds much more aggressive and angry in the original Japanese. In cases where a character's personality and dialogue are significant to the overall analysis of the game's cultural meaning, I will provide notes regarding original phrasing. But on the whole, the major themes that run through the text are not conveyed through dialogue alone. Much thematic content is also delivered through symbolism, artwork, character actions and plot events (such as the blowing up of a town or a scientific experiment gone wrong). My analysis will therefore focus mainly on overarching themes and recurrent ideas in a series, giving specific examples and case studies from the games to illustrate the 'big picture' or ideological underpinnings of the text as a whole.

The other main issue with game texts, particularly retro classics that are now seen as canon, is that different versions of the games exist. Some games have been translated and re-translated multiple times with different ports and re-releases. Others have been changed to include voice-over narration and dialogue where the original was only text-based. Many of the old 8-bit and 16-bit sprites have now been 'updated' for a more modern look, losing much of the original impact and personality while adding elements that did not previously exist. In my research for this book I have used the earliest possible version of the game, either utilizing old consoles in the Morris Library of University of Delaware or original arcade versions at game conventions, conferences and museum exhibits.[38] For the long, 100-hour narrative games I have used my own PlayStation consoles, for which the CD ports of earlier games have been very useful. This has led to some tense moments, for example starting to play *Final Fantasy VI* on the PlayStation 2 and having to order an original PlayStation memory card before I could save my game. Interested readers can follow the footnotes to each text to see the port I used for gameplay. Where there are significant deviations between the original SNES (Super Nintendo Entertainment System, also known as the Super Famicom, a home videogame console released in Japan in 1990) and PlayStation ports I have noted these also. There are extensive footnotes on debates that are highly significant to gamers (such as the name of the character Aeris/Aerith in *Final Fantasy VII*), but the main point of the book is to analyze the broader cultural content of the games as a whole. I hope that gamers holding

strong feelings about certain phrasing and particular versions of the text will understand my reasoning and motivations here.

The multiplicity of the game 'text' is not limited to translation and localization issues. James Newman (2019) has examined global ports and exports of games to analyze the remarkable differences between them, some of which impacted the gameplay experience. The clearest example is *Sonic the Hedgehog*, the main idea of which is the speed of Sonic's movement as he spins and jumps over the platforming environment to collect coins, to the rapid syncopated beat of cheerful music in the background. Sega's 'blast processing' advertising campaign for the Megadrive/Genesis console also emphasized the speed of Sega games – including *Sonic* – compared to Nintendo's, using the analogy of a speeding race car compared to a clunky white van left behind in the dust.[39] But comparing the US/Japanese release, played on the NTSC television system, with the PAL release of Europe and the UK, it is noticeable that the European version is much slower, playing at 50 Hz instead of the 60 Hz experienced in the original. In this case, as Newman persuasively argues, the European gamer would have more time to make the split-second decisions needed for successful gameplay.[40] In the 1980s, pre-internet forums and pre-YouTube, the gamer themselves would not necessarily know they were playing a slower version. But I mention this example here to acknowledge the multiplicity of different ports and releases of the games studied in this volume.

Another consideration in gameplay is the physicality of arcade games and consoles – how the game is played and where. Personally, I like the physicality of the old consoles and arcade games from the 1980s. I appreciate the differences between the stand-up cabinet of *1942* and the table-top version, where you can put your drink on the side while you battle in the Pacific. Fighting my friends at *Soul Edge* and *Tekken* in the arcade as part of a standing, screaming, jumping up and down mob is of course very different to sitting on the floor, playing new ports on the console in the living room. The arcades of Australia, Japan and the US are all very different, with different atmospheres and expectations of play. This book is not about play styles or the performative aspects of public versus private or domestic play, though interested readers will find much on this topic in the footnotes and bibliography.[41] Speaking for myself, I prefer the old original versions of these games. On many occasions I have argued with a student who wants to do their class assignments on *Final Fantasy X* with the new HD version on their PC rather than the old PlayStation 2 with vibrating controller. Or *Katamari Damacy* on the PlayStation Portable (PSP), where the game unit as a whole may be moved to produce a parallel movement on the screen, compared against the console version where the player pushes desperately at the buttons on the controller in order to make the onscreen images respond to their commands. But as I have learned from the quality of my students' analysis over the years (and grudgingly admit here), the port itself does not have significant impact on the meaning of the game, the underpinning ideologies that are put forward by the developers in creating the game as a whole. I have come to believe it is more important to play the game – the whole game, right to the end – than to split hairs over how and where the game is played.[42]

On this point, issues of literacy come into play. While it may not be necessary for literary critics to emphasize that they have, indeed, read the books that they are analysing in their academic work, it is important for readers to know that I have played the games discussed in this text. Some of the games took years for me to finish, while others took a number of weeks. Games like *Katamari Damacy, Ōkami*, early *Final Fantasy, Legend of Zelda* and *Dragon Quest* titles were fairly straightforward (so I had to fight for screen time with my daughters), while others such as titles in the *Metal Gear* series were much more challenging and took far longer to complete. Games like *Kessen* and other real-time strategy games had the learning curve of a new genre. Others like *Kantai Collection* or *SoulCalibur IV* were more adult in nature, so I played these at night when small children were not in evidence. There are many games I would have loved to include but have not yet played myself, such as *Xenogears* and *Catherine.* But there will always be a long list of games that we are going to play next. I figured it was better to write the book now than wait until I have played them all – because that will never happen. I hope that other gamers and scholars will take this volume as a jumping-off point, to see similar themes in games they already know, or perhaps go looking for more evidence of games that show the ideologies, attitudes and values of modern Japan.

The nine chapters of the book are spread over three main parts, as follows. Part I examines the idea of 'Japanese Culture as Playable Object.' Chapter 1 analyzes *Katamari Damacy* (2004) as an example of nostalgia and kitsch, considering the idea of Japanese culture itself as a global and marketable product. This idea has become dominant in academic treatments of Japanese videogames, which tend to focus on game texts as global exports rather than cultural artefacts.[43] Although most of the games I study in this book are 'triple-A' studio releases, well-known around the world, I argue that we must look beyond the product to see the nature of the game itself and what themes and problems the designers are grappling with in each game text. Chapter 2 examines the distinctive vision of the Japanese past in *Ōkami* (2006), created with a narrative focus on traditional Japanese legend and the use of visual signs such as written Japanese characters in the art background. The deliberate packaging of Japanese art and history may be read as self-Orientalism, exoticizing Japan for both the domestic and foreign audience. Building on the idea of videogames presenting a vision of the national Japanese 'Self,' Chapter 3 focuses on the representation of Japan in the fighting game genre. Beginning with *Karate Champ* (1984) and *Street Fighter* (1987), I examine character construction to show the privileging of Japanese characters over others, and the binary construction of Japan versus America that appears time and time again in the genre.

Part II of the book examines 'Ideology and Critique in Japanese Games,' as videogames express the concerns that Japanese people have about life in their country. Modern ethical dilemmas include the changing family structure and gender roles, and whether and how to use nuclear power and bioengineering. Chapter 4 analyzes the tropes of absentee parents and amnesia in the JRPG, from the perspective of social structures in modern Japan as well as quest-based

structures in role-playing games. I explore the multiple 'Self' and the formation of identity in the JRPG, through linguistic positioning and social realism in the 3D environment. Chapter 5 examines discourses on nuclear power in the *Final Fantasy* series (1987–2016). Many games in the global arcade and early console systems featured the destructive power of nuclear energy, playing on 1980s fears of radiation,[44] but I hope to show that *Final Fantasy* as a series has consistently put forward an ideology of anti-nuclear critique in specific and thought-provoking ways. Building on this case study of anti-nuclear discourse, Chapter 6 investigates the intersections between nuclear crisis and bioethics in a range of game texts, notably the *Final Fantasy, Metal Gear, Tekken* and *Resident Evil* series. The mid-1990s context of cloning experiments and nuclear accidents created much anxiety about scientific uses of the nucleus, and the dangers of technological hubris. All three chapters in this section explore the interplay between public perception of a socio-political issue, the game text and real-world laws and regulations. Social anxieties are synchronously expressed in games and politics, creating an overarching discourse through which artists, journalists, corporations and government bodies attempt to understand, explore and offer solutions to social problems.

Part III of the book is titled 'History, Memory, and Re-imagining War.' Chapter 7 considers the uncomfortable nature of the war game genre in Japan, as there are no acceptable victory narratives from WWII that would be conducive to gameplay. A comparison of the US and Japanese game markets highlights the lack of first-person shooter war games in Japan, or games that focus on war in the twentieth century. Strategy games and arcade shooters are analyzed in terms of creating successful war games in the absence of a victorious historical narrative in the real world, with tactics ranging from setting games entirely in the past to rewriting history altogether. Chapter 8 narrows the focus to a closer reading of one game franchise, examining the representation of the Hiroshima bomb and violence in the *Metal Gear Solid* series (1987–2016). I examine *Metal Gear Solid* (1998) as an exercise in transmedia experimentation, and the series as a critique of war, violence, and nuclear weapons. Chapter 9 analyzes the colonial legacy of racial stereotyping in Japanese videogames, particularly in the *SoulCalibur* series (1995–2018). Korea emerges as a significant object of Orientalist and imperialist discourse in Japan, seen in popular titles from J-League soccer games to the *Yakuza* series. The end of the book thus comes full circle to consider the Japanese game industry as a source of Orientalist rhetoric. The difference between *SoulCalibur* and games like *Katamari Damacy* or *Ōkami* is that this Orientalism is directly connected to Asia as the object of colonial discourse, continued into the present era. Where *Katamari Damacy* is firmly contemporary and *Ōkami* celebrates the past, *SoulCalibur* depends on timelessness and archetype to perpetuate its colonialist constructions.

In sum, this book analyzes specific Japanese game titles as cultural objects, discursive practice, and ideological artefacts. As we have seen, a number of scholars have considered the interplay between the sociocultural context, the game text, the designer/author and the player, set within a local, national and

global games industry. These ways of thinking about games and their contexts inform and inspire my own approach to studying Japanese culture through videogames. Through close readings of specific game titles, set in their specific time period and sociocultural milieu, I hope to show how Japanese game designers have created meaning-making systems that resonate deeply with players, reflecting and challenging their deep-seated anxieties, fantasies, desires and expectations.

Notes

1 And if it were any videogame character, it would certainly be Mario – on the character's ubiquity and aggressive marketing see Ryan (2011: 159–162).
2 See for example Pelletier-Gagnon (2011), Consalvo (2009, 2016).
3 See Picard (2013), Picard and Pelletier-Gagnon (2015).
4 For more on the 'media mix' and contemporary Japanese culture see Steinberg (2012).
5 This point is expanded in Hutchinson (2018).
6 This premise is explored in the journal *Games and Culture* and by scholars in digital rhetoric and cultural studies. McAllister (2004) and Paul (2012) see the game text as a cultural, discursive object, of which more below. Penix-Tadsen (2016) situates games as cultural texts, focusing on Latin America. Wolf (2015) shows various approaches to locating the game text within its national and cultural milieu.
7 Eagleton (2016: 1–29) recently overviewed definitions of 'culture' through time; Edward Said (1993: xii–xiv) famously explored the relationship between culture, identity, and historical power dynamics.
8 See Nishikado (2014), Endoh (2016), also Iwatani (2016) discussing these ideas regarding the development of *Space Invaders, Xevious* and *Pac-Man* respectively.
9 See Verhulsdonck and Limbu (2014).
10 See Aarseth and Grabarczyk's witty and useful work on 'terminological triage' (2017).
11 On cheats, hacks and mods that impact and enhance the player's experience see Consalvo (2007), Newman (2008: 151–178).
12 Penix-Tadsen's ideas of 'cultural ludology' emphasize the importance of cultural context in a ludological study. His case studies show how Latin America is portrayed in games, and how games are used more broadly in Latin American society (2016).
13 On arcades and gamer culture in Japan see Katō (2011), Kijima (2012).
14 An entertaining read about Japan's arcades or 'game centres' is *Arcade Mania!* (Ashcraft 2008a). For more in-depth scholarship on the history of Japanese arcades see Ishii Zenji (2017); Ishii Zenji *et al*. (2002).
15 Aarseth (2004, 2005) discusses structures and conventions of quest-based games.
16 See Whaley (2016: 59–87) on gender roles in *Catherine*; Hasegawa (2013) on *otome* games, Galbraith (2011) on *bishōjo* games; also Schules (2015) on the function and meaning of *kawaii* (cuteness) in Japanese games.
17 See Hutchinson (2007, 2015b) on the uses and effects of stereotype in fighting games.
18 On the lack of narrative in fighting games and shooters see Murray (1997: 51) and Atkins (2003: 23).
19 Good thematic readings of JRPG games include readings of *Final Fantasy* games in terms of the environment (J. Foster 2009; Blahuta 2009), religion (Mitropoulos 2009) or historical memory (Washburn 2009).
20 An entertaining assessment of this process is James Paul Gee's description of his identification with Snake in *Metal Gear Solid* (2009).
21 See Goto-Jones (2016), also Hutchinson (2007: 295–296) on doubled performance in fighting games.

22 Later fighting games incorporated more RPG-like gameplay modes, for example Weapons Master Mode in *SoulCalibur II*, through to the single-character focus of story mode in *SoulCalibur V*, focusing on Patroklos and his quest to become a holy warrior.

23 Ibuse Masuji's 1966 book *Black Rain* was adapted into a film by Imamura Shōhei in 1989; Honda Ishirō's film *Gojira* was released in 1954; *Fires on the Plain* is well-known as both a book (by Ōoka Shōhei, 1951) and a film (directed by Ichikawa Kon, 1959). Miyazaki Hayao's animated *The Wind Rises* was released in 2013. While these works are often studied together in Japanese literature and film courses, videogames are not often assigned on syllabi due to various logistical factors, including the length of the game narrative and the need to ensure access and game literacy for all students (Hutchinson 2015a).

24 See Consalvo (2009, 2013, 2016), Whaley (2015, 2016) and Martin (2018). Although a search of *Game Studies* and *Games and Culture* will find far fewer Japanese game titles mentioned than Western games, Game Studies scholars are more likely to include Japanese examples in their work than Japanese Studies scholars are to include game examples in their discussions.

25 Interestingly, structuralist theory never took off in the Japanese intellectual context of the 1960s (see Ogino 2013), although post-colonialist thinkers like Komori Yōichi have been influential in literary studies.

26 The phrase is Saul Cornell's (1995: 57).

27 Some Game Studies scholars also use postcolonial frameworks to illuminate and understand games as discursive objects – see Mukherjee (2017).

28 Pocock (1971: 15, 24, 1987: 20–21). A good discussion of *langue, parole* and other Saussurean terminology appears in Fowler (1971); also see Culler (1975: 6, 8–10).

29 A compelling example of Foucault's thinking here is *Discipline and Punish* (1977), also *The History of Sexuality: Volume One* (1979). A good overview of discourse as a critical idiom is provided by Mills (1997).

30 See for example Tavares, Gil and Roque (2005).

31 In this sense games as discursive practice may be understood as praxis, on perhaps an even more fundamental level than the acts of reading (literature) or viewing (cinema). On games as active, dynamic texts that are by their very nature interactive, see Galloway (2006).

32 Nomura Tetsuya is a senior character designer for Square Enix, taking over from Amano Yoshitaka as lead designer for *Final Fantasy VII*. His designs may also be seen in *Kingdom Hearts* and *The World Ends with You*.

33 This point echoes Penix-Tadsen's observation that much academic discussion of games set in or produced in Latin America are not seen as 'games about Latin America' (2016: 24).

34 Pelletier-Gagnon is changing this state of affairs, translating Nakazawa Shin'ichi's essay on *Xevious* with his colleague Tsugumi (Mimi) Okabe (see Nakazawa 2015).

35 The quote comes from the opening cutscene of the Sega Megadrive version, as a poor translation of the Japanese phrasing found in the original 1989 arcade game 「君達の基地は、全てCATSがいただいた」(*kimitachi no kichi-wa, subete CATS ga itadaita)*. Schules notes that this kind of glaring error is a rarity in the industry (2012: 96).

36 The retranslation was released twice, once for PC and once when taken up by Steam. It is available as an add-on modification (mod) so players can experience a more smoothly localized version of the game: see DLPB and Lusky (2011, 2014). A good discussion of the process and fan reception is given by Yin-Poole (2015).

37 I am thankful to Brenton Baker for pointing this out.

38 The annual ReplayFX convention in Pittsburgh has been especially helpful in this respect; also the Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York, and the National Videogame Arcade in Nottingham, UK (now the National Videogame Museum in Sheffield).

39 The famous ad for Sega's 'blast processing' system may be viewed at www.youtube. com/watch?v=zlulSyBI2aY. The Sega Genesis console was known as the Megadrive in the UK and Australia.

40 When video clips of the two versions of Sonic are projected next to each other, it is immediately noticeable that one is not only slower, but also letterboxed or 'squashed' to fit the European TV system (Newman 2019).

41 A good place to start is Ashcraft (2008a), also Katō (2011) and Ishii (2017).

42 On the 'whole text' and what that phrase may imply, see Hutchinson (2017a).

43 While these studies show useful data in the spread of Japanese games around the world, the focus is on the game as an object to be received and manipulated by the market (see for example Pelletier-Gagnon 2011; Consalvo 2009, 2016).

44 One entertaining example was the 1982 Atari game *Miner 2049er*, in which the player-character Bounty Bob must inspect abandoned uranium mines (owned by Nuclear Ned) and avoid radioactive creatures. Later games are more thoughtful in their treatment of nuclear power, such as *Metal Gear Solid, Fallout, S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* and others. Radiation provides an interesting game dynamic, as the use of nuclear weapons and powers often has a built-in punishment for the player-character, such as sickness, or an inability to perform certain moves afterwards.

Part I

Japanese culture as playable object

1 *Katamari Damacy*: nostalgia and kitsch

Too much furniture in a home; too many Buddha figures in a temple; too many statues and plants in a garden; a person who talks too much or who includes in a prayer too many good deeds he has done – all are despicable.

Yoshida Kenkō, *Essays in Idleness*, AD 1130.[1]

My, the Earth is really full of things.

The King of All Cosmos, *Katamari Damacy*, AD 2004.[2]

One of the simplest mechanics in game design is the rolling of a ball on a flat surface through three-dimensional space.[3] Takahashi Keita used this principle to design Namco's 2004 game *Katamari Damacy*, in which the player-character must manipulate a ball through a crowded 3D environment, using the ball to pick up 'stuff' which accumulates into a mass of increasing size.[4] The noun *katamari* means 'conglomeration' or 'aggregate,' a 'piling up' or 'sticking together' of physical material. *Damacy* is an alternate transliteration of the word *tamashii*, or 'soul,' so the full title could be translated as 'Clumping Spirit' or 'Soul of Clumping.' Looking at the Japanese title, both words share the same kanji component on the right (塊魂), which makes for a pleasing visual alliteration. The game's appeal lies in its cute characters, colourful palette, and cheerful soundtrack, as well as the ludicrous nature of the central mission: to accumulate enough stuff to make into stars, constellations, moons and planets, which will fill the empty galaxy unfortunately wiped out by The King of All Cosmos in a drunken stupor. The player-character is The Prince, a tiny green avatar with bolster-shaped head, who must push the ball and achieve varying goals dependent on the size of the *katamari* or the time taken to pick up certain kinds of objects. The player may find themselves limited to picking up nothing but pandas in a zoo environment, or rolling up schoolchildren, national monuments or even the planets themselves. In this opening chapter, I will analyze the aesthetics, objectives and narrative of *Katamari Damacy* to show how the game packages Japanese culture for both the domestic and foreign audience.

Katamari Damacy is a good place to start in a book on Japanese videogames, since it is seen widely as one of the most obviously 'Japanese' games ever made.

The game is full of specific references to cultural objects, food items, furniture and architecture particularly associated with Japan. The things that the player picks up are a mixture of everyday items that one would find anywhere – paper-clips, nail polish, playing cards – and objects that one can only find in Japan, or in very specialized supermarkets, such as particular brands of rice cake or ramen noodles. There are also items that have become very hard to find even in Japan, traditional playthings and foodstuffs that were common 50 years ago but now signal a time long past. Old coins, *otedama* (juggling balls) and *kokeshi* (wooden dolls) could fall into this category. In the Japanese context, these things of our grandparents' generation have been lovingly preserved in *Katamari Damacy* to evoke a sense of nostalgia. But *Katamari Damacy* was also made for export, and self-consciously packages an idea of 'Japan' for the foreign market. This strategy also applies to the game *Ōkami*, set in an environment rich in references to Japanese folktales and ancient texts; as well as the fighting game genre, which established a template for packaging 'Japan' back in the 1980s. Part I of this book takes a closer look at these very different game types to see how 'Japan' functions in videogames as a site of twin constructive processes, producing a national ideal of self-identity, as well as an exotic Other for consumption abroad.

Katamari Damacy is also an excellent case study for two of the main approaches taken in understanding games. There is a considerable difference between a game's narrative – its story, what it's all about, the motivations of the characters and so forth – and its 'gameplay,' how the game actually works when a player is interacting with it.[5] Narrative includes events in main story missions and optional sidequests, cinematic cut-scenes, singular or multiple endings, and all the possible dialogue trees with their branching choices and consequences.[6] Narrative and theme are enhanced by environmental elements, including music, setting, and graphical realism or abstraction.[7] Gameplay includes all the actions taken by the player in playing through the game, strategizing about it (either during an active play session or lying awake at night wondering how to solve a puzzle), completion (which may mean different things for different people), and self-imposed standards for 'successful' play, including speed-running and other ways of breaking personal or public records.[8] The narrative script and gameplay rules are set in place by the game designers before the player ever comes into contact with the game. It has been well documented that players often play games in ways that the designers might not have envisioned, but it is equally true that the narrative of a game is often open to interpretation by the player.[9] In these ways, games depend on both coding set by the designer, and decoding on the part of the player to make meaning out of their play experience. In *Katamari Damacy*, the strictly limited ruleset of the ball-rolling simulation is paired with a narrative that is widely open to interpretation, and an environment rich in cultural meaning. This chapter offers a number of different readings to demonstrate the wide variety of interpretations the text can support, and to think about the significance of 'open' and 'closed' narrative structures.

Bizarre kitsch: Othering Japanese culture

Katamari Damacy received high praise on its release, with game critics around the world agreeing on its witty sense of fun, easy controls, original characters and addictive gameplay. Although sales were higher in the US than in Japan, the game won many Japanese awards, including CESA Awards of Excellence in 2003 and 2004.[10] It also won a Good Design Award from the Japan Industrial Design Promotion Organization, the first videogame ever to receive such recognition (Smith 2004). The reviewer for Dengeki Online congratulated Namco for their dedication to 'pure' (*junsui*) gameplay with simple rules.[11] Japanese fan reviewers online tended to use words such as 'fun' (*tanoshii*), 'addictive' (*tamaranai*), 'interesting' (*omoshiroi*), and 'simple' (*shimpuru*), also noting the nausea sometimes induced by the 3D rolling action and spinning graphics.[12] Where the Dengeki reviewer used the word *hen* (strange, weird) to describe the characters and worldview, fan reviews tended to say *fushigi* instead, a more positively nuanced word meaning 'strange' with a sense of oddness, mystery and intrigue.[13] Perhaps unsurprisingly, none of the Japanese fan comments that I read commented on the game as a Japanese creation. A long review on the Japanese site *GameWatch* repeatedly noted the game's appeal (*miryoku*) and uniqueness (*yuniiku*) from a number of different angles, with the word 'unique creation' (*ishoku-saku*) in the headline. This reviewer noted that the opening sequence was '*okashii*', which has a dual meaning of funny and odd at the same time, but did not consider either strangeness (*fushigi/hen*) or Japaneseness in the course of three pages of commentary.[14]

   In contrast, many Western reviews of *Katamari Damacy*, professional or otherwise, saw the game as unusual, strange or downright bizarre. *Time* magazine featured *Katamari Damacy* in its 'Coolest Games of the Year' list for 2004, describing it as 'the most unusual and original game to hit PlayStation 2.'[15] The 1UP review began: 'Katamari isn't very difficult, but it is very different' (Gifford 2004). IGN called the game 'insane,' 'wacky' and 'outrageous' (Sulic 2004), while GameSpot called it 'one of the strangest, most original games to come along in years,' using the words 'unique,' 'weird' and 'surreal' all in the first paragraph (Davis 2004). In contrast to the other critical reviews, which tended not to mention the game's Japanese origins, Davis notes that the game is Japanese and set inside a Japanese home, with a J-pop soundtrack. At the end of his review, Davis comments on the game as a Japanese export:

> Katamari Damacy comes to the US with a built-in market of players who appreciate things uniquely Japanese in nature, and this game most certainly qualifies as that. But unlike so much other otaku-bait, Katamari Damacy is not overly esoteric, and the mechanics are simple and enjoyable enough that people of virtually all shapes and sizes should be able to pick it up and start having fun in minutes.[16]

> (Davis 2004)

On the other hand, *Eurogamer*'s Tom Bramwell (2004) stated that the game was so strange that even Japanese people would have trouble understanding it, though calling the game ' "typically wacky Japanese fare" or something of the sort … would be a copout.' Bramwell is referring to a common online trope in the 1990s connecting Japanese culture and cultural products to the bizarre, an essentialist discourse that Martin Picard has described as Orientalist in nature.[17] As Patrick Galbraith and colleagues have noted, this tendency can be observed in many discussions of Japanese art, manga, anime and games: 'Much of the popular writing on Japan might be accused of indulging in Orientalist fantasy, whereby that nation is the Other to Western modernity, as evidenced by weird or perverse media or customs.'[18] Comparing the professional reviews to fan reviews, however, this 'copout' occurs frequently in online discussion forums. Many fans commented specifically on the country of origin, linking the 'bizarre-ness' of the game to some kind of essential Japanese quality. Looking at the 1UP User Review pages, Conor Teichroeb was a typical example, beginning his A+ review: 'Well another one of those games has come out, the ones that are so strange and weird that it could only have been made by the Japanese.' Bryan Stermer called it 'another one of those quirky Japanese games' while Daniel Packham said 'Only the Japanese could come up with something like this.'[19] Overall, Western gamers agreed that *Katamari Damacy* was brilliant but peculiar. Fan commentators in particular were engaged in a process of Othering Japanese culture – connecting the game's 'bizarre' quality with its place of origin, perpetuating the idea of Japan as a strange, exotic country that is fundamentally Other to our own.

What is it that makes *Katamari Damacy* so strange? The concept of rolling a ball to pick up objects is not strange – rolling an object around a surface had been used in other videogames, from Atari's *Marble Madness* (1984) to Sega's *Super Monkey Ball* (2001).[20] The character design of *Katamari Damacy* is decidedly unique, as no other videogame characters have bolster-shaped heads. While the Prince wears bright green clothing, the King is dressed in a gorgeously over-the-top flamboyant style, in a cross between hippie chic and Louis XIV grandeur. The King's dialogue appears in text accompanied by a blurred, distorted sound similar to the grown-ups speaking in *Charlie Brown* cartoons, producing an odd effect. It is strange that the King has wiped out the galaxy in an alcoholic blunder – perhaps stranger for the honest admittance of alcohol drinking rather than the blunder in itself. The King's actions provide only a tenuous sort of narrative justification for the rolling-up simulation of the gameplay, but this could also be said of a giant monkey throwing barrels down a series of ladders at a plumber, or a burger chef being chased by eggs and sausages.[21] All sorts of odd happenings are responsible for videogame events, so this in itself is not remarkable. It seems that what most critics found bizarre about *Katamari Damacy* was the cumulative oddness of all these elements put together. For Western commentators, strangeness also came from the game's inclusion of Japan-specific cultural objects, unfamiliar to a foreign audience, coupled with a Japanese-language music soundtrack and Japanese environments such as tatami-mat rooms.

One critic with a thoughtful approach to the bizarreness of *Katamari Damacy* and its Japanese elements is Steven E. Jones, who characterized the game as a 'cult hit' in which the 'fractured fairy-tale of a back-story sounds absurd' (2008: 48) The characters, colour scheme and overall attitude are 'psychedelic,' while the cut-scenes are 'all too strange to take seriously' (2008: 50, 66). The 'stuff' which the Prince picks up is a range of 'decontextualized everyday objects,' described as 'anything at all in various and usually bizarre juxtapositions' (2008: 49). For Jones, the objects themselves are everyday items, but what makes them bizarre is their juxtaposition with other items that are not usually found together – ramen noodles next to nail polish, *daruma* dolls next to mermaids, and so on. Jones notes that this kind of 'surreal' and 'dada-like' juxtaposition does occur in one other context, the inside of a claw game or 'UFO catcher' often found in the Japanese game arcade.[22] He also argues that the basic action of *Katamari Damacy*, collecting objects, is also the centre of 'nerd culture' in America or 'otaku culture' in Japan, whether one collects comic books, Star Wars figurines or Studio Ghibli memorabilia.[23] Outside the game's home environment, Jones likens the increasingly huge katamari to 'a campy version of giant monsters in classic Japanese science-fiction films, rampaging through city streets' (2008: 49). Jones notes that non-Japanese players may find some of game items unfamiliar, and some scenarios uncomfortable, as in the 'Virgo' level where young women are rolled up with high-pitched shrieks and squeals (ibid.). Jones's analysis of the 'Japanese' quality of the game is thus limited to the context of Japanese pop culture and its export abroad. However, Jones is one of the very few scholarly commentators to take the game's cultural content into account. McKenzie Wark's lengthy analysis mentions Takahashi as the game's designer, but otherwise ignores its Japanese origin.[24]

This is surprising, since *Katamari Damacy* is so obviously Japanese in design, a refutation of the *mukokuseki* aesthetics theorized by Koichi Iwabuchi (2002). According to Iwabuchi, many Japanese cultural products are designed purposefully to appear 'culturally odourless' – nationless, anonymous, and globally relevant. Ever since the 'God of Manga' Tezuka Osamu (1928–1989) created *Astro Boy* (*Tetsuwan Atomu*, known as *Atom Boy* in some parts of the world) with soft lines, big eyes, and androgynous features, manga and anime have blurred the visual boundaries between East and West to target the widest possible audience. Japanese videogames are similar, often featuring heroes with blond hair and blue eyes, even when the game's themes and narrative focus are clearly based on Japanese attitudes, values and contemporary events. We will return to this idea throughout the book as we encounter examples, but here we can see that *Katamari Damacy* clearly does not fit this model. Although the Prince and the King of All Cosmos are 'psychedelic' in design and could come from anywhere, the detailed nature of their environment points to the specificity of the Japanese home. The cutscenes featuring the life of the Hoshino family also point to the difference between the vast scope of the cosmos and the familiar, enclosed space of the Japanese household. The game environment is so blatantly rooted in Japan that it becomes the opposite of *mukokuseki* – ultra-*kokuseki*, if you will.

In other words, the Japanese designers of *Katamari Damacy* purposefully and self-consciously created an obviously Japanese product, for the consumption of players at home and abroad. Jones observes the 'self-conscious' quality of the game, a knowing parody of collecting missions in other games as well as game-making itself:

> At one point in the training level in an open arena, the King of All Cosmos comments on his having gone to all the trouble of making the training space 'just so you can roll a katamari,' an obvious self-reflexive comment on the process of making the game itself, a complex software space in the service of the simplest kind of fun. That apparently wasteful (time-wasting) ludic gesture, creating an arena for surface play for the sake of play, is the point.
>
> (Jones 2008: 51)

In this self-reflexivity, *Katamari Damacy* differs from more straightforward series from earlier years, such as the *Super Mario Bros.* platform games from Nintendo. Like *Katamari Damacy*, Mario-themed games also feature bright colours, blocky shapes, adrenalin-fuelled time-based challenges and a cute aesthetic with giant caterpillars, flowers and turtles as enemies, as well as a tenuous narrative justification for the action.[25] But Mario games are often described as universal in their fundamental relatability to all audiences, pointing to the *mukokuseki* aesthetic underlying Nintendo's exported products. Jeff Ryan notes that Mario's 'bland persona' and 'one-size-fits-all' design make him a 'purposeful blank,' 'a mere avatar for the audience.'[26] Ryan cites Scott McCloud's well-known argument for 'simplistic empathy' in comics and manga, in which the simplest of icons seem the most human and universally relatable.[27] Mario may be a Japanese creation, but his kitschy oddness tends to be seen as individually his, or universally ours, not a 'Japanese oddness.' By contrast, in *Katamari Damacy* the kitsch is used together with specifically Japanese referents to create a 'Japanese kitsch,' that can be seen as leveraging 'unique Japan' as a consumer product.[28] At the time of *Katamari Damacy*'s release the idea of 'Cool Japan' was gaining traction in the media, pointing to Japanese economic policy aimed at creating 'soft power' through exports of cultural products.[29] As with any creative industry, it is difficult to gauge the impact of the government's later 'Cool Japan' campaign on the games industry, but the deliberately universal appeal of Mario and the specifically Japanese kitsch of *Katamari Damacy* may be seen in terms of different export strategies, negotiating cultural content in purposeful ways.[30]

The degree of 'Japaneseness' attributed to certain videogames and their related media products has become a point of contention in recent years.[31] One of the most-discussed titles has been *Pokémon*, created for Nintendo's handheld Game Cube in 1996 and quickly adapted into other media such as a card game, anime series, feature films, manga, light novels and toys.[32] Roland Kelts argues that *Pokémon* found a great deal of success by marketing the Japanese qualities of the game as a selling point. Part of the equation was timing:

Pokemon was hitting the mainstream just as handheld video games were finally reaching a point of technological sophistication where they could properly reflect the complexities of a world in which detailed characters were in conflict with one another. But perhaps even more important was the visceral experience. Pokemon gave western kids their first proper contact with the naked force of Japan's trend-driven commercialism. They were exposed, without filters, to the marketing juggernaut that the Japanese have learned to live with. Pokemon was translated into English, but that was where its westernization ended.

(Kelts 2006: 93)

According to Kelts, the president of Pokémon Co., Ishihara Tsunekazu, chose to introduce the Japanese-designed characters just as they were, without any visual changes, even though market research indicated that Americans might find them too childish (Kelts 2006: 93). However, fans and bloggers have observed many changes made to *Pokémon* games reflecting religious, sexual and alcohol-related taboos in the US market.[33] While *Pokémon* certainly created a turning point in Japanese cultural exports, Ishihara's rosy view of its inherent 'Japaneseness' has been questioned by critics.

   Koichi Iwabuchi describes the appeal of recognizably Japanese exports in terms of 'cultural fragrance' – a pleasing sense that the item came from Japan, and a feeling associated with 'the image of the country of origin' (2004: 57). This 'cultural fragrance' has been praised by Japanese commentators such as Okada Toshio, who writes prolifically on the value of otaku culture and the global spread of Japanese animation and videogames. Iwabuchi points out that critics like Okada depend on Western approval for their arguments, perpetuating an age-old hierarchy and binarism that places the arts and cultures of Europe over those of Asia. Japanese cultural products are actually much more popular in Asian countries than in North America, for example, but it is the American audience that captures the Japanese imagination.[34] However, with *Pokémon*, the point became moot, as its incredible selling power took North American markets by storm. This led Iwabuchi to the question of how 'Japanese' *Pokémon* is considered to be. If, as Ishihara argues, it is the Japanese quality of *Pokémon* that leads to its appeal, then the 'cultural fragrance' argument holds up. But if the visual style of *Pokémon* is *not* distinctly Japanese, then perhaps something else is at work. Iwabuchi's analysis of the transnational media corporations involved in *Pokémon*'s genesis and marketing, as well as the localization processes involved in the anime in particular, shows that many Japanese elements were purposefully omitted or minimized for the 'global' (mostly North American) audience. Iwabuchi shows persuasively that *Pokémon* is yet another Japanese cultural product that has been rendered visually *mukokuseki* – culturally odourless – for the purposes of the global market.

   Iwabuchi's essay on *Pokémon* appeared in 2004, the same year that *Katamari Damacy* was released. The ultra-Japanese quality of *Katamari Damacy*, its revelling in Japanese culture as something to be joyfully appreciated and consumed

by all players, seems to argue against Iwabuchi's pessimistic view. But the game's treatment of its own Japaneseness remains problematic and ambivalent. *Katamari Damacy* 'Others' Japan as special, unique and exotic for the foreign market, even while underscoring the significance of the cultural 'Self' and reinforcing national self-identity. In the years bracketing *Katamari Damacy*, various videogames were made in Japan that were obviously Japanese in style, content and theme. *Final Fantasy X* used main characters with recognizably Japanese facial features, a Japanese-language song, and cultural elements such as kimono-like clothing, as the director Kitase Yoshinori aimed for a new kind of 'fantasy' that was not based on European styles.[35] *Ōkami* (Clover Studio 2006) explored Shinto myths and Japanese culture, with a hand-drawn environment evoking woodblock prints and other traditional art styles. But the majority of Japanese videogames have continued to feature *mukokuseki* characters and visual designs for universal relatability. Some element of Japanese culture is usually retained: as Iwabuchi has noted, no media product can be completely culturally neutral, and scholar Lucy Glasspool adds that 'a deliberate "fragrance" of Japaneseness may be conveyed by the game company itself' to capitalize on some idealized vision of Japan overseas.[36] In this context, there is a delicate balance to be found between Japanese design and global export. *Katamari Damacy* plays with that balance and exploits it, right on the surface of the game text. The game is self-conscious indeed, not only in terms of game-making and collecting, but also in terms of the many possible constructions of national identity and the many purposes they may fulfil.

In terms of production, marketing and distribution, *Katamari Damacy* may thus be understood in terms of a self-conscious Japanese cultural artefact. The game's content also conveys a great deal of cultural meaning, much of it residing in the objects to be rolled up and the flat surfaces upon which they rest. As Michael Nitsche explains, 3D videogame space is used to generate 'fictional worlds in the player's imagination that grow from a comprehension of the 3D representations' (2008: 2). Nitsche uses the term 'evocative narrative elements' to describe elements in the gameworld that assist in this comprehension, 'because they do not contain a story themselves but trigger important parts of the narrative process in the player' (2008: 3). Depending on the player, the 'evocative elements' of *Katamari Damacy*'s gamespace may hold different ideas and meanings. Objects in the environment may not be recognized by non-Japanese players, who see them as merely 'foreign,' entertaining by value of their difference from the known. For players in Asia, objects may have strong correlations with local items, so the sense of known/unknown is complicated by the comparison with local variants. Japanese players are more likely to recognize objects, while older players, or those with grandparents in the countryside, may feel a sense of nostalgia for certain items. Young players who do not recognize the items will understand their provenance as 'old Japanese items' from traditional culture.

Katamari Damacy's design team have accounted for player variance in recognizing objects by including a 'Collection' accessible from the Prince's home

planet. Entering the Collection, players can read descriptions of items they have picked up, so we learn that a wooden mortar and pestle are used for making *mochi* rice cakes, for example. This provides a contextual understanding of objects for all players. For Jones, the objects of *Katamari Damacy* make contextual sense only in terms of arcade games, *kaiju* films, and collectible 'otaku culture.' However, anyone with small children will know that these items also make perfect sense strewn about the floor of a room inside the home. Examining *Katamari Damacy* as an artistic representation, the 'context' emerges as the Japanese home and interior space. I believe that *Katamari Damacy* constructs the distinct physical space of the Japanese home as something to be celebrated, and that the game as a whole plays on age-old notions of nostalgia and dependency associated with the Japanese home, both the single-house structure (*ie*) and the wider idea of a hometown (*furusato*).

Nostalgia, the home and *furusato*

Nostalgia is a powerful force in Japanese literature and film, and has been theorized in terms of *natsukashii* (reminding one of past times) as well as *akogare* (yearning or desire). Japanese players of *Katamari Damacy* may be reminded of a simple time in childhood, or feel a sense of yearning for what has been lost, as urbanization and changes in social structures have meant a shift towards the nuclear family and a lack of connection with grandparents and the *jikka*, one's birthplace or ancestral home.[37] Demographic trends of the twentieth century show a strong movement of young people from rural to urban areas, so the *jikka* image is often associated with the countryside and the rural hometown. Stephen Dodd (2004) and others have demonstrated that notions of *furusato* or 'hometown' are strongly related to Japanese identity, nationhood and sense of belonging, as well as a sense of lack in the modern era. The lack of 'hometown' in modern Japan has been lamented since as early as 1933, when the writer Kobayashi Hideo wrote his famous essay 'Literature of the Lost Home.'[38] The *furusato* may or may not correspond to an actual place: 'Although it sometimes overlaps with a specific physical location, its broader significance in modern Japanese literature is as a mythical construction through and against which radical alternatives to prevalent ideas about what constitutes modern Japan have been played out' (Dodd 2004: 3). Ideas of 'home' thus convey a great deal of meaning as to what 'modern Japan' signifies, and whose idea of 'modern Japan' should prevail.

The myth of the hometown, the idyllic space of childhood, is also caught up in the myth of the perfect Japanese home. Many Japanese people think of the 'traditional Japanese home' as located in the countryside, with tatami-mat rooms, large gardens and spaces to display antiques, such as a *tokonoma* alcove.[39] Even in heavily populated urban areas, this still seems to be the ideal. However, as Inge Daniels has shown with her studies of houses in the Kansai area, the idea of a traditional Japanese home is often at odds with reality.[40] Daniels notes that Tsuzuki Kyoichi's 1999 photographic study, *Tokyo: A Certain Style*, is one of

the few publications to adopt a realist attitude to portraying the Japanese home. Tsuzuki says:

> Let's put an end to this media trickery, giving poor ignorant foreigners only images of the most beautiful Japanese apartments to drool over … I wanted to show you the real Tokyo style, the places we honest-and-truly do spend our days. Call it pathetically overcrowded, call it hopelessly chaotic … hey, that's the reality.[41]

Katamari Damacy constructs both the perfect idea of the Japanese home as well as its chaotic reality through the game environment – the rooms and spaces through which the Prince must roll the katamari, and the objects he must pick up. A close reading of the game environment shows how the mythology of the 'Japanese home' is created through specific cultural content.

After a spectacular opening sequence in which pandas, elephants, ducks, giraffes and other animals dance and sing in celebration on the slopes of Mount Fuji, the game opens with a tutorial and a cut-scene of the King of All Cosmos inadvertently smashing the universe. The Prince is transported to Earth and the katamari is placed on a flat surface covered with things – dice, pushpins, screws, acorns, caramels and other small items. Once we start rolling, we see we are in a living room, with TV and built-in cupboards called *ochi-ire*, the kind that hold futons when not in use.[42] We realize that the surface is the top of a *kotatsu*, a small table with a built-in heater and blanket, which plugs into the wall. We can roll over the blanket and under it, onto tatami mats. Set into one wall is the traditional *tokonoma* alcove, displaying a hanging picture scroll with an ink landscape scene, and a sword set on a wooden stand. Another wall consists of a *shōji* screen, with paper set into square wooden frames. The last wall has a calendar, and we see that someone is sitting and dozing at the *kotatsu*, wearing a flowered shirt and pink cardigan. This must be the lady of the house. The room also holds a small folding ironing board and a chest of drawers with a teddybear and decorative plate on top. The entire floor is covered with small items – candy, coins, batteries, pieces from a game of *go* (Japanese chess), eyedrops, ants, and chewing gum – as well as larger items like a game console. We also find erasers, chestnuts, cherries and strawberries, cookies, nail polish, nail clippers and 'cockroach zapper refills.'

From this first level, we see that *Katamari Damacy* is set in the ideal 'Japanese tatami-mat room' complete with *tokonoma* and traditional decorations and furnishings. Historically, tatami mats are most associated with the large, formal spaces of *sukiya*-style rooms in houses of the Tokugawa elite, built to show off the status and taste of the occupants, but these days tatami rooms are associated with the countryside and unsophisticated, rustic living, as well as the 'real' or authentic Japanese way of life.[43] The room in *Katamari Damacy* also reflects the reality of modern living, cluttered with all kinds of superfluous objects. Inge Daniels argues from her fieldwork that this is indeed the case in the modern Japanese home, with inhabitants wishing for clear surfaces and spacious surroundings,

but giving in to clutter and mess. The tatami room is especially prone to this problem, designed as multi-purpose and meant for the display of objects. As gifts, souvenirs and handicrafts proliferate in the home, the difficulty of throwing away such meaningful items leads to 'an eclectic mixture' of objects in this space, in which 'the focus is more on volume than minimalism' (2010: 112–113). Daniels analyzes the social obligations, memories and other meanings attached to objects in the home. The small size of Japanese dwellings, the 'scarcity of pragmatic disposal strategies,' and the tendency for older children to stay at home, means that the number of possessions inside the Japanese house has actually increased dramatically since the 1960s. As a result, Japanese homes are increasingly *mono-darake*, or as the King says in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, 'full of things.'[44]

As I played through *Katamari Damacy* for this study, I noticed that the items proliferating in the rooms of this specific house on Earth held specific meanings, associated with 'traditional Japan,' the 'ideal home,' childhood, and nostalgia for certain seasons. In Level 2 of gameplay, we find ourselves back on the same *kotatsu* table, in the same room as before. Now there is a tower made of cards on the table, and when we pick them up they are labelled 'New Year cards' (*nengajō*). Mandarin orange pieces and peels litter the *kotatsu* and the floor, indicative of a common pastime in winter, hanging out at the *kotatsu* peeling mandarins and watching television. There are now other items on the floor that indicate leisure activities – a great number of cassette tapes, pachinko balls, ping pong balls, more *go* pieces. There is a whole *go* board set up in another corner of the room, ready for play. The snacks on the table have changed, with the *dango* (sweet dough balls on a skewer) replaced by *omuraisu* (rice wrapped up in a thin omelette) and mini sausages. This is the kind of food that a mother makes for her children. The whole scene is very cosy and reminiscent of wintertime.

In contrast, in this level the player/Prince can leave the room and go out onto the veranda, leading to a grassy garden area. Tomato plants are laden with ripe tomatoes (and also a chicken drumstick) and a man is practising his golf putting. Among the scattered objects in the garden are golf balls, picnic-style food (more drumsticks, fried shrimp) and domestic items such as cutlery, cleavers, alarm clocks, soap, coffee cans, calculators, and garden tools. The scene is strongly reminiscent of summertime, in the ideal suburban home. The idea of vegetable gardens resonates strongly with people in the city, who often lack the space to grow anything other than potted herbs and shrubs, often placed on the street outside the front gate. Gardening is seen as a leisure pursuit for retirement, or as an aspirational activity that would take place in *mai hōmu* ('my home'), an idealized space with wooden floors throughout and minimalist modern furniture.[45] The juxtaposition of this garden scene with the tatami room in Level 2 of *Katamari Damacy* points to the construction of an 'ideal Japanese home' in the game design. What ties these two scenes together is not the season but the feeling of being 'at home,' relaxing whether inside or outside the house structure.

This picture of domestic bliss is emphasized by the cut-scenes, showing a nuclear family affected by the King's actions. Two children, dressed in bright

yellow and looking like Lego or Playmobil figures with their blocky structure and flat faces, are watching a program about a superhero fighting a Godzilla-like monster. Their mother enters to tell them it's time to go, and the news interrupts the program to report the disappearance of stars from the night sky. The mother has a pleasant demeanour and soft tone of voice, while the children are very obedient. In the cut-scene following Level 3 the children tell her the news, and she responds 'Oh honey, things like that don't happen.' Later, the children will rejoice when the Prince is able to make constellations and they reappear in the heavens. (The first constellation, Cancer, involves rolling up as many crabs as possible in a short period of time. The setting is again the tatami room, but this time there is a huge horseshoe crab on display instead of the sword in the *tokonoma*, while another crab carries the TV around on its back). The introduction of the Hoshino family in the cut-scenes makes us wonder about the presence or absence of children in the rolling-up scenario. Level 4 answers this question, as we travel to other parts of the house to find a *Hina-matsuri* display of dolls for Girls Day in a section of the house called the 'Kids Room,' and a boy wearing shorts holding a remote control, playing with an RC car.[46]

In Level 3 the Prince leaves the home environment for nearby streets. Bright sunshine indicates summertime, matched by the appearance of many summertime items: a playground has 'kiddie spades,' water bottles, crabs, fireworks, toys, fishing lures, bug spray, cucumbers, toothbrushes, and walkie-talkies. A *takoyaki* stand (a popular street snack with pieces of octopus cooked in batter) is surrounded by *takoyaki* balls, while a small cherry tree is growing not only cherries but also *takoyaki*. Mosquito coils, compasses, dried squid, *kanji* workbooks, and more *geta* clogs indicate the summer season, while bottles of soy sauce, mayonnaise, superglue and so forth reinforce the domestic feel. The reason I enumerate the many items found in these areas is to show that the items themselves are not completely random, weird, or 'decontextualized,' as Steven Jones suggests. Certain items are found in certain areas of the home – the kitchen is full of food and cleaning supplies, while the toilet area features toilet paper, air freshener and bathroom slippers.[47] Notably, the toilet is in the Japanese style, set into the floor, rather than the Western-style toilet found in more affluent homes. This speaks to the class status of the inhabitants as well as the image of 'traditional Japan' associated with tatami mat rooms and *tokonoma*. While many areas are littered with neutral items of stationery (pushpins, paperclips, notepads, inkpads etc.), many of the other objects in an environment speak to the image of that environment held by the average Japanese person. Summertime implies being outside, eating *takoyaki*, packing for a camping trip, fishing and gardening – ideal hobbies and pastimes that are out of bounds in the snowy winter season. The summery feeling is underscored with the beach scenes of Level 6, with people swimming, boating, and sunbathing. That these scenes are rather at odds with the New Years' cards and wintertime cosiness of Level 1 only emphasizes the idealized nature of the game environment.[48]

Thinking about the smaller items found in the home, garden and nearby streets, the emphasis on stationery, food, and children's toys is significant. These

depict items with which young players are familiar; items that children often leave around the house; and the three things children are expected to do outside sleeping hours – study, eat, and play. These items signify childhood and the *jikka*, triggering nostalgia. At the same time, the disarray is a negation of adult responsibility – this is how most of our homes may look if we never picked up anything! There is a definite distinction between children and adults in the game, as children can be rolled up before adults due to their smaller size. The Hoshino children can see the King and the constellations, but the mother cannot. Girls and boys in the *Katamari* town appear in school uniforms, playing, walking and riding bicycles, or performing sports activities such as soccer or *kendo* (Japanese fencing). In contrast, adults in the town are usually performing a job (construction, shopkeeping, farming) and are denoted in the text by their profession (fisherman, construction worker, housewife, fortune teller, delivery guy, farmer). That some children and adults are given first and last names adds to the sense of this town representing a real community, with several members of the same family named individually (for example, Biker Akiba and Grandpa Akiba, riding on the same motorcycle).[49] Together with the fairly faithful depiction of the typical Japanese home, the representation of the town creates a certain sense of realism, grounding the game in the materiality of modern Japanese life.

In these ways, *Katamari Damacy* creates a realistic sense of environment made up of a wide array of individual objects. The sheer proliferation of objects causes a strong sense of 'mess,' but objects generally fit the environment. That some objects are out of place (chicken drumsticks on a tomato plant, *takoyaki* on a cherry tree) creates a sense of humour and fun. Overall, domestic objects are imbued with meaning through repetition and familiarity: Level 4 revisits the tatami room, this time with mah-jong on the *kotatsu* table. Now cucumbers are growing in the garden, while the *go* board is set up on the veranda. The rotation of seasonal items suggests that time is passing, as if we are glimpsing a year in the life of the *Katamari* people. In Level 6 we enter the town, which is also reassuringly typical: streets are narrow, with '*tomare*' stop signs painted on the road. Bollards, cones and other objects denoting construction litter the roadways, while buildings are closely packed together, providing obstacles for gameplay and a feeling of the town as a bustling commercial centre. As the environments of each level get bigger, rollable objects also increase in size, including bicycles, street signs, vending machines, people and cars. Items lose detail and become more generic, the idea of 'hometown' as a whole obscuring the fact that each street is properly named.[50] The inclusion of a schoolyard seems particularly geared towards nostalgia, as children perform outdoor activities rather than learning in the classroom. Similarly, a religious festival focuses on fun, with food stalls and a *mikoshi* shrine carried by burly men shouting the traditional '*Wasshoi! Wasshoi!*' Scenes of Japanese rural life are thus presented selectively, reinforcing the sense of 'hometown.' Kitsch continues to balance with nostalgia on the grand scale, with the Loch Ness Monster in a lake and giant elephants perched on buildings. In the final levels, the player can roll up deities, countries, planets and stars, until the game ends with rolling up the sun. Reaching the

realms of fantasy, the player looks back on their experience, and is free to ascribe some kind of meaning to the game as a whole.

Katamari and narrative frames

While the 3D environment of *Katamari Damacy* evokes a particular narrative of home and growing up, there are also elements in the game text that deliver narrative by more straightforward means, such as cinematics and cut-scenes.[51] In *Katamari Damacy*, some cinematic sequences depict the life of the Hoshino family, while other cut-scenes appear between levels, to reward or punish the Prince and give directions for the next level of play. Taken together, the different cut-scenes paint an interesting picture of families in Japan, which contrasts with the bright and sunny aspect of 'home' in the gameplay. When the King of All Cosmos first enjoins the Prince to solve his problem, he invokes 'the very definition of the father-son bond.' But in cut-scenes preceding levels, the King is condescending and insulting. If the Prince fails a task, the King appears against a black background of thunder and lightning, scowling while the Prince cowers on hands and knees. He berates the Prince and rejects his pitiful efforts. On failing 'Make a Star 7' the King is so angry he refuses to even speak to the Prince, and gives up the whole enterprise, shouting 'Forget everything! Go away! Goodbye!' Even when the Prince succeeds, the King demeans his efforts, complaining that the katamari is not big enough, shiny enough, or impressive enough. The 'father-son bond' depicted here is grim indeed. The sequel *We ♥ Katamari* (2005) has a closer focus on childhood through the experiences of the King himself, suffering strong physical discipline at the hands of his father the Emperor. The Emperor throws away the King's second-place boxing trophy in disgust, but later retrieves it from the river and places it carefully on his golden desk. When the King realizes this as a young man, he weeps copious tears and they reconcile. The King in time receives his father's crown and marries his true love. When the Prince is born they celebrate in front of Mount Fuji, with the dancing animals we saw in the opening credits of the first game. The cycle is complete, although Roger Altizer calls it a 'cycle of dysfunction' (2017: 98).

One way to interpret the cut-scenes of *Katamari Damacy* is in terms of the breakdown of the family unit, with the difficult father vs. son trope that informs many other texts of Japanese popular culture, from *Neon Genesis Evangelion* to *Final Fantasy X*. We will revisit this idea in Chapter 4. The King's denial of affection for the Prince may be seen as an indictment of Japanese society, where children are taught to expect affection from their mothers through the social construct of *amae*. The famed psychologist Doi Takeo analyzed the literary works of Natume Sōseki in terms of *amae*, arguing that Japanese social traditions of raising children were distinct and thus had a marked effect on literature of the Meiji period.[52] Doi's explanation of *amae* as a driving force in some of Japan's most well-known artistic works could be applied to *Katamari Damacy*, with the Prince's lack of access to *amae* providing a negative depiction of father-son relations. The Hoshino family gives yet another view of family, as the mother does

not pay attention to her children other than providing for their immediate needs – food, travel, and so forth. She denies their insistence on seeing the King and hearing the TV news, preferring to give them a watered-down version of reality. The children are not deterred, rejoicing in the reappearance of the constellations. Through the eyes of the Hoshino children, we find joy in the results of the Prince's efforts – which are really the player's own efforts at rolling the katamari to pass each level. Although the Prince never grows larger than 5 cm tall, he is able to complete all his tasks with the help of the player, finally coming home to his family castle in the credits of *We ♥ Katamari*. In this way the gameplay, cut-scenes and credits work together to provide a holistic narrative of childhood, with struggle and physical effort producing its own reward regardless of parental approval. This narrative works together with and against the ideal representations of 'home' created by the gameplay environment.

While cut-scenes provide an overarching structure to the narrative of the King and the Prince, the beauty of *Katamari Damacy* is the way that gameplay itself – the rolling of the katamari – provides meaning on its own. All kinds of interesting narratives and meanings can be attributed to the rolling simulation. The most obvious interpretation of the unceasing collection of material items in the game is a consumerist one, in which the Prince must labour to pick up an endless amount of 'stuff' to be turned into stars and planets. As McKenzie Wark notes:

> In this digital cosmos, everything is of the same substance. A cow, a car, your cousin: each has its shape and color, but in the end it's all the same, just stuff. In *Katamari Damacy* it is mostly consumer stuff, but this goes far beyond a critique of the commodity ...
>
> (Wark 2007: 85)

Wark sees the game is a meta-commentary on the digital versus the analogue, encountered through algorithms (ibid.). Because the consumerist allegory is so obvious, Wark prefers to interpret the game as an allegory for play itself as labour, enacted through the analogue pushing of the controller buttons to problematize the digital realm.[53] But the consumerist allegory is highly accessible and readily understood by players. When I ask my Game Studies classes what *Katamari Damacy* could 'mean' if we were forced to interpret it along narrative lines, this is always the first interpretation offered. The endless accumulation of 'stuff' in the game points to the meaningless accumulation of 'stuff' in life, and can be seen as a reaction against materialism following the bursting of Japan's economic bubble in the early 1990s. The Japanese reaction against 'stuff' hit its peak with Marie Kondo's popular 2011 treatise *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, translated into more than 30 languages. The cluttered surfaces of *Katamari Damacy* beg for someone to clean them up, to empty the space. The Prince in this reading has the dual function of endless accumulation and also endless space-clearing.

A closely related narrative reading is an environmental one, in which the accumulation of 'stuff' on Earth is producing dangerous levels of waste. The

Prince may be seen as a saviour, clearing the Earth of its waste materials for recycling into stars and planets. The jettisoning of extra 'stuff' into space is of course a problem in itself, which we contemplate through the experience of the Hoshino family. The children rejoice as the constellations reappear in the sky, but are unaware that the constellations are made of junk from Earth. The environmental reading is interesting when we consider that the rolling up of 'stuff' also includes animals and plants. In this case, the game could provide a critique of the human condition which treats animals and plants as mere consumer goods. Notably, the Prince also rolls up people, who are equally treated as waste materials to be recycled and jettisoned. We can interpret this in a number of ways, including the view that the earth is overtaxed by the booming human population of modern times, which should be reduced. Or perhaps the modern way of living itself reduces people themselves to mere objects, cogs in a machine with no intrinsic worth. These views are bleak indeed, but the game is open to these readings. Another way to read the game may be along these lines: The Father in heaven sends his only son to Earth as a saviour, to atone for sins and redeem us all. The Christian religious allegory is not the most obvious, but the game is open to this reading as well.

Yet another way to interpret the game is in terms of borderless countries and world peace.[54] Towards the end of *We ♥ Katamari*, the katamari grows so large that it can roll up monuments outside the town, such as giant statues of the Buddha, shrines and temples, even specific national symbols such as the Arc de Triomphe and Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty, the White House, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Great Wall of China, the pyramids of Egypt, the Petronas Twin Towers (at the time of the game's release the tallest structure in the world), 'Saint Vasily Church' (the Cathedral of Saint Vasily the Blessed, in Moscow's Red Square) and so on. This action makes all national symbols equal, and equally collectible. In a later level, the Prince must roll up all the nations on Earth in order to avert an asteroid impact. As the Prince rolls around on the surface of the globe, the dimly outlined shapes of nations break free and stick to the katamari, appearing in a text list showing the official name of the nation (e.g. Federated States of Micronesia) together with its flag. This action at once shows the importance that we place on national symbols and borders, but emphasizes that they are meaningless in the face of a global disaster.

Since the game is so open to interpretation, Steve Jones finds meaning in the game's essential 'meaninglessness,' through its function as parody. Jones reads *Katamari Damacy* as a statement on the Japanese game industry itself, a 'witty procedural parody of the whole idea of collecting objects in video games and elsewhere' (2008: 48). Especially in role-playing games, collecting weapons, magical objects, dictionaries and other lore-related items, clothing, and material for crafting or cooking play a large part in the strategy, while managing one's inventory (which always seems to be full) is a puzzle in itself. Jones argues that the katamari pokes fun at such serious collecting and item management, in a punk-rock aesthetic that values simplicity and enjoyment in an era of increasingly realistic graphics, difficult strategy, and over-determined character-centred

narratives at studios like Square Enix and Konami (2008: 51). Not only are graphics in *Katamari Damacy* decidedly non-realistic, but the collectible characters 'Punk' and 'Double Punk' act as significant references to the punk philosophy of simplicity and meaningless entertainment (2008: 49, 51). But this meaninglessness is hard to sustain:

> The connection to an imagined aesthetic of 'punk rock' is telling: irreverent, sometimes playfully nihilistic, deliberately simple, engaging in play as a form of parodic rebellion defiantly in the face of the meaninglessness of everyday consumer life. What Takahashi has created is a game against interpretation (as such), a collecting game whose meaning is the need to make one's own meanings from what you collect, to make collecting meaningful, to make your own fun.
>
> (2008: 51)

By placing *Katamari Damacy* in terms of punk rock, Jones places it against 'establishment' games as well as bourgeois acquisitiveness and consumerism. Takahashi has not created a game against interpretation, but a game open to any interpretation, as many as the player wants to see in it. The anti-consumerist message is certainly the hardest to resist. Jones later argues that any narrative interpretation of the game misses the point:

> Clearly the Prince *can* be read or interpreted as a sort of enslaved consumer, one who is compelled to labor to gather things so quickly…. But to say all of that is to miss what is most compelling about playing the game, the joyful irony or ironic joy with which fans (and I include myself) play it.
>
> (Jones 2008: 62)

In other words, the gameplay itself is the main point of the game. But I would suggest that one does not have to preclude the other. Part of the fun of the meaningless rolling-up is ascribing all kinds of different meanings to it. It is free-floating narrative, which can be read however the player likes. This is yet another level of the punk-rock aesthetic at work, giving agency to the player to subvert the dominant, obvious reading – consumerist critique – and say it is something completely different. The environmental, Marxist, Christian or psychological reading can all make perfect sense.

   Although Jones cautions against any allegorical reading, I personally see the game as an allegory of growing up – we start in the interior recesses of the home, explore other rooms, emerge into the wider world of town, school and excursion sites such as parks and zoos, and finally achieve dominion over the world at large, comfortable and confident in our size and power. The game may also be taken as an amusing parody of *giri-ninjō* narratives of the Japanese stage – the desperate struggle within the hero's bosom between duty (to parents, lord, or norms of society) and passion (one's true calling in life, one's true secret love). For anyone versed in Japanese literature and drama, the struggle of the Prince

against the King represents a filial tale for the ages. Pushing the ball in this scenario is our *giri* – something we are duty-bound to do for the sake of our father and our suffering world. The *ninjō* points not only to the Prince's own hidden desire, but to the agency of the player. Who knows what the player aims to achieve with each roll of the ball? Only the player themselves. Engaging with *Katamari Damacy* through various narrative frames adds to the enjoyment without diminishing the fun of rolling. If we *only* look at the narrative, however, I agree with Jones that we are missing out.

The sheer variety of possible interpretations in *Katamari Damacy* points to an openness of the text that is exceptional in videogames. This is linked to the fact that *Katamari Damacy* is fundamentally a simulation, not at all like the tightly scripted structures of the JRPG. Linear, or 'closed' narratives, like we find in *Final Fantasy* or *Metal Gear Solid*, work in different ways to convey ideas to players. The closed narrative structure is more definite in its aims to convey one main message, or a number of interlinked messages, through plot and character development, strengthened by dynamics such as player-character identification, immersion, and emotional intensity. I will examine a number of these kinds of games in Part II of this book. In *Katamari Damacy*, the simulation of ball-rolling is supported by a tenuous link to the King's personality, encompassing his clumsiness in wiping out the galaxy as well as his painful memories conveyed to us through flashback. Jones says the relationship between story and gameplay is 'deliberately simple … self-consciously arbitrary and gratuitous,' but its effects are 'subtly complex' (2008: 50). Story frames the gameplay and determines its mood, enhancing the player's rebellious streak: 'In the end the very arbitrariness of the relation between story and game is rendered part of this game, is parodied, not semantically, by textual commentary or symbolism, but procedurally, by the configurative actions required by the player' (ibid.). In the context of narratologists versus ludologists in Game Studies, Jones argues, *Katamari Damacy* intervenes with a 'transparent pretext for gameplay that is non-narrative with a vengeance – you just roll a ball' (2008: 52). The mental work that the player has to engage in to connect the framed story with the gameplay forces a reflection on the very connections between gameplay and story that scholars and critics argue about.

Another scholar well known for their work on narrative and simulation is Gonzalo Frasca (2003), who argues that the two structures are fundamentally different in the ways in which they convey ideology to the player. Narratives work mainly on the level of representation, while simulations work mainly in the realm of rules. Nearly all contemporary games work with a mixture of both elements, so the player is always bound by the rules of the game. Goal rules – what must be achieved to finish the game or make progress in the main story – can be ignored by the player, if they are merely enjoying the environment. But manipulation rules – governing what can and cannot be done by the player in that game environment – affect every player. Frasca (2003: 231) argues that manipulation rules are more subtle than representation and goal rules, and are therefore more effective in showing the ideas of the designers, whether those are well thought

out, or merely stemming from bias or deep-seated social attitudes. I would add that manipulation rules are perhaps more effective because they affect all players, from the start of the game, and do not depend on completion or game progress to achieve their impact. Where goal rules are closely tied to player skill and game literacy, manipulation rules apply to all levels of play.

Katamari Damacy is very much a game of goal rules, with objectives dictated by the King. To use Roger Caillois's (2001) definitions of gameplay elements, *Katamari Damacy* is a game of *agon* – competitive play, with all the time limits and high scores that competition entails. The player can always work harder to beat the clock, beat the size of the ball, beat their own record. The game may also be described as a game of *ludus* rather than *paidea* – a set sequence of objectives rather than free-form exploration of an open environment.[55] And yet, compared to the simulation of car-racing games, *Katamari Damacy* allows for a far greater degree of freedom in movement. There is no set road to follow, no pre-determined pathway through the clutter of objects. The player must find their own way, choosing between objects in their field of vision to mentally sort them into size – either small enough to pick up, or big enough to be avoided. Bumping into things takes time, so the optimal pathway is made up of large numbers of small objects grouped together, increasing the frequency and efficiency of collection. If the objective of the level is to pick up only certain kinds of items, the player must also sort the available objects into goal-objects and non-goal-objects, keeping the immediate method of visually sorting, choosing and avoiding, but changing the criteria for choice. The size and type of objects in the field of vision are thus what determine the player's pathway. The physical environment of the *Katamari Damacy* simulation combines with its open narrative structure to create a very player-centred meaning-making process. In many ways, space itself is presented as the reading, in the pleasure of experiencing the environment and moving through it. In Caillois's terms, we could describe the game in terms of *ilinx*, or pleasure of movement. The simulation of ball-rolling focuses on navigating the space of the 3D environment, which brings us back to the idea of the Japanese home as physical space. How does 'movement through space' feel real to the player of *Katamari Damacy*, and how is this different to other games? Is there some kind of 'Japanese space' that *Katamari Damacy* taps into, and what might this be like?

'Japan' as a 3D environment

The idea of some essential kind of 'Japanese space' has been theorized from both Japanese and Western perspectives, reaching a high point with the writings of Inoue Mitsuo (1969) on the one hand and Roland Barthes (1970) on the other.[56] Inoue posited a fundamental Japanese outlook on architecture in terms of 'movement through space,' where structures from the feudal period onwards were meant to be moved through and experienced room-to-room rather than viewed from afar. Formal interiors featured individual rooms and spaces that led to one another, but did not form orderly lined sequences that could be seen all in

one glance. Where Heian architecture was 'pictorial,' to be viewed from a distance, Edo architecture was 'spatial,' to be moved through by the human form.[57] However, Inoue also noted the strength of Buddhist aesthetics and the ideals of 'emptiness' and 'nothingness' that persisted from the earlier medieval period.[58] The 'beauty of empty space' (*yohaku no bi*) was praised by the Buddhist monk Yoshida Kenkō, writer of the *Tsurezure-gusa*, a collection on aesthetics and philosophy translated as *Essays in Idleness*.[59] The opposite of this aesthetic is clutter, as seen in Yoshida's quote at the beginning of this chapter: 'too much furniture in a house' or 'too many statues and plants in a garden' are described as 'despicable.' Inoue (1985: 137) notes that 'what is usually meant by the qualities of Japanese architecture is the qualities of *feudal* architecture,' but this is acceptable because Buddhist aesthetics still affected ways of building and thinking about space in the medieval and modern periods.

Barthes took the feudal, Buddhist aesthetics of space as standing for the entirety of Japanese architecture, emphasizing the emptiness of Japanese rooms and the minimalist look of pure white *shōji* screens set against perfectly rectangular tatami matting.[60] Both Barthes and Inoue positioned their discussion of Japanese architecture in terms of European architecture, focusing on difference to achieve their definitions. Barthes stated:

> … in the Shikidai gallery, as in the ideal Japanese house, stripped of furniture (or scantily furnished), there is no site which designates the slightest propriety in the strict sense of the word – ownership: neither seat nor bed nor table out of which the body might constitute itself as the subject (or master) of a space: the center is rejected (painful frustration for Western man, everywhere 'furnished' with his armchair, his bed, proprietor of a domestic location). Uncentered, space is also reversible: you can turn the Shikidai gallery upside down and nothing would happen, except an inconsequential inversion of top and bottom, of right and left: the content is irretrievably dismissed: whether we pass by, cross it, or sit down on the floor (or the ceiling, if you reverse the image), there is nothing to grasp.
>
> (Barthes 1970: 108–110)

Barthes observes the square-beamed ceiling, *shōji* doors, and tatami-mat floors of the Shikidai gallery, visually compiling a sequence of squares and rectangles which does indeed, from his photograph, seem reversible and invertible, with no real consequence as to the pattern of shapes created. But of course the hard wooden panels of the ceiling cannot be substituted for the soft matting of the floors, and the *shōji* screens, made of paper, would certainly break if any pressure were to be put upon them. Barthes' understanding of the room as a rotating spectacle is only possible when taken as pure shape, decontextualized and stripped of meaning. For Barthes, the emptiness of the room seems artificial, as he expects rooms to be full of purposeful furniture, suggesting the 'masterful' (and masculine) proprietor of the space. Barthes' description gives us an essentialized 'strange' Japan, only a few years before Edward Said would pen

Orientalism in 1978, criticizing the French and British intellectual establishment for their deliberately quaint depictions of Japan and other places from the East. *Empire of Signs* in fact has much in common with contemporary emphases on 'Cool Japan' and 'otaku culture' that celebrate only the surface image of Japanese culture while minimizing or ignoring the complex pluralities of real life in Japan.

If 'Japanese space' has been seen as somehow unique or possessing its own distinct style, then how has 'Japanese space' been rendered in videogames? Outside the frenzied disorder of *Katamari Damacy*, the Japanese home and the Japanese town have been constructed in certain specific ways in Japanese videogames, differing by genre. Tomàs Grau de Pablos (2014) has argued that the creation of a specific 'feeling' in a 3D environment is what really makes a JRPG a JRPG. Rooms are depicted from an overhead viewpoint yet set at an angle, so human figures and furniture appear in an isometric perspective within the 3D space. As figures move through the space, walls recede and new rooms become visible, much like Inoue's emphasis on human movement in Japanese architecture. We see this particular rendering of 3D spatial environments in titles as diverse as *Resident Evil (Biohazard*, 1996), *Final Fantasy VII* (1997) and *Metal Gear Solid* (1998). A sense of disorientation is produced, as the player feels lost within the mansion, the slums of Midgar, or the Alaskan base. Maps become important to locate the player in space, the 2D layout or blueprint proving more immediately understandable than the 3D environment. Grau de Pablos sees these titles as creating a specific 'feel' through their spatial rendering that led audiences to associate this kind of environment with 'Japanese games' in the 1990s. Games which utilized similar 3D renderings were seen as having a Japanese 'look' which allowed the player to engage with the game text as a global consumer product, creating a sense of appreciation for the Japanese artistic work *as Japanese*. Konami's FOX engine in particular has been noted as creating a specifically Japanese aesthetic, which allows the *Metal Gear* games to provide a 'Japanese feel' for players even though the setting may be located in foreign environments from Alaska to Afghanistan (Freedman 2019).

These games differ from *Katamari Damacy* in that they aim for a gritty sense of realism, as well as emotional impact through the use of oppressive interior spaces. But I would argue that *Katamari Damacy* also utilizes 3D space in remarkably effective ways, using a similar method of modelling movement from one space into another. The Prince's field of vision is extremely limited, blocked by the giant katamari and by obstacles such as furniture and walls. To view the details of the tatami room in Level 1 it is necessary to pause the rolling and 'look around' by pressing the L1 button. Too much of this means failing the level, due to strict time limits. To accurately understand the complete layout of the tatami room, the player must fail repeatedly. On the other hand, constant rolling gives the player a sense of location through repetition, coming back to the same place over and over again to pick up increasingly larger items. We come to know the tatami room as a home base, becoming familiar with its range of associated items and seasonal foods. We can only access other rooms once we have

thoroughly experienced the first room. In this way Inoue's 'movement through space' theories apply to the rooms of the *Katamari* house, while the material reality of their clutter and mess deny the idealization of the Japanese home by Barthes and other Western thinkers.

Katamari Damacy depicts the Japanese home on a micro-level and then on a macro-level, shifting our perspective on the home itself and what the ideal sense of home might mean to us as players. This attention to both the micro and macro level of the game environment is seen in two ground-breaking Japanese works lauded for their excellence in environment design: *Shenmue* (Sega 1999) and *Persona 5* (Atlus 2016). The designers of *Shenmue* led the global games industry in recreating real-world environments in the game space, using the streets of Yokosuka as not just their inspiration but their model for surprisingly accurate renderings of the suburb as the setting for the game's action.[61] One internet blogger undertook a pilgrimage to the famous places from the *Shenmue* narrative, posting photographs of shops, Dobuita Street and the high walls that divide the shopping district from the residential area (Lewis 2014). The Atlus designers also recreated the streets of Sangenjaya in meticulous detail, calling the location 'Yongenjaya' in the game space. *Persona 5* is similar to *Katamari Damacy* in the degree of attention lavished on recreating very banal objects of everyday life: trash cans, street signs, street guard railings, advertising for dentist's offices, as well as larger structures like *jizō* statues, barbershops, drinking dens and game centres, all replicated in astonishingly realistic graphics and accurate colours. A player of *Persona 5* will feel comfortable in the Sangenjaya environment when they travel there in real life; conversely, a resident of Sangenjaya would find many familiar haunts, even subway staircases and pedestrian crossings, recreated in the game space. It has become popular to post photographs of real-world locations juxtaposed with their in-game equivalents on the internet, demonstrating the authenticity of the designers' vision.[62]

The conflation of physical/real space and game space enhances the player's enjoyment of the game, both during play (recognizing familiar landmarks, feeling a sense of immersion in a 'real' 3D space), and when engaged in actions that represent non-diegetic involvement in the game, such as travelling to the real-world location or posting screenshots juxtaposed with photographs of that location. Alison McMahan has argued that one of the most immersive aspects of games with 3D environments is 'perceptual realism,' dependent on whether the objects, environments and characters in the game look as they would in real life (2003: 73–75). Perceptual realism in *Shenmue* and *Persona 5* is developed to an extremely high degree. For people who do not live in Yokosuka or Sangenjaya, the games become a portal into a world of virtual travel. Acting as a tourist in the game space, the player encounters the place as essentially Other, feeling that 'I am in a foreign country and this is a foreign game.' This dynamic provides a sense of enjoyment of the cultural product *as* a Japanese product. This creates a different experience to that of *Resident Evil*, in which the characters are shown as Caucasian, with Western names, in an American environment. The setting is nowhere 'real' in particular, a fictional location called Raccoon City. Since the

Japanese aspect of the game is not visually foregrounded, players may not recognize the game as a Japanese cultural product.

The *mukokuseki* aesthetic can thus make the Japanese origin of videogames opaque, while the vision of 'authentic Japan' in more realistic depictions can make the player into a tourist. *Katamari Damacy* in this spectrum stands alone, as an over-the-top super-Japanese product depicting a detailed vision of the Japanese home, set in a cartoon exaggeration of the Japanese town. This chapter has analyzed the clutter of the Japanese home in *Katamari Damacy* in terms of ideal and reality, a nostalgia for 'traditional Japan' and a kitsch that appeals to a broad target audience. *Katamari Damacy* depicts the material culture of present-day Japan in great detail, presenting Japan itself as a cultural object, something to be appreciated at home and sold abroad.

This focus on Japan as a cultural object is similar in *Ōkami*, a game set in the mists of ancient Japanese legend, and the subject of the next chapter. If the idea of 'Japanese space' is central to *Katamari Damacy*, *Ōkami* explores concepts of history and 'Japanese time.' Where *Katamari Damacy* packages contemporary Japan for our consumption, *Ōkami* packages the past.

Notes

1 This title is Keene's translation of *Tsurezure-gusa.* Yoshida (1998).
2 Game quotes are from my own gameplay of the original English-language PS2 release.
3 The first tutorial for users of the content-creation engine Unity is 'roll-a-ball,' using simple physical mechanics to roll a sphere through 3D space and collect objects: https://unity3d.com/learn/tutorials/projects/roll-ball-tutorial/introduction-roll-ball?playlist=17141. Accessed 23 July 2018.
4 Takahashi has repeatedly said that simplicity is one of his main goals in game design: see interview at the GDC (Game Developers' Conference) in 2004: www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vra5PZcgaU . There are 13 main games in the *Katamari* series, the latest being *Katamari Damacy Reroll* (2018) for Nintendo Switch and PC.
5 For many years Game Studies was split between 'narratologists' who emphasized a narrative reading of games, while 'ludologists' emphasized the gameplay aspects of an algorithmic text. It is now accepted that both aspects of a game are significant, and should be studied together in complementary terms. Jones (2008: 3–6) summarizes the debate.
6 A cut-scene is a brief cinematic that serves as a reward for player progress, a narrative link between scenes, or a flashback sequence to add depth to the narrative and characterization.
7 Nitsche (2008) argues that narrative derives from, or is evoked by, spatial elements in the 3D videogame environment. Setting and spatial structures in earlier, more abstract 2D games also evoke story and character (Wolf 2003).
8 Gameplay can be further broken down into 'diegetic' in-game actions, versus 'non-diegetic' actions such as night-time strategizing. Calleja (2011) describes the difference in terms of 'online' and 'offline' play. On varying meanings of 'completing' a game see Hutchinson (2017a: 174–175).
9 See Consalvo (2007), Newman (2008: 151–178).
10 The game also won awards in innovation and game design at the 8th Interactive Achievement Awards and the Game Developers Choice Awards in 2005. CESA stands for Computer Entertainment Suppliers' Association, established in 1996 to

oversee the Japanese games industry. CESA runs the Tokyo Game Show and the Japanese Game Awards. The ratings agency CERO is a branch of CESA, set up in 2002.

11 Reviewed for Dengeki Online by Japanese game writer Igudon: http://dengekionline. com/soft/review/2004/katamari.html

12 The Dengeki review is followed by a representative discussion, with 131 comments from players and charts of their ratings regarding graphics, story, soundtrack, etc.

13 Tofu-san (2004) was typical, describing the game as '*fushigi to tanoshii*' (strange and fun).

14 Unfortunately the author's name is not listed. *Game Watch* staff (2004).

15 *Time* staff (2004).

16 The word 'otaku' here indicates a certain kind of American fan who is extremely interested in Japanese cultural products such as manga and anime. In general use in Japan, 'otaku' is similar to 'nerd,' with nuances of connoisseurship and collecting, an indoor lifestyle, and solitary sensibility. 'Otaku' is also used negatively, suggesting men who are overly interested in young girl characters and 2D rather than 3D relationships. But 'otaku' is also a socially constructed term (Kinsella 1998), meaning different things to different people (Galbraith 2012). Galbraith, Kam and Kamm (2015) give a detailed history of the term and its meanings and appropriations over time.

17 Picard (2014) was commenting particularly on the reception of Japanese role-playing games, commonly described as 'unique' and 'strange' in North American online commentary.

18 Galbraith, Kam and Kamm (2015: 5).

19 Other forums have a similar range of comments. The 1Up forum is archived at: https://web.archive.org/web/20130303050212/www.1up.com/games/ps2/katamari-damacy/review/ .

20 More recently, see *Rock of Ages* (ACE Team 2011), in which a giant boulder rumbles through different historical scenarios causing varying degrees of humorous destruction. Playing *Me and My Katamari* on the PSP (2005), gamers tilt the entire device to roll the ball; an early version of this technology appeared in *Kirby Tilt & Tumble* for the GameBoy in 2001 (Ryan 2011: 229).

21 Referring to *Donkey Kong* (Nintendo, 1981) and *Burger Time* (Data East, 1982) respectively. Jeff Ryan commented that the plot of *Mario Bros.* 'bears as much relation to plumbing as *Pac-Man* does to fighting the paranormal' (2011: 47).

22 Jones (2008: 49, 61–62). Ashcraft (2008a: 14–29) describes the prominence of claw/crane games in the Japanese arcade, and their generic descriptor 'UFO catcher.'

23 Jones (2008: 58–64) uses 'otaku' uncritically and in a neutral manner, to indicate zealous fandom. However, by using 'otaku' to connect *Katamari Damacy* with the bizarre, Jones also reinforces the Orientalist discursive trend mentioned above, describing Japan's essential state as somehow strange and 'Other' to the West.

24 Wark (2007) refers to Greek legend, Plato, Albert Camus, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno in analysing *Katamari Damacy*, but not to Namco or Japan. Takahashi's mention is the only hint of the game's Japanese design.

25 Mario is one of the most widely recognized *kyara* (characters) of all time, hence Abe's appearance as Mario at the Rio Olympic Games. Originally named 'Jumpman' in *Donkey Kong*, Mario acquired a brother Luigi in the arcade game *Mario Bros.* (1983), achieving widespread popularity with *Super Mario Bros.* (1985). Eternally fighting Bowser to rescue Princess Peach, Mario was surprised in *Super Mario Odyssey* (2017) when Peach refused bouquets from both rivals in order to enjoy her own adventures. Ryan (2011) analyzes the development of Mario games; Kohler (2005) explores their effect on the Japanese and global game industries.

26 See Ryan (2011: 3, 93, 116).

27 Ryan (2011: 267). McCloud shows how simplicity of design creates viewer-character identification, and enhances understanding across linguistic and national borders

(1993: 36–42). Tezuka Osamu is one of McCloud's examples. The same kind of simplicity and blankness is also found in Link, from the *Legend of Zelda* series.

28 Much has been written on the successful exports of Japanese consumer goods, e.g. Allison (2006), Iwabuchi (2002, 2004), and Kelts (2006).

29 McGray's (2002) notion of Japan's 'Gross National Cool' was highly influential, pointing to Japanese economic policy and Japan's cultural capital at the time. Margaret Talbot wrote in the *New York Times* about 'Pokemon Hegemon' in 2002, but Chris Burgess (2015) shows that the term 'Cool Japan' was not officially used by Japanese government until 2005. The NHK TV show 'Cool Japan Hakkutsu: Kakko-ii Nippon' aired in April 2006, popularizing the phrase. By 2010 it had 'moved into common parlance' (Burgess 2015: 113) with the establishment of the Creative Industries Promotion Office (*Cool Japan-shitsu*) under METI (Ministry of Education, Technology and Industry). Iwabuchi (2010) and Bul (2009) criticize the 'Cool Japan' policy as overly nationalistic; Miller (2011) critiques its masculinist perspective.

30 Nintendo's *Mario* games were certainly developed too early for the 'Cool Japan' policy to be a factor, but their success overseas, compounded by *Pokémon* fever, contributed to the discourse.

31 A good summary of arguments on the 'Japaneseness' of pop culture products from Japan is found in Tsutsui (2010: 23–27).

32 Created by Tajiri Satoshi and developed by Game Freak, the original *Pokémon* games were RPGs with strategy elements. For more on the *Pokémon* games see the essays in Tobin (2004). Light novels are 'small print books with more illustrations than usual … highly popular among young adult audiences' (Saito 2016: 315). Saito discusses the development of light novels, and their ties with tabletop and computer-based adventure gaming.

33 For a recent example, see Hopkins (2017). Tsutsui (2010: 50) also discusses various aspects of *Pokémon* localization.

34 Iwabuchi (2004: 59–60).

35 See Kitase (2001) interview; video with subtitles available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tzf-baZ1Bc Accessed 29 December 2018.

36 Iwabuchi (2002: 28); Glasspool (2016: 101).

37 Daniels' 2010 study shows that this shift is not complete – families with three generations under one roof comprised one-fifth of the homes in her study of households in the Kansai region.

38 See Kobayashi (1995).

39 *Tokonoma* fell out of favour after the war due to nationalistic associations with traditional arts and crafts, but homes built in the 1970s saw a resurgence of the *tokonoma* with nostalgia for 'traditional Japan,' entering the mainstream in the 1980s with increased affluence and home ownership (Daniels 2010: 112–113).

40 Daniels (2010: 1–26) interrogates the notion of the 'ideal Japanese home,' showing how the image was constructed over time, focusing on specific houses, material culture, and social practices associated with domestic space.

41 Tsuzuki (1999: 9); see Daniels (2010: 22) for discussion.

42 Inside the cupboards we find not futons but mousetraps and other scattered objects such as those found on the floor of the living room. In subsequent levels, some of these apparent cupboards become sliding doors, opening to other rooms.

43 Daniels (2010: 105, 112–113).

44 Daniels (2010: 146–148). Chapter 5 of Daniels' book, 'Stuff and Storage,' examines storage solutions such as free-standing *kura* storehouses outside the main structure of the home, to closets, wardrobes, chests of drawers and so on, many of which encroach into the living space. The *Katamari* house features a built-in floor storage space in the kitchen, popular in new homes.

45 For discussion of gardening and photographic examples, see Daniels (2010: 56–57, 76–77).

46 Parts of the house are listed in the 'Collection' on the Prince's home planet, comprising the Living Room, Garden and Porch, Roof, Kitchen, Kids' Room, Entry Hall and Hallway. Interestingly, the toilet area is not listed even though we see it in Level 4, and neither are bedrooms, since gameplay is confined to the ground floor.

47 It is Japanese custom to leave shoes in the entryway (*genkan*) when entering the home, and many people wear soft slippers or socks at home for relaxation. Entering the bathroom or toilet, one changes into plastic 'toilet slippers' so that socks do not come into contact with the dirty bathroom floor.

48 A winter scene is found in the sequel, *We ♥ Katamari* (2005), in which one can roll up snowmen, sleds and so forth.

49 Fans have made detailed name lists of characters in *Katamari Damacy*, their occupations and locations in the game environment; see https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/ps2/918766-katamari-damacy/faqs/34455 Accessed 3 August 2018.

50 Places in the 'Town' Collection are named as North and South Pigeon Street, Shopping Street, Quail River, Roadway, Dove Lake, Sparrow Hill, Baseball Field, Construction Site and Campground.

51 Because cut-scenes are pre-rendered and do not include action from the player, they can be understood as something created purely by the game designer, although in some games, different cut-scenes will appear dependent on the player's actions during gameplay. See Newman (2013: 73–74, 90–97).

52 See Doi (1976, 1981). Doi's arguments about psychological concepts defining the nature of Japanese identity were later criticized as *Nihonjinron*, racialized theories of national identity.

53 Jones (2008: 53–54) critiques Wark's argument, but finds it useful in drawing our attention to the interface itself as a subject of exploration.

54 For example, see the Dengeki Online review above.

55 Newman (2013: 17–24) explains Caillois's definitions, applying them to a wide range of games.

56 Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's 1933 treatise on Japanese aesthetics and architecture, *In Praise of Shadows* (*In'ei Reisan*), focuses more on the home's interior, while Maeda Ai's 1982 work on space (*kūkan*) is more generally applied to urban topographies. *Empire of Signs* by Roland Barthes (1970) is perhaps the best-known analysis of Japanese architecture and aesthetics from the standpoint of French critical theory.

57 Inoue (1985: 137–171). By 'feudal' Inoue means 1573–1868, encompassing the Azuchi-Momoyama and Edo (Tokugawa) periods.

58 'Medieval' here means 1185–1573, comprising the Kamakura, Nanboku-chō and Muromachi periods.

59 Yoshida (1998). Together with the *Makura no sōshi* (*The Pillow Book* of Sei Shōnagon) and the *Hōjōki* (*An Account of My Hut*, by Kamo no Chōmei), it is seen as one of the three great medieval texts and representative of the *zuihitsu* essay style.

60 Daniels (2010: 1–26) discusses this 'myth' of Japanese home design.

61 *Shenmue* (pronounced 'Shen-moo') predates the vision of Miami in Rockstar North's *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* by three years, and the remarkably accurate San Fierro/San Francisco of *GTA: San Andreas* by five. Other Japanese games paying attention to geographically accurate detail include the early *Yakuza* games, *Steins;Gate, Tokyo Jungle* and *The World Ends With You*: see Johnson (2017).

62 See examples at Ashcraft (2017). The Atlus offices were also located in Sangenjaya. Director Hashino Katsura comments on the design process: www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGb3BNgU7SE Accessed 20 December 2018.

2 Packaging the Past in *Ōkami*

> Ezofuji and the Ark of Yamato…. They're both steeped in history. It sends shivers down my spine just looking at 'em!
>
> <div align="right">Issun, Ōkami[1]</div>

Where *Katamari Damacy* played with notions of Japanese space, *Ōkami* (Clover Studio, 2006) plays with ideas of time. Written and directed by Kamiya Hideki, a designer at Capcom from 1994, *Ōkami* transports the player into a world of Japanese myth and legend. Taking the form of a white wolf, the player embodies the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami. The title is a pun – 'Ōkami' can mean 'wolf' or 'god,' and the game as a whole can be seen as a humorous re-interpretation of the *Kojiki* (The Record of Ancient Matters) from AD 712, one of Japan's oldest written documents. At the same time, the religious meaning of *Ōkami* has been interpreted as didactic practice, as players enact rituals of life-giving and restoration to regenerate a cursed world. Battling traditional Japanese monsters known as *yōkai* and *oni* as enemies, befriending characters from beloved fairytales, the player encounters the dark and light side of Japanese legend as they move through the world of Nippon. The game plays on ideas of nation, history and Japanese identity, ending in a snowy Hokkaidō-like area replete with Ainu mythology. *Ōkami* features an award-winning, unique art style based on hand-drawn characters, environments and animated sequences, drawing on traditional ink methods such as *sumi-e* and incorporating calligraphy into the gameplay.[2] Kanji characters appear in the game environment as important narrative elements and diegetic symbols, signifying the day-night cycle as well as emotional affect in fight sequences. This combination of legend, artwork and visual sign produces a compelling and immersive environment for the player. In this chapter I examine *Ōkami* as a self-conscious export product which successfully appeals to players – with or without expertise in Japanese language, culture and history.

Told tales and Shinto myths: gateways to the past

The opening sequence of *Ōkami* takes the form of a picture scroll, unrolling from left to right. A giant calligraphy brush appears, sketching the outlines of a

village, after which a conventional storybook introduction appears at the bottom of the screen: 'Once upon a time, in a faraway land….' The backstory is told in text, with accompanying black-and-sepia-toned illustrations resembling traditional shadow plays. The calligraphy brush is seen intervening in the fight between the wolf Shiranui and the eight-headed serpent Orochi, foreshadowing the Celestial Brush techniques the player will use in gameplay. A full-colour animated sequence follows, culminating in the wolf's howl, the title screen, and a prompt to 'Begin Story.' Taken together, the shadow play, scroll paintings and calligraphy showcase Japanese artistic forms, here in the service of telling a *monogatari* (tale) based on legend. The text and illustrations then continue for a good 20 minutes before the player gains control of the avatar. The passive role of the player in this sequence, merely clicking on the screen to progress through the text, heightens the feeling of being told a story. In English translation, many words are used that demand a sophisticated reading age, such as 'satiate,' 'thwarted' or 'succumb.' The Japanese version uses kanji characters that would similarly be learned later in school, making it clear that the game is not for 'little kids' but for older children who can read fairy tales and legends for themselves.[3] Clover Studio thus shows its expectations of the player as someone who can make sense of complex language, and who can appreciate a sense of 'olden times' in both storytelling and content. As we shall see below, this bears some significance for making meaning out of the gameworld more generally.

As the story of *Ōkami* unfolds, its characters – the fearsome serpent Orochi, the warrior Susano, the hero Izanagi (shortened to Nagi in the English version), and Amaterasu herself – are all clearly inspired by the *Kojiki*. Together with the *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicles of Japan, AD 720), the *Kojiki* provides evidence of pre-modern and ancient belief systems in Japan, as well as the order of imperial succession.[4] The *Kojiki* includes the creation myth, with deities Izanami and Izanagi producing the islands of the Japanese archipelago as well as a great many lesser gods, forming the roots of the Shinto religion. Unsurprisingly, there is a great deal of religious iconography in the game. As the incarnation of the sun goddess, the player-character Amaterasu does not need to acquire the Celestial Brush technique that restores the sun to the sky, but can summon the sunlight from the beginning of gameplay. She is often referred to as 'Mother to us all' and 'the origin of all that is.' Amaterasu is given three 'Divine Instruments' as weapons, each inspired by one of the three ancient Imperial Regalia: a mirror (*kagami*), jewel (*magatama*) and sword (*tsurugi*). The main sword in *Ōkami* is named Tsu-kuyomi, recalling the name of the Shinto moon god, later turning into Tsumu-gari, a legendary sword similar in mythical status to Excalibur in Western tradition. While the sword is not named Excalibur for localized versions of the game, the jewel is called a Rosary in the English-language release. This makes the comma-shaped jade beads of the *magatama* immediately understandable as a religious object, used in Buddhist and Catholic worship.[5] The three Divine Instruments link Amaterasu with the Japanese imperial line, reinforcing the idea of the Emperor's divine descent. When we save the Emperor in *Ōkami* from sickness, this is part and parcel of saving Nippon itself from the curse of Orochi.

The linkage of Nippon, the Emperor, and the sun goddess in *Ōkami* replicates the nationalistic ideology of state Shinto, with the pronunciation 'Nippon' echoing the hardened tones of military language – 'Japan' these days is known by the softer 'Nihon.'

The divine imagery and symbolism in *Ōkami* are not all Shinto-based: animals of the Chinese zodiac play a large role, and where Amaterasu steps on the earth, flowers and leaves bloom, as in the ancient tales of the Buddha. *Ōkami* is a syncretic mix, much like the *Kojiki* itself.[6] But the game does place great emphasis on nature and its inherent sacredness, a fundamental idea in much Shinto philosophy.[7] The entrance to Kamiki Village is marked by a crimson *torii* gate, usually denoting the entrance to a Shinto shrine, while cherry trees in the environment are marked with a white *shimenawa* rope, indicating their holy nature. Some trees in Kamiki Village marked in this way appear to be dead, with withered black branches. Part of gameplay is to find dead trees like this and make them bloom, bringing life back to the land. In this way, gameplay carries out the mission of feeling reverence for nature. This feeling is heightened by the option to feed creatures in the environment. Feeding an animal its preferred food – seeds, meat, fish, or herbs – triggers a beautiful cut-scene in a field of flowers, with the wolf sitting peacefully across from the animal while it eats. This scene is quite a lengthy cinematic and can be skipped, but the lush visuals and sooth-ing music provide a sense of well-being. Amaterasu receives 'Praise' points for restoring trees and feeding creatures, allowing the player-character to power up in terms of life energy and fighting strength. This gameplay dynamic reinforces Amaterasu's position over and above other elements of nature, as well as the idea of Amaterasu as a living deity who needs faith and praise to thrive.

Jason Anthony (2014: 38) interprets *Ōkami* as a didactic religious game, teaching the player about a religion foreign to their own. Players can certainly learn about Japanese religious iconography and shrine-related material culture from gameplay, but *Ōkami* does not convey much information about specific Japanese deities or Shinto ritual, rather presenting a syncretic mash-up of beliefs with roots in ancient China as well as Japan. Nor is *Ōkami* a faithful adaptation of the *Kojiki*. Important scenes in the *Kojiki* are reversed – it is not Amaterasu who hides in a cave and needs to be lured out to restore sunshine to the world of *Ōkami*, but the warrior Susano hiding away in his house, who needs to be lured out to fight a battle. This scene is amusing to Japanese players or those familiar with the legend, as it was traditionally Susanoo-no-Mikoto whose antics drove Amaterasu to hide herself in the first place.[8] Other important stories are omitted entirely, as in the story of the fish-hook and the fire gods, told in both the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki*.[9] If *Ōkami* is didactic, it teaches more of a worldview rather than specifics of Shinto tradition. The player absorbs, or at least enacts, a rever-ence for nature that is consistent with the recognition of the divine (*kami*) in all living things. Louise Grann contends that 'depending upon the player's sub-jective experience and personal belief, *Ōkami* can also be a "digital praxis game," a digital game that, when played, is devotional practice' (2017: 9). Anthony sees the creature-feeding scenes as 'a meditation on balance and nature

that plays into traditional Shinto worship…a jarring departure from the button mashing typical of the genre' (2014: 38). These scenes are certainly meditative and calm, but are skippable for players keen to get back to the action. There is also much 'button mashing' in battle scenes, as the player uses brush techniques not to meditate but to slash through enemies and destroy them. In some situations, the brush techniques can 'harmonize play with traditional meditative praxis' found in Japanese calligraphy (Anthony 2014: 38), but this is not always the case.

On this point, it is useful to compare *Ōkami* with the Japanese survival horror game *Fatal Frame* (Tecmo, 2001).[10] In *Ōkami*, the player is not required to perform any specific religious ritual to achieve progress in the main narrative, as opposed to *Fatal Frame*, in which the player must use religious objects such as 'sacred ropes and plaited paper' to enact specific, detailed rituals learned and remembered in the course of gameplay (Walter 2014: 100). The player of *Ōkami* uses the Celestial Brush to draw familiar shapes indicative of their purpose: a circle in the sky to bring forth the sun, a crescent moon to cast nightfall, heavy downward strokes to summon a deluge of rain, or a spiral to create wind. The player enjoys control over their environment, acting like a god by summoning the elements to defeat foes in battle. This is more like a 'theoptic game' in Anthony's typology, offering the player 'the experience of "divine as avatar," though it must be noted that such games can rarely be understood as engaging the divine … [t]hese games are largely opportunities to engage with ideas about religion, rather than with religious experience itself' (2014: 43). As such, *Ōkami* is less a game of 'digital religious praxis' and more a way to engage with modern Japanese perceptions of Shinto, nature and the gods. That said, there is one game mechanic that encourages selflessness and generosity as virtues in the player. At several points in the game, the player is given the choice to donate money to springs or other sacred places. Giving everything one owns is always the preferred option, resulting in game progress and access to new areas.

Walter's analysis of the use of religion and ritual in *Fatal Frame* sees the videogame medium as a means by which Japanese artists of popular culture navigated the divide between Japan's ancient past and its uncertain future at the turn of the century, following the collapse of the economic bubble in the 1990s:

> Like a sacred rope bridge, the ritual world of *Fatal Frame* serves as a conduit between past and present, a pilgrimage route by which the Japanese player can journey inward to a long-obscured cultural self. Just as the camera's lens uncovers ghosts, curses, and other supernatural clues within the game, so too does the magic lens of *Fatal Frame* reveal Japan as a supernatural landscape, a spirit-haunted world where traces of the past might bubble up unexpectedly before the eyes of the mindful watcher.
>
> (Walter 2014: 101)

Walter sees Japan as positioned precariously between its past and its future, and the Japanese audience as eager for artistic works that invest meaning into

traditional Japanese culture, worth preserving for a sense of stability in turbulent times. *Fatal Frame* and *Ōkami* both preserve and cherish Japanese culture, partly by drawing on Shinto myth and practice. Both games invest meaning into religious symbols, but in different ways, consistent with their genre. In survival horror, religious artefacts offer a way out of the haunted game arena, whereas the bright world of action-adventure uses religion as a playful gateway to an imagined Japanese past. The vision of premodern Japan in *Ōkami* is beautiful and reassuring, a particular construction of 'Japanese culture' attractively packaged for consumption by the domestic and foreign audience alike.

'Japan' as cultural artefact: signifiers across audiences

In order to package this vision of the Japanese past for a range of different audiences, *Ōkami* uses methods similar to *Katamari Damacy* to enable both Japanese and non-Japanese players to make meaning out of the cultural references and historical objects encountered in the gameworld. The initial setting of Kamiki Village employs traditional Japanese architecture in terms of thatched domestic dwellings and other structures such as water wheels, bridges, and *torii* gates. Each building gives a hint as to the occupant, with the house of the village headman Mr. Orange featuring a large orange atop the roof, and the warrior Susano's house sporting a large helmet motif. More complex two-story structures are found in different areas, such as the Inn at Sasa sanctuary. Inside the buildings, the player finds Japanese furniture and decor such as low chests, braziers, *zabuton* cushions, musical instruments, teapots and so on. The player can often go up to items and examine them, and a text box will appear with an explanation, like 'samisen: three-stringed instrument used for dramatic stage performances.' It is thus possible to learn about Japanese cultural items just by moving through the space and interacting with the environment. Collectible treasures also come with their own explanations, appearing in a text box when the object is acquired. These treasures harken back to premodern rather than truly 'ancient' times, with stand-mounted coral and carved wooden animal figures, as well as precious vases, tassels and gems. All are explained and categorized in an Inventory system similar to the Collection used in *Katamari Damacy*, so players are able to look up the items later to learn more about them if desired.

One set of objects in the game environment is particularly interesting in this respect – the vast array of creatures called '*bakemono*' by Mr. Orange, a parade of monsters and enemies based on the *yōkai* of traditional Japanese culture.[11] The first set of enemies we encounter in Kamiki Village are imps carrying musical instruments, including *biwa* and *samisen* lutes, but later incarnations incorporate objects into their own bodies, such as monsters based on roof tiles, kettles or umbrellas. These monsters recall the *tsukumo-gami* of medieval picture scrolls: 'everyday objects with added eyes, noses, hands, and legs' (Komatsu 2006: 20). The *Tsukumo-gami e-kotoba* scroll of the Muromachi period (1336–1573) can be summarized:

> [P]eople once believed that tools were inhabited by spirits and would trans-
> form into yōkai after turning a hundred years old. Consequently, they would
> make sure to discard their old tools before this happened. Being casually
> tossed away on the roadside by their owners with nary a word of gratitude
> for their hard work infuriated the old tools, which banded together for
> revenge…. In the end, however, these yōkai tools-as-*oni* were vanquished.
> They repented their wrongdoing, embraced Buddhism, and finally rested in
> peace.[12]
>
> (Komatsu 2006: 21)

The *tsukumo-gami* thus recall folk beliefs mixed with Buddhist patterns of
wrongdoing and repentance, but the monsters in *Ōkami* have broken this pattern
and need to be physically vanquished by the player/Amaterasu. Celestial Brush
attacks often accord with the nature of the monster – an imp with a lute can be
immobilized by cutting along the line of the strings, for example, while a crane
monster holding an umbrella can be hurt by creating a strong wind. All monsters
can be damaged if Amaterasu uses the calligraphy brush to create trees in the
ground, which spring up instantly with great force, causing harm on impact and
providing a living barrier between Amaterasu and the opponent.

It is with the *bakemono* enemies that the Inventory screen of *Ōkami* comes
into its own, reflecting the encyclopaedic nature of diverse multitudes of *yōkai*
that proliferated in the arts of the late Tokugawa period (1603–1868).[13] Rank on
rank of *yōkai* are assembled in the Inventory, listed in order of their appearance
in the game narrative. Since similar monsters appear together in battle, they are
thereby classified into categories such as 'musical instrument monsters' or 'roof
tile monsters' by this game mechanic. Clicking on a specific *yōkai* in the Inven-
tory will bring up its statistics, a short description of the monster, and hints on
how best to attack it. Cultural background is often included, providing informa-
tion for non-Japanese players as well as for Japanese players who may not know
the obscure monster's origin. The Inventory imposes order on the chaos and pan-
demonium of the 'Demon's Night Parade,' a popular theme of Tokugawa art.[14]
In this way, the Inventory uses systems of classification similar to the 'Collec-
tion' in *Katamari Damacy*, mitigating the player's lack of cultural knowledge.

Japanese folklorist Komatsu Kazuhiko reports a *yōkai* 'boom' in Japan in
2006, the year *Ōkami* was released. Capcom and Clover Studio doubtless prof-
ited from the upswing in interest in *yōkai* at the time, joining the trend that saw a
concurrent increase in *yōkai*-themed festivals, exhibitions and manga. Komatsu
sees the 'soaring interest in *yōkai* among the Japanese' [people] as a continu-
ation of 'traditional *yōkai* culture nurtured over many centuries within Japan
itself,' reaching a broader global audience through Miyazaki Hayao's animated
films, particularly *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988), *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and
Spirited Away (2001), all of which featured *yōkai* creatures in the cast.[15]
Komatsu argues that the process was helped along by 'manga artists like Mizuki
Shigeru and novelists like Kyōgoku Natsuhiko' who translated the academic
findings of *yōkai* studies to a wider, popular audience (2006: 26). *Yōkai* of

various kinds had informed manga artists for years, as we see with the use of *oni* (demons) in Takahashi Rumiko's series *Urusei Yatsura* (1978–1987) and *Inuyasha* (1996–2008), for example.[16] At the time of *Ōkami*'s release, Urushibara Yuki's manga *Mushishi* was still being serialized in *Monthly Afternoon*, with individual chapters later collected into volumes by Kodansha. The anime adaptation aired on Fuji Television from October 2005 to June 2006, while the Kodansha volumes were translated into English and published by Del Rey from 2007 to 2010. The strange and wondrous *yōkai* of *Mushishi* found a wide audience around the world, which may have contributed to *Ōkami*'s sales in North America. *Yōkai* popularity continues, if local festivals are anything to go by – as I write this, the Yōkai Festival of Philadelphia is advertising its celebrations, timed to coincide with Halloween.[17]

Whether or not the designers of *Ōkami* deliberately sought to capitalize on the '*yōkai* boom,' producer Inaba Atsushi has said the director Kamiya Hideki

> felt strongly that it would be great if people outside Japan played this game and became interested in Japanese culture…. I am glad to see the game was well received overseas and hopefully it will take on the role of an ambassador for Japanese culture.
>
> (Shea 2007)

The game seems to have succeeded in this respect. Game scholar Mia Consalvo interviewed Western players who found that playing Japanese videogames sparked their interest in Japanese culture, with 'virtual travel' leading to Japanese language training or physical travel to Japan (2016: 33). *Ōkami* and *Katamari Damacy* both figured prominently in this discussion.[18] Looking at the *Ōkami*-related discussion boards on GameFAQs, Neoseeker and the IGN forums, it seems that many players see the game as an opportunity to learn about Japanese culture. This learning process is taken fairly uncritically, speaking of 'Japanese culture' rather than 'the designers' construction of Japanese culture.' Forum questions tend to focus on the legends and fairytale characters of the game, rather than architecture, furniture or clothing, which are accepted at face value as representing premodern Japanese artefacts. Some players ask direct questions such as 'What Japanese mythos and folklore was Okami based on?' while others ask for help: 'Calling Japanese Mythology Experts!' Still others offer information of their own accord, starting new threads with titles like 'For those who don't get the Japanese myth references.'[19] For some reviewers of *Ōkami*, the 'Japaneseness' of the narrative and visual style is in itself a draw for the international audience:

> One look at *Okami's* cel-shaded/sumi-e graphics is enough to whet any Japanophile's intrigue. Its liberal use of Japanese mythology characters such as Susanoo and Orochi will succeed in captivating them. And while this game is clearly not meant to accurately portray these characters or tales (think *God of War* in relation to Greek mythology), it tells its own story

beautifully…. It is decidedly Japanese through and through, and that's easily one of its core strengths.

(Stephen P. 2014)

Reviewers who write in this vein clearly find pleasure in the exotic image of 'JRPG' or 'Japanese game' that we saw in the previous chapter. There are also those who just enjoy the foreign aspect of the Japanese references, revelling in a sense of difference. As Consalvo notes, the same enjoyment of difference is seen in Susan Napier's studies of anime fans and cosplay enthusiasts.[20] *Ōkami* leverages this idea of the foreign to create a vision of Japan that is exotic, strange, and rich in colour – an 'Orient' where everything is different to mundane reality, which can yet be categorized and known through diligent study. This process of Orientalization is the same rhetorical method used by French and British observers of distant lands in Africa and the Middle East in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Said 1995), although turning the rhetorical method back on Japan, one of the original objects of Orientalist discourse, involves a convoluted subject-positioning too complex to explore here in depth.[21] To illustrate the point, a good example of self-Orientalizing 'Japan' in *Ōkami* is seen in the use of written language appearing in the game environment.

As we have seen, the player is able to understand and make meaning out of unfamiliar 'foreign' things encountered in the game space without resorting to the internet, either by pressing 'o' to examine objects in the environment, or learning further details about creatures and treasures in the Inventory. But the process is more complex when it comes to *Ōkami*'s visual use of the written Japanese language. Celestial Brush techniques are each introduced with an associated kanji character, while the eight Canine warriors of the Gale Shrine each have a personality trait (faith, loyalty, courage, etc.) signified by a kanji character written on their collar. Most notably, 'Praise' is signified by the kanji 幸, which floats up from restored trees and nurtured creatures. As new techniques, traits and praise are acquired by Amaterasu, the kanji are absorbed into her body, providing energy, strength and enhanced abilities. In these situations, the meaning of the Japanese written symbol is plainly understandable from the narrative context, amplified by explanations given by Issun, Amaterasu's companion and guide. In other cases, the kanji is given meaning by changes in the game environment, as in Amaterasu's manipulation of the day/night cycle: 照 (shō) appears in the sky with rising-sun rays to signify 'daytime,' while 宵 (yoi) appears to signify 'evening,' accompanied by a wolf's howl.[22] The player can thus infer the meanings of all these kanji by their narrative and environmental context. Other kanji characters in the game-world are not so easily understood. The environment is liberally dotted with wooden signboards offering directions, place names or instructions, written in Japanese. If the player clicks on the signboard, the information appears in an English-language text box positioned beneath the scene. This game mechanic emphasizes the idea that *Ōkami* was developed in another language. The player must actively choose to cross the linguistic boundary by asking for the

translation, effectively positioning themselves as a foreigner to the game's narrative space.

The strongest impact of the Japanese language in visual terms occurs during battle. Once an enemy encounter begins, Amaterasu is immediately surrounded by a coloured, shimmering force field, the surface of which is covered by a multitude of kanji characters, all alike: 来. This character means 'come,' heralding a sense of foreboding in the player who can read and recognize the character. What is coming? Are many things coming? Once the enemies appear, new kanji characters begin to float downwards, all with negative meanings: fear, evil, cowardice, demon, and so forth. This reinforces the evil nature of the enemies, and also taunts the player. Even the player who cannot read the characters experiences an emotional impact, achieved through the colour, shape and size of the kanji characters. They are all written in a deep black ink, slightly misshapen and not appearing in uniform size, giving an impression of chaos and disorder.[23] Some have a jagged or spiky appearance, indicating a threatening air of danger. In this way, players ignorant of the character's meaning can still feel the foreboding and dread signified by the character itself. Even so, the player's inability to read the kanji emphasizes the idea that this is a Japanese game.

Keeping the *Ōkami* environment deliberately foreign and opaque gives a strong feeling of 'Japanese product,' which many non-Japanese players enjoy. Players from Asia with shared linguistic roots may understand the kanji characters more easily, but can still enjoy a sense of the 'foreign' through the Japan-specific cultural references, such as monsters from folklore, fairytale characters, or Shinto myths and legends. The treatment of Japanese objects, monsters and language in the game design shows a process of packaging 'Japanese culture' as a marketable, sellable product, just as we saw in Chapter 1 with *Katamari Damacy*.[24] Japanese culture acts as an object of desire for the Japanese domestic audience, nostalgic for the past, and also for the Western audience, eager to consume 'exotic Japan.' Arguably the most important symbol of Japanese culture in the game is the wolf itself, a symbol of the vanished past and a potent focal point for nostalgic yearning.

The wolf in Japan: historical and religious perspectives

Historically, the wolf has a strong connection with religion and spirituality in Japan. As with the ancient Native American and Roman cultures, wolves were seen as nurturing caregivers as well as useful predators who kept down numbers of ravaging deer and other crop-eating animals. Wolves are seen as 'beneficial animals,' indicated by the kanji character for 'wolf,' made up of two parts meaning 'good' and 'beast.'[25] Anthropologist Brett Walker states:

> Japanese once revered the wolf as Ōguchi no Magami, or Large-Mouthed
> Pure God. Grain farmers worshiped wolves at shrines, beseeching this
> elusive canine to protect their crops from the sharp hooves and voracious
> appetites of wild boars and deer. At Shinto shrines such as the one at

Mitsumine in Saitama Prefecture, talismans adorned with images of wolves guarded worshipers from fire, disease, and other calamities; charms with images of wolves with their pups supposedly brought fertility to surrounding agrarian communities and to couples hoping to have children.

(Walker 2005: 9)

The amulets, called *ema*, are still sold at Ōkawa Shrine near Nishi Maizuru in Kyoto Prefecture, while the Mitsumine Shrine in Saitama Prefecture is still seen as a major centre of wolf worship, its gates flanked by two large wolf statues. *Ofuda* or talismans from these shrines are often displayed in the homes of local residents.[26] Belief in the wolf's protection is seen in films such as Miyazaki Hayao's *Princess Mononoke*, in which wolves symbolize the nurturing spirit of the forest. The wolf's howl expresses the Japanese value of *wabi*, or loneliness, while wolves are sometimes believed to act as messengers for the gods (*o-tsukai*), or as guides for lost travellers and lovers, especially those who have shown kindness towards animals.[27] At the same time, wolves can be dangerous, inhabiting a liminal space between this world and the next, linking humans with the gods.

Prior to the nineteenth century, the two words *yamainu* (mountain dog) and *ōkami* (wolf) were used fairly interchangeably, after which hotly contested debates sprang forth among Japanese and European naturalists trying to determine whether the two animals were distinct types or actually the same species.[28] Since wolves are now extinct in Japan, these arguments depend on archaeological finds such as fossils and remains of religious rituals, depictions in artwork, and descriptions written in bygone eras, including oral history and folklore such as *The Legends of Tōno*, recorded by Yanagita Kunio and others.[29] Walker argues that in the Meiji period, wolves became more associated with the 'nationally centered and scientifically legitimate name *Nihon ōkami*' rather than *yamainu*, which was seen as more 'folksy' and rural (2005: 45). The title of Clover Studio's game can thus be associated with nation-state centrality, Nihon, and modernism, in opposition to *yamainu* and the Hokkaidō wolf, which are marginal to Neo-Confucian and Linnaean systems of taxonomy (Walker 2005: ch. 2). In this way, the title *Ōkami* reinforces our perception of 'Japanese culture' in terms of the nation-state and Imperial Japanese culture, rather than more marginal or pluralistic cultural forms. Interestingly, the idea of the nation-state also makes its presence known when Amaterasu uses the Celestial Brush to summon daylight: the sun which appears in the sky is surrounded with bright red rays, in a startling echo of Japan's wartime flag.

The confusion over the correct naming of the Japanese wolf only adds to its mystique, and the animal continues to occupy a prominent place in the Japanese imagination. At the time of *Ōkami*'s release, Japanese environmentalists and wolf-lovers were enthusiastically proposing the re-introduction of wolves to Japan, a highly controversial and politically charged notion. Much as in North America and Europe, everyone likes the idea of wolves roaming free in the wilderness, as long as that wilderness is far away from human settlements. The

logistics of re-introduction are also complicated by debates over the relative merits of cloning, breeding, or merely introducing colonies of Chinese Inner Mongolian wolves, the closest relative of the Japanese wolf.[30] Nevertheless, a longing for re-introduced wolves is shown clearly in Nonami Asa's novel *The Hunter* (1996), translated into English in 2006. An underground syndicate imports wolves into Japan, cross-breeding with dogs to produce excellent hunters known as 'wolf-hounds.'[31] One specimen in particular exhibits extremely high intelligence, escaping to cause havoc in Tokyo until detective Otomichi Takako can track it down. Complex and conflicting attitudes towards the wolf in Japan are shown through the supporting characters, including police dog-handlers, pet shop owners and members of the public (Nonami 2006). These attitudes were plainly on show in real-life Japan in 2000, when a wolflike creature was spotted and photographed by a high school principal in Kitakyūshū. Walker recalls that 'the incident caused quite a stir in Japan, and over the next several weeks the photograph was plastered over most major dailies,' with eminent zoologists and natural historians called upon to give their expert opinion (2005: 24–26). As long as no conclusive evidence can be found, the hope that Japanese wolves have somehow escaped extinction continues to inspire nature-lovers in Japan.[32]

Wolves are also seen to symbolize Japanese culture as a whole, with proponents of wolf re-introduction in Japan presenting their proposal in terms of 'cultural restoration' as well as a return of ecological balance:

> In recent decades there has occurred a resurgence of scholarly and popular interest in the mountain village and the forest as sites of Japanese culture and sources of Japanese identity. It is against the background of this trend that the prospect of wolf reintroduction acquires a special resonance. The existence of wolf shrines, the wolf's role in farm protection, and the benign images of wolves in Japanese folklore are all invoked to support the claim that the wolf is an indispensable part of Japanese culture.
>
> (Knight 2003: 222)

If Clover Studio and Capcom set out to package Japanese culture for sale, it seems they could do no better with their choice of the wolf as the player's avatar. Nostalgia for the lost wolves of Japan is part of a wider nostalgia for a 'past time,' a sense of yearning for the countryside and the *furusato*, or hometown. Kamiya Hideki and Nonami Asa reflect in their storytelling a Japanese longing for nature, and a human connection to animals and the gods that has long been lost. The wolf in *Ōkami* is not only the avatar of Amaterasu and the player, but may also be seen as a re-animation of premodern Japanese culture.

Ōkami as a 'historical game'

Marilyn Ivy (1995) has shown that late twentieth-century Japan was marked by a sense of loss, with an accompanying drive to recover the ever-receding, vanishing

notion of 'authentic culture' through tourism, folklore studies, museum exhibits and advertising exhorting the consumer to find their true 'self' and sense of home. Ivy argues that discourses of a vanishing Japanese identity find expression in literature, film and other popular artistic forms which often rely on a sense of the uncanny – a doubling of identity, or doubling of time, through flashbacks and repetition.[33] I find it significant that *Ōkami*, a tale of Japanese cultural identity, depends heavily on narrative flashback and repetition, with three time periods represented and visited by the player-character in the course of the game.

The 'present' of pre-modern Japan is contrasted against the Japan of '100 years ago,' with each character mirrored in a past incarnation: Susano as Nagi, Kushi as Nami, and Amaterasu herself as Shiranui. This scenario is in turn set against a mysterious 'Ancient Civilization' mentioned in a special scroll. Passing through a 'spirit gate' hidden deep in the forest, we find a lush and vivid green environment looking eerily similar to Kamiki village, although houses look different and the great protective tree is just a tiny sprout. The *kamidana* (altars) in the village are very elaborate, each featuring a big mirror and two vases with leafy branches on top, *shimenawa* ropes underneath and braided white paper denoting a Shinto shrine, suggesting that faith was stronger in the past. The narrative doublings are re-echoed in gameplay, as the player must fight against the boss Orochi not once but twice in the main story, defeating the boss in the exact same manner the second time. Orochi must be defeated a third time in the Ark of Yamato, with other major bosses reappearing here as well. The repetition, flashbacks and character doubling all create a sense of the uncanny, unsettling the player and leaving them to unravel the story – all of which is ultimately revealed as a 'tale' told by Issun in his role as messenger of the gods. The focus on time and the retelling of tales draw our attention to the idea of history, and how human actions become part of the historical record.

Ōkami is different to most 'historical games' since it is clearly and obviously dealing with legend and myth, not the factual recreation of specific time periods. Indeed, the supposed events of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* are still much debated and open to interpretation, just as they were when Basil Hall Chamberlain offered his translation and commentary in 1919. The presence of fairytale characters and deities, the drawn environment, and the intrusion of kanji characters into the field of play all point to a constructed, non-factual place. The combination of ancient legend with less-ancient modes of architecture, agriculture and artisanship in the game also declares an anti-historic frame of mind, as does the geographic division of the play space into the three legendary realms of earth, under-the-sea and the Celestial Plain. Most academics who work on historical games deal with digital simulations of history, but Kapell and Elliott's argument on the significance of play in historical environments holds true for *Ōkami*: the process of playing in and enjoying even a quasi-historical environment is significant, as it allows the player to engage with the *idea* of the past.[34] The 'Japanese past' in *Ōkami* is designed in such a way that it stimulates player interest in specifically Japanese objects, myths, and writing systems. The abundance of cultural references and historical objects in the environment is similar to what we

saw in *Katamari Damacy*, offering an array of interactive items for the player to engage with depending on their level of curiosity. Through its selective inclusion of some traditional items and not others, *Ōkami* shapes our perceptions of Japanese culture and Japanese history – a beautiful and non-threatening past governed by Shinto belief.

Ōkami's complex engagement with history becomes clear midway through the game, when we reach the area Sei-An City. Located in the centre of the map of Nippon, Sei-An City is home to the largest temple of the game, as well as the Imperial Palace. The city is laid out on a loose grid pattern with streets and canals, and sits on Lake Beewa, a homonym for the real Lake Biwa in western Japan. The Japanese pronunciation *Seian-kyō* (Western Capital) in *Ōkami* is very close to *Heian-kyō* (Peaceful Capital), the Imperial city of the Heian period (794–1185) now known as Kyoto. But the hand-drawn Sei-An City has little in common with the realistic, detailed historical environments of games like Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* series. Mini-games here include ferrying customers on leaf-boats, chasing down a robber who pops out of a rock, and completing a set of kimono designs which then appear on townspeople's clothing as the trend catches on. In Sei-An City we find fairytale characters such as Momotarō, who is searching for his lost millet dumplings, and Raiden, the God of Lightning, who wishes to harness his lightning powers somehow. Near the city, 'Fisherman Urashima' cries on the beach as he is teased by local children, who do not believe his tales of underwater kingdoms and the magical orca that transported him there.[35] Each fairytale character presents a puzzle for the player, who must solve problems closely associated with their respective stories. Following Urashima's instructions, for example, the player can call Orca to access the underwater Dragon Palace and explore outlying islands. The 'Japanese past' is thus imagined as a time and place where legendary heroes walked the earth, mythical beings were real, and fairytales were true. The obvious mix of storybook fiction with a heavily stylized premodern setting raises the question of whether, and to what extent, *Ōkami* can be considered a 'historical' videogame.

Kapell and Elliott (2013: 6–17) examine historical games in terms of the problems inherent in the discipline of history in general: the selection of facts, the relationship between the depiction of those facts and historical accuracy, and the way we construct narratives in order to understand our incomplete knowledge of the past. The excitement of engaging with history in games often relies on ideas of causality and contingency – as one action leads to another, the player may change the outcome of certain historical events by their choices and actions. *Ōkami* is a game set in the past, but it also establishes itself very early as a tale, a story laying claim to no facts, no accuracy, no causality and no contingency, side-stepping all the problems of 'historical games' that Kapell and Elliott write about. Rather than winning historical battles or exploring photorealistic renderings of ancient cities, players of *Ōkami* engage with characters from myth and legend. In central game missions, players aid certain quasi-historical figures in achieving their goals, and help Amaterasu Ō-mikami bring light back to a cursed world. The linear game narrative ends with the world being saved and harmony

restored, merely reaffirming what we already know from the Amaterasu myth. As such, the 'point' of gameplay is found primarily in the process of running around in the beautiful pristine world of imagined 'ancient Japan' – just being there, meeting and interacting with people of legend. To paraphrase Kapell and Elliott (2013: 14), the game designer Kamiya Hideki offers us a 'playground of the past,' a place in which the player can enjoy moving through a version of 'ancient Japan,' which is to be encouraged in terms of both interactive gameplay and historical engagement.

On the other hand, *Ōkami* is a highly intelligent and critically aware text which challenges the very idea of 'history' as a trustworthy and reliable record. History is talked about as the witnessing of important events, as in the Merchant's comment in Kamiki Village: 'I saw a pivotal point in history. Phew, talk about responsibility!' History is also seen as a continuum, precariously balanced and needing careful preservation. Issun often chides Amaterasu that if she doesn't win a battle she will be 'messing with history,' and when the party travels back to the past Issun worries 'I just hope our coming here hasn't totally messed up history!' One of the primary functions of Issun in the tale of *Ōkami* is to challenge and question the idea of history as a reliable written record, mainly through his unreliable status as narrator. Inspired by the diminutive Issun-bōshi of Japanese children's stories (similar to Tom Thumb in Western tradition), as well as the *korpokkur* or *koropokkuru* of Ainu legend, Issun belongs to a tiny race of people called Poncles.[36] Their highest honour is to perfect their artistic skill and go out into the world as Celestial Envoys, communicating with the gods and showing people through art that gods are alive in the world. Issun has left Ponc'tan and has assumed the rough bravado of a 'famous painter,' but he is not living up to his community's expectations. Ironically, by guiding Amaterasu and the player, he is in fact living up to these expectations, but he does not believe in himself. The fundamental unreliability of Issun's character is first revealed through his treatment of female characters.

Issun accords Amaterasu the respect she deserves, as the principal deity of the Shinto religion. Shortening her name for convenience, Issun calls Amaterasu 'Ammy' or sometimes 'mutt' in a teasing, good-natured tone. But where Issun is careful not to step beyond his bounds with Amaterasu, he can be very inappropriate when talking to female characters in the game, including sacred spirits and priestesses. The worst case in point is Issun's treatment of Priestess Rao from Sei-An City. We expect her to be beautiful, from the comments of the people waiting outside her lecture hall to hear her sermons. They say that just looking at her gives them a peaceful feeling, and her beauty is renowned. But when we see her, it is not her face but her bosom that commands attention. Overflowing from the top of her robes, her breasts bob around in defiance of gravity. Issun calls her 'busty babe!' and makes comments about her 'melons.' Rao affects ignorance and so Issun often repeats his comments, so the player has to hear them twice. When meeting Rao again later in the game, Issun says 'it's great to see you two again!', clearly talking about her breasts. This fan service becomes grating and obnoxious over time, indicating a masculine subject-positioning rather out of place with the game's emphasis on nature, artwork and the Goddess.[37]

As if to provide balance, the Dragon Palace under the sea is notable for the number of important social and political positions filled by women, including the armed security guards, Chancellor, and item seller Mrs Turtle. The ruler is a princess named Otohime. Unlike the wood sprite Sakuya or the priestess Rao, Otohime is not sexualized to the same degree, expressing beauty through attractive facial features, elegant headdress and softly coloured robes. The other major female ruler in the game is the dreaded Queen Himiko, spoken about in hushed voices in Sei-An City. But Queen Himiko defies expectation by turning out to be very kind, caring and responsible, isolating herself in order to single-mindedly pray for her people's welfare.[38] She is slender, beautiful, and properly attired with an Empress head-dress and a fan made of branches. This portrayal of female power in ancient Japan echoes historical records which place a 'Himiko' or 'Pimiko' at the head of the early Japanese state of Wa, as well as the Empress Suiko, who ruled Japan in her own right in the years AD 593–628.[39] Between them, Otohime and Himiko rule the two major centres of power in Nippon. But despite their high social and political standing, the overall representation of women in *Ōkami* tends towards the physically appealing, commented upon by Issun at every turn. Issun's inability to see the real nature of female characters leads to his undoing when Priestess Rao is revealed as an evil being in disguise. Although Amaterasu doubts Rao's intentions, Issun sees her as merely a sex object and fails to understand the danger. The untenable nature of Issun's sexist worldview renders him an unreliable guide. However, this critique is so subtle that most players of the game may not pick up on it. Issun is more successful in critiquing the idea of history itself.

At the end of the game Issun is left behind as Amaterasu enters the Ark of Yamato to complete her travels. The tiny Poncle throws his sheaf of papers in the air, and as they flutter down the player recognizes scene after scene from their long adventure. We now realize that the beautiful chapter headings of each main part of the narrative are these paintings by Issun, created as a chronicle of our journey. The Japanese reader probably figured this out much earlier, as all the woodblock prints are signed with a red-ink cartouche saying 'Issun' in kanji. The drawings create an interesting connection between the narrative structure, diegetic events and non-diegetic time. Since all of the events of *Ōkami* supposedly happened in the distant past, a non-specified time of 'ancient Japan,' they are not in the written historical record. The narrative of *Ōkami* presents us with a pictorial record of what happened in the main story: all players of the game enact the same main legend, and generate the same set of Issun's illustrations. But what actually happens in the game will vary from player to player. Side missions will differ, as will the amount of time that individual players spend on particular actions – some will like fishing, for example, and spend a lot of in-game time catching different fish, selling them to merchants and buying special fishing rods made from precious materials as a reward for their efforts. Side missions and explorations often bring an advantage to gameplay in the main mission strand, as the fish-catching player will complete Benkei's fishing mission very quickly, and the player who enjoys jumping off cliffs and scaling high places will find the Cat

Tower much less daunting. But if each player's gameplay were recorded, each would generate a different tale. Issun's pictorial record thus presents us not with our own subjective experience, but the official version of what happened, written down by someone who took it upon themselves to preserve the stories of the past – a historian.

Ōkami thus highlights the constructive nature of what we think of as 'history,' with some interesting results. Kapell and Elliott (2013) maintain that gamers take away some of the discursive power of the professional historian, creating their own dynamic understanding of history by interacting with and enjoying the past through games. *Ōkami* achieves the same goal. But there is no 'official history' to be had here, because of the plurality of gamer experience and also the fact that the narrative events are based on myth and legend, not a history which can be proven by archaeological evidence. *Ōkami* wittily draws our attention to archaeology, by making famed archaeological finds into game characters. Towards the end of the game we encounter demons based on *haniwa*, the ceramic guardians of ancient Japanese dynastic tombs (a parallel in China would be encountering the Terracotta Warriors of Xi'an as enemies in a videogame). Even the game Inventory can be seen as a play on historical categories and classification, curated like a museum collection with accompanying captions. After the end credits, Issun once again appears to tell us he has left new material for us to explore – maps, artwork and extra information about the world of *Ōkami*. The reward for completing the game is thus more knowledge about Nippon and its culture, encouraging us to learn even more about the posited Japanese past. However, the thoughtful player may reflect that this vision of 'Nippon' is only Issun's vision, a constructed and curated version of pre-modern Japan specifically targeted towards players as an easily commodified, easily consumable fiction.

Culture through contrast: Nippon and the Oina

A large part of *Ōkami*'s fiction is the homogeneity of the people found in Nippon. Until the last few levels of the game, all the characters are visually homogeneous: minor and speaking characters alike all have black hair and dark eyes, and all wear the same kind of traditional Japanese dress, usually a kimono with a sash, plus *tabi* socks and wooden *geta* clogs, with different headwear depending on their profession or trade. Even the mysterious Waka, with his white hair and French vocabulary, wears Japanese dress. They are all recognizable as what John Lie calls 'Yamato Japanese' people, with no variations in skin tone or other physical features.[40] The only difference is in facial expression and body shape, as some characters are fat, thin, tall or short. This visual homogeneity points to a common perception about the people of the Japanese archipelago, that 'in the past we were all the same,' before diversity entered through wartime mobility and immigration.[41] The foregrounding of Yamato Japan is also seen in the depiction of Kamiki Village, a small and simple environment with only the houses needed for the story. It is very homey and familiar, and the player can

return to Kamiki Village at any time. The 'home base' for this ancient tale is thus the essential unit of civic life, the village (*mura*), surrounded by mountains on one side and ocean on the other, just like the Japanese archipelago it is made to symbolize. At the end of the game, this version of Nippon is seen to have a counterpart, an Other to the Japanese Self.

The final game level is set in the land of Kamui, accessed via a tunnel from Shinshu Field. On the game map, Kamui is over the sea from Nippon. Most players would recognize Kamui as a fantasy depiction of Hokkaidō, the island to the north of Honshu in the real-world Japanese archipelago. 'Kamui' is very close in sound to the Japanese word for cold, *samui*. Unlike other in-game environments Kamui has a lot of ice, so the player can now experiment with sliding on the ice as a new form of movement. Villagers in Kamui complain of the cold and how they have to store food for the winter. When the player/Amaterasu enters a house and approaches the hearth, Issun tells us not to snack because the people need food. This is a clear contrast to the agricultural settlement of Kamiki Village, where Grandma Orange makes Amaterasu copious quantities of cherry cakes. In Kamiki, vegetables and rice balls pop out of trees and bushes when they are cut with the Celestial Brush, but the environment in Kamui is harsh and unyielding. The game environment itself reinforces Nippon as a 'land of plenty' set against the wilderness of the frozen North. Kamui is also established as a definitive Other through the depiction of its civilization and myths, as fundamentally different to those of Nippon. This recreates the perception of Otherness that many Japanese people hold regarding Hokkaidō and its indigenous Ainu people. Hokkaidō is a strange land where everything is different – a perception leveraged to great effect by Murakami Haruki in his best-selling 1982 novel *A Wild Sheep Chase*.

Narrative tension is created around the idea of the North in the game as the player slowly discovers that the North is the site of the Ark, and also the source of all the evil that has entered Nippon. As in real-world Hokkaidō, the local religious figures in Kamui are described as shamans rather than priestesses. The demons in this area are markedly different to those encountered up to this point, with more hair on their bodies and more primitive weapons. Entering Kamui, we meet a fearsome warrior named Okikurumi (shortened to Oki in the English version), who describes his tribe as 'we half-man, half-beast Oina.' Villagers wear special masks that indicate their animal avatar, for example squirrel, raccoon, bear and so forth.[42] When necessary, the people can transform into a wolf, as Oki does later in the game. As Brett Walker observes, the Ainu:

> believed that their people were born from the union of a wolflike canine and a goddess…. Ainu folklore and epic poetry celebrated the wolf, and some Ainu communities even sacrificed wolves, along with bears and owls, in elaborate ceremonies called *iomante*, the 'sending away.' They believed wolves to be gods and their ancestors.
>
> (Walker 2005: 9)

The place name 'Kamui' also recalls the Ainu word for the high-ranking wolf deity, Horkew Kamuy.[43] In a game dedicated to the figure of the wolf in Japanese culture, the link between the Oina and wolves emphasizes the ancient antecedents of wolf worship in native Japan.[44] Oki himself draws on an older belief system than Shinto, praying to elemental spirits: 'O spirits of the earth, air and sea … grant us your divine power!' In many ways, the Oina people are shown in a positive light, with their own cultural and religious heritage serving them well. Issun seems to place the history of Kamui and Nippon on an equal footing when he gazes on Kamui's great mountain Ezofuji and the ancient relic of the Ark of Yamato: 'They're both steeped in history. It sends shivers down my spine just looking at 'em!' However, the narrative and gameplay both serve to emphasize the inferiority of Ainu/Oina culture compared against that of Yamato/Nippon.

The warrior-hero Oki is portrayed as a flawed character, consumed by the desire for his sword Kutone to glow silver so he can defeat the evil threatening his people. This seems like a selfless wish, but Oki's obsession partly stems from his own desire for glory. His sword stubbornly refuses to glow until he unthinkingly wields it in defence of Issun and Shiranui. Oki sees the error of his ways with the help of Amaterasu and other characters from Nippon, and it seems that submission to Amaterasu – the Japanese sun goddess – is necessary before he can achieve his own goals. In wolf form, Oki can only take independent action after helping Shiranui heal, and he cannot overcome the twin evils Lechku and Nechku without assistance. More importantly, Oki cannot defeat True Orochi by his own actions. The player expects to be able to control Oki in fighting Orochi, much as we controlled Susano for a moment in the first battle. However, Nagi swoops in and takes over the battle before Oki can strike a blow. At the end of the game, Yami, Lord of Darkness, is not defeated by the Oina warrior but by the heroes from Nippon. The blogger Katherine Byrne (2011) notes this as significant:

> It's here where we have perhaps the game's biggest narrative hijack. It isn't Oki that defeats Yami – it's Ammy, and on this occasion it's as if she's commandeered Oki's legend for herself, completely displacing the Oina warrior and his culture.
>
> (Byrne 2011)

Byrne concludes that Amaterasu's actions are justifiable:

> Much like Oki, Ammy has evolved the story of her origin by combining Ainu and Japanese folklore together, uniting much more than just the people with the gods in this climactic celebration of narrative and good vs. evil. Instead she's created her own legend – the legend of *Ōkami* itself.
>
> (Ibid.)

However, this rationalization rings hollow. It seems that 'the legend of *Ōkami* itself' is not so much a joyful uniting of Japanese history with indigenous

culture, but a repetition of Japanese goals of conquest, overriding and subsuming those of the Ainu people.

The Oina in *Ōkami* can be thought of as playing the role of Barbarian, as seen in historical games about Rome. Emily Bembeneck (2013: 85) argues that the Barbarian shows us our own uses of cultural myths 'to provide an idealistic cultural Other against which we can define a notion of an easily distinguishable cultural Self.' Writing about the positioning of the player's identity in the fantasy space of videogames, Bembeneck argues:

> For the duration of the play experience, the player is a member of the cultural Self versus one or more separate groups that play the role of either a barbarian Other or a separately defined culture that emphasizes its difference from the player's civilization through their unique features and simultaneously affirms the player's homogeneous cultural identification.
>
> (2013: 80)

In terms of *Ōkami*, the cultural Self takes Yamato Japanese identity, and yet the Oina are not the 'culture-less Other' exemplified by the barbarians in Sid Meier's *Civilization* series. Where the barbarians in *Civilization* 'serve to define culture itself (and civilization) through their lack of it' (Bembeneck 2013: 83), the Oina people are shown with their own distinct culture, heritage, religion, language and history. The main idea is that they are not Japanese, not that they have no culture of their own. Even so, the hierarchy established between Nippon and the Oina mirrors the 'representational choice' made by the game narrative and structure of *Civilization V*, which suggest that the Barbarians 'exist only to serve the interests of those superior to them' (ibid.). Bembeneck sees these representations as 'evidence of our own struggles to reconcile diversity and cultural identity in our global culture outside the game' (2013: 85). Japanese game designers, as much as other artists, position 'Japanese culture' in terms of diversity versus homogeneity at home, as well as defining the distinct part of the world called 'Japan' in opposition to other places. In terms of the market for videogames, this begs the question of which representations of 'Japan' will sell the most copies. In other words, how do game designers make 'Japan' both attractive and playable?

The main solution is to simplify the representation down to absolute basics. In *Ōkami*, there can only be one entity 'Nippon' which is monolithic rather than plural or complex, and there can be only one 'Other' to the main identity, which again is neither plural nor complex. It is significant that no minorities of the Japanese archipelago are represented, other than the Ainu/Oina people. There are no people from nearby nations – no equivalents to China or Korea, even though the kingdoms of Zhou, Han, Silla and Pekche are mentioned often in the *Nihon Shoki*. Similarly, there are no islanders in *Ōkami* equivalent to people from the ancient Ryūkyū Kingdom (now Okinawa). The furthest south we are able to travel on the map of Nippon is Sei-An City, halfway down the main island, implying that everything south of the ancient capital is a No-Man's-Land. These omissions serve to highlight the inclusion of the Ainu people in the designers'

vision of Nippon. China, Korea and Ryūkyū were always distant, separated from the main Japanese archipelago by long sea voyages. But the Ainu people were the original inhabitants of Honshū and all the Japanese islands. It was the late Tokugawa and Meiji rulers who pushed the Ainu up towards the north, ultimately segregating them in Hokkaidō.[45] The fundamental idea of Kamui as a completely separate region in which the Oina can live is thus a reification of Meiji-period foreign policy. The fact that the gameworld was called 'Nippon' in the game design, not 'Yamato' or even 'Wa,' is a linguistic slippage that confirms the islands as the modern nation-state of Japan, with a clear ontological split between the homogeneous Yamato peoples on Honshū, and the barbarian Ainu/Oina to the north. Just as the title 'ōkami' takes its name from wolves in a Meiji-era taxonomy centred on the idea of the scientific nation-state, the map of *Ōkami*'s gameworld depends on Orientalist rhetoric and imperialist endeavour.

By locating 'Nippon' in a mythical past, *Ōkami* creates its own myth of Japan as a homogenous, easily commodified nation. This kind of mythologizing process is highly visible in the war game genre, to which we will return later in the book. The tension between Self and Other found at the end of *Ōkami* provides the absolute *raison-d'être* for war games and also fighting games, which are the subject of the next chapter. Both war games and fighting games depend on an 'us versus them' mentality in which binary conflict provides motivation, immersion and identification for the player. In *Ōkami*, the Oina appear at the end of the game to cement the Yamato Japanese identity as central and normative. In fighting games, the Japanese identity is established as normative in a number of different ways, not only through narrative representation such as character design and cabinet art, but also through innovative use of the player interface and default settings. In the next chapter, I examine how Japanese visions of Self and Other are expressed through character design in fighting games, distilled in the privileged representation of the normative Japanese male.

Notes

1 Game quotes are from my own gameplay notes on the original PS2 English-language release; also see script by Mookiethebold, https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/wii/943732-okami/faqs/50772. Accessed 19 November 2018.
2 *Ōkami* initially had poor sales in Japan but soon won critical acclaim, winning the Grand Prize in the Entertainment Division at the Japan Media Arts Festival in 2006, the 'Award for Excellence' at the Japan Game Awards in 2007, and IGN's 'Game of the Year,' among others. It was released on the Nintendo Wii in 2008, taking advantage of the gameplay's calligraphy action to wield the Wii remote as the Celestial Brush. The calligraphy was more awkward on the PS2 controller, with complex combinations of buttons. I played both versions for this study.
3 Kanji characters appear with a furigana phonetic gloss, explaining the pronunciation of the word but not its meaning.
4 The *Nihon Shoki* is also called the *Nihongi*. The order of imperial succession is taken as convention rather than historical fact, as both texts trace the legendary Emperor Jimmu's descent from Amaterasu herself.
5 Chamberlain (2008: 60) states that *magatama* beads were the most common forms of earthenware jewellery from the Jōmon period (traditionally dated 14,000 to 300 BC).

Jade examples from the Kofun period (AD 300–538) show China's growing influence at the time.

 6 On the various Chinese and Japanese beliefs and religious practices informing the *Kojiki* see Chamberlain's introduction (2008: 18–62).

 7 Shinto is also pluralistic, with variants and local beliefs: see Breen and Teeuwen (2000).

 8 See Chamberlain's translation of the *Kojiki* (2008: 92–93).

 9 Chamberlain (2008: 127–131). The story is significant in the narrative structure, ending the first volume of both books.

10 Known as *Zero* in the Japanese release, *Project Zero* in Europe.

11 *Bakemono* means 'shape-shifter,' while *yōkai* is a compound word using two kanji that can both be read as *ayashii* – something suspicious, mysterious or strange. Komatsu (2006: 64–66, 97–99) discusses the differences between *yōkai, oni, bakemono* and other 'strange beings.' Definitions of each group fluctuated depending on historical period, social class and urban/regional legends.

12 Komatsu (2006: 21). Yearly rituals of house-cleaning (*ō-sōji*) and dust-clearing (*susuharai*) supposedly keep tools and household instruments from wrongdoing (Yamamoto 1985: 13).

13 Komatsu (2006: 21–22) discusses early depictions of monsters and strange beings in Japanese art. See also Michael Dylan Foster's numerous publications on *yōkai* culture (e.g. 2009, 2015).

14 Good examples include Sawaki Sūshi's set of picture scrolls, *Hyakkai-Zukan* (The Illustrated Volume of a Hundred Demons, 1737), and Toriyama Sekien's set of woodblock-printed picture books, *Gazu Hyakki Yagyō* (The Illustrated Night Parade of a Hundred Demons, 1776). Deguchi (1985) examines antecedents and legacies of the 'Hundred Demon' parades and 'Hundred Ghosts' games in art, literature and drama.

15 Komatsu (2006: 12). All three films also portray Japanese gods and Shinto beliefs, including nature's inherent protection of children and the human ability to awaken gods to action.

16 Reider (2010: 144–169) examines the use of *oni* in Japanese manga, anime and film.

17 The Yōkai festival is one of many cultural events held at the Shofuso Japanese House and Garden. The 2016 Edo-Tokyo Museum exhibition 'From Eerie to Endearing: Yōkai in the Arts of Japan' included Jōmon-period items through to the game *Yōkai Watch* (see https://amu-zen.com/edo-tokyo-yokai/). The 2018 exhibition 'Yokai: Iconography of the Fantastical. The Night Parade of One Hundred Demons as the Source of Supernatural Imagery in Japan,' held at the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid, celebrated 150 years of diplomatic relations between Japan and Spain: www.jpf.go.jp/e/project/culture/exhibit/oversea/2018/05-01.html. Accessed 19 November 2018.

18 Other players sought out games not released outside Japan, although linguistic and technological barriers to playing such games are high (Consalvo 2016: 34–37). Consalvo notes that many gamers have little interest in a game's country of origin, inhabiting one end of a 'spectrum of cosmopolitanism,' the other end represented by her interviewees, who showed deep engagement with Japanese culture (2016: 22).

19 See Jake Bourke, 'What Japanese mythos and folklore was Okami based on?' Quora, www.quora.com/What-Japanese-mythos-and-folklore-was-Okami-based-on. This question and its answer, posted by Jessica Taylor (18 April 2017), had 922 views. Listed as 'related questions' were queries such as 'What legends from the game "Okami" are from real ancient Japanese myths?' or 'What are some creatures from Japanese folklore?' Echo738 'For those who don't get the Japanese myth references,' GameFAQs, Okami Message Board, 6 January 2009 https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/boards/943732-okami/47519123; Aragami777 'Calling Japanese Mythology Experts (spoilers),' GameFAQs, Okami Message board, 1 May 2008, https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/boards/943732-okami/42895174

20 Consalvo (2016: 33); Napier (2005; 2007).
21 For a discussion of Western Orientalist rhetoric in modern Japanese literature, see Hutchinson (2011: 8–16, 95–132).
22 These kanji characters are themselves elegant and old-fashioned, as opposed to the more frequently used 昼 (*hiru*) and 夜 (*yoru*) for 'day' and 'night.'
23 Sometimes another dark colour is used, such as deep red or purple.
24 For more on the dynamics of Japanese products being exported and consumed overseas, see scholarship by Iwabuchi (2002, 2004), Allison (2006), and Kelts (2006).
25 See Knight (2003: 203).
26 Walker (2005: 70–77). Knight discusses the large number of wolf shrines on the Kii Peninsula (2003: 197–198).
27 On wolves in Japanese folklore see Walker (2005: ch.3), Knight (2003: 202–209). The wolf's lonely howl provides a haunting backdrop to Shiga Naoya's famous story 'Night Fires,' representing the lost past and wild nature as the antithesis to modern civilization.
28 Walker (2005: 25–56) overviews these discussions in the nineteenth century, when the Linnaean system was adopted in Japan. Many questions remain over hybridization and distinctions between the Jōmon wolf, Hokkaidō (or Ezo) wolf, Siberian wolf, and the ancient Japanese dog breeds Shiba and Kishū. Knight (2003: 195) observes regional naming variations, and reports 'a widespread assumption in Japan that the *waken* or native dog breeds are descended from the native wolf' (2003: 210).
29 On the extermination and extinction of wolves in Japan see Walker (2005: 151–157, 165–176), Knight (2003: 195–197).
30 Ire was also raised by the fact that the Japan Wolf Association, prime campaigners for reintroduction, were based in Tokyo. The proposal was not widely supported (Knight 2003: 3, 5–6, 216–223). Walker (2005) sets the debate in the context of North American and European experiences, while Knight (2003) compares the wolf debate to the treatment of other destructive animals such as monkeys and wild boar.
31 These cross-breeding experiments have basis in fact: see the efforts of breeders on the Kii Peninsula to produce *modori-ōkami* or 'recovered wolves' (Knight 2003: 212).
32 See Knight (2003: 196–197). This longing for the non-extinction of the Japanese wolf has a direct parallel in Australian sentiment towards the Tasmanian tiger, or Thylacine. Interestingly, a Japanese film *Tasmania Story* (*Tasumania Monogatari*, 1990) depicts a young Japanese boy searching the wilds of Tasmania for the animal.
33 Ivy (1995: 84) relies on the theories of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud in this analysis, but here it is enough to note that the doubling indicates a fundamental anxiety about the status of the self, simultaneously subject and object.
34 Kapell and Elliott (2013: 14). For more on digital games and history see Chapman (2016). On the uses of history in videogames and the role of nostalgia in both play and design, see Whalen and Taylor (2008).
35 In the legend of Urashima Tarō, the fisherman rode a turtle to the underwater kingdom. For more on these characters and their stories, see Piggott (1983).
36 Piggott (1983: 92) discusses Issun-bōshi. *Korpokkur* is a transliteration of Ainu language; *koropokkuru* is a transliteration of the Japanese approximation.
37 'Fan service' is a term used to denote extra (often sexual) material included in an artwork to please and titillate fans.
38 The positive depiction of Himiko in *Ōkami* counters the negative image used by manga artist Tezuka Osamu in the *Phoenix* series, where the queen is famously depicted as Hitler (Tezuka 2003: 98). The play between negative and positive images of Himiko has reached the Hollywood screen, with the Square Enix film production of *Tomb Raider* (2018) featuring a horrifying myth of Queen Himiko as a goddess of destruction, proven false by Lara Croft when she realizes Himiko shut herself away from her people to protect them from disease.
39 According to Chinese records, a 'Pimiko' ruled the neighbouring state of Wa in the years AD 189–248, although this is one of the most contentious aspects of early Japa-

nese history. Empress Suiko (AD 554–628) was the first of eight female sovereigns who ruled Japan in their own right for varying lengths of time. On Japanese royal succession see Chamberlain (2008: 334–335).

40 Lie (2001: 3) uses the term 'Yamato Japanese' in much the same way as 'Han Chinese' is used to indicate a majority ethnic group. The ancient Japanese state of Yamato is believed to have been located in southern Japan (Kyūshū) or near Nara on the main island (Honshū).

41 The myth of Japanese monoethnicity is deconstructed and analyzed in detail by Lie (2001), considering both the contemporary discourse of Japanese identity and its roots in Tokugawa period scholarship on Japanese history and language.

42 This character design may draw on the *sapaunpe*, ceremonial headgear worn by Ainu chiefs, which featured carved images of wild animals (Walker 2005: 92).

43 Walker (2005: 20). Many of the details of the Oina tribe and their town of Kamui come from Ainu language and legend. See Byrne's illustrated discussion (2011).

44 On wolf tales in Ainu poetry and folklore see Walker (2005: 87–92).

45 Siddle (1996) examines the identity of the Ainu people, their forced move north, and their resistance.

3 Japan and its Others in
   fighting games

> To live is to fight, to fight is to live!
>
> Ryu, *Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix*[1]

Where *Katamari Damacy* celebrates Japanese culture for its own sake, and *Ōkami* sets a central Japanese identity against an 'Other' to the North, fighting games define Japan through a process of contrast against a wide range of Others, as stereotyped combatants of various nations battle it out in the arena. Where Japan is represented by a karate master, China will put forward a kung fu fighter (more often than not complete with nunchuks), and America may have a heavy-weight boxer. This chapter examines how Japanese characters are designed in specific ways to contrast against characters from elsewhere. My main case studies will be *Karate Champ, Street Fighter, Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken*.[2] These titles created the template for the representation of Japan and its Others in fighting games, and the dominant Japan–US binary found in many games of the 1990s. Over time, the figure of the normative Japanese male would become more prominent, privileged and foregrounded in both game content and peripherals, including cover art and cabinet design, game manuals, and the user interface, most notably the character select screen. The fundamental binarism of the genre, with two opponents fighting onscreen, one winner and one loser, strengthens the essentialist constructions of Self and Other, expressed not only through visual representation but also through game rules and player options.

The ideology of representation is complex, and as Gonzalo Frasca has argued, representation is only one way in which ideology – the attitudes, values, ideas and assumptions of the developer – may be expressed through videogames. Frasca places representation (including narrative) as the first and most obvious ideological level of a game, followed by the more subtle ideological strategies of manipulation rules (what the player is able to do), and goal rules (what the player must do to win).[3] Representation in fighting games takes place mainly through static visual character design, including physique and costume, complemented by the kinetic movements of the character in animated fight sequences, their scripted dialogue, associated music and settings, and the overall narrative of the game's fictional world. Manipulation rules are limited in this genre, as each fight

sequence has a strict set of possible movements, actions, and time limits.[4] Goal rules for fighting games are simple – the player-character must beat their opponent in order to progress and win. In this chapter I will demonstrate how Japan and its Others are constructed through representation, manipulation rules and goal rules in binary fighting games, drawing some common threads between the earliest examples of these games and the numerous titles that proliferated in the 1990s. This chapter broadens the analysis of ideology in games by considering elements beyond the screen, namely game peripherals, the physicality of play, and the significance of the play space – the arcade, or game centre (*geemu sentaa*).

Character and story in fighting games

Compared to role-playing games or action-adventure games, story and characterization take place at different points of gameplay in the fighting game genre. Arcade battles can be completed in minutes, although defeating all opponents to reach the final boss will take much longer. Without hours of linear gameplay, character and story must be delivered in very specific ways. Understanding how character and story work in fighting games helps us appreciate the careful construction in the genre: when each second counts, what is presented on screen and what is left out becomes highly significant. A defining feature of the genre is the ability to choose one's character, and change at any time. Where early fighting games featured one or two playable characters, this soon changed to a 'character select' screen with a number of different character icons. This multiple-character structure has clear implications for characterization and player-character identification.[5] The close one-to-one player-character identification expected in the RPG is at first glance unavailable to the player of fighting games. But to win, a player must be completely familiar with the full 'moveset' of their chosen character. Each character has an extremely complex list of combo moves which must be memorized and practised twice over – first moving from left to right, and then right to left. Practice play is essential for game strategy and developing technical skill. Because fighting games depend on direct action input, often mapping joystick directions to a specific limb or physical stance, the player's actions are directly reflected in the actions of the character onscreen. The character becomes an extension of the player's body, in a very physical link. In these ways, player-character identification works differently in this genre than in others.

The player's first glimpse of a character is often from arcade cabinet art, or the cover art of a home console game. Essential features of each character are also presented to the player in the 'attract mode' of the cabinet, where characters appear in an animated video sequence, enacting their signature moves. In later games and console ports, a more elaborate cinematic sequence follows the load screen, showcasing different characters' strengths and abilities. The player is then asked to choose their character, using the select screen to cycle through fighters until they find one they like. Before the fight sequence begins, then, characterization is delivered through short bursts of animation and a static

picture of the character. Designers therefore pack as much information about the character as possible into their visual appearance, including details such as costume, tattoos, facial hair, hairstyle, weapons and so forth to indicate the character's background and fighting specialty. The resulting array of fighters presents an arresting display of stereotype and archetype, each with a distinctive fighting style which the player can strategically deploy against their opponent. The narrative justifies the character construction, as the 'world warrior' travels the globe or an international tournament is held to determine the 'king of fighters.'

There are many practical, logistical and financial reasons for adopting stereotyped characters rather than complex realistic characters in this genre. Stereotyped characters generally speed up production time and are adaptable to a wide range of markets, while localization may necessitate limited text assets and dialogue options.[6] Stereotype is often combined with exaggerated sexualization of both male and female figures in the fighting game to produce highly exoticized representations of racial and ethnic identities. In all videogames, representations of identity based on differences of race, gender, age and sexuality cause much consternation on the part of both designers and players.[7] For some players, the over-the-top stereotypes and hypersexualized figures of fighting games provide mere entertainment and spectacle, while others find that stereotype affects their identification with characters or their immersion in the gameworld.[8] Many players could not care less about stereotype, as they just want to win against their opponents. Much has been written about stereotype and representation in videogames more generally, but in this chapter, I hope to demonstrate the ways in which Japanese developers have leveraged stereotype to explore cultural identity, defining the Japanese Self in relation to its many Others, real or imagined.[9]

The fact that fighting game characters are largely constructed as stereotypes may lead to the assumption that these are simple characters without much depth or psychological development.[10] This may hold true if we analyze one single game title in a vacuum: compared to the moody characters of the *Final Fantasy* series, the fighters of *Tekken* can seem rather static. But characters in fighting games develop over the course of a series, with each title seen as a new episode in an overarching structure, much as a new issue of *The X-Men* comic adds to the rich universe created through years of world-building effort. Characterization in the fighting game genre is complex, with anything from eight to 32 playable characters needing their own backstory, motivation, narrative events, and relationships with other characters in the game's fictional world. Each character's origins, backstory and personality attributes are revealed through bonus screens, the game manual, or a gallery showing the character's blood type (used in Japan much as astrological signs are used in the West), height, weight, and more frivolous pieces of information such as their favourite colour or food. To maintain the balance of gameplay, no one character is supposed to be privileged in terms of fighting ability or screen time. However, certain characters do end up being promoted more or less heavily in the game's narrative and peripherals, as we shall see below.

Narrative structure also becomes diffuse in this genre. With games structured around three-minute fight sequences between any two characters, story cannot

be conveyed in linear fashion. The player gets hints about character backgrounds and relationships from the opening cinematics, as well as game environments associated with different characters. Characters may say different things when chosen from the select screen, during the 'versus screen' (where the two opposing characters face one another), or before and after fight sequences. If the player wins with the character, they may be rewarded with a manga-style text screen or cinematic cut-scene – or they may have to play against the entire roster of opponents before accessing such a reward. This can mean 'beating the game' eight or more times in succession to access the entirety of the basic story, and unlocking further playable characters to achieve a fuller understanding of the game's events. Each non-playable boss also offers new information about the overall plot. In later *Tekken* and *SoulCalibur* titles, 'story battles' give more detailed cut-scenes for certain fights between particular characters that are significant for the overall narrative.[11] A fight between Kazuya and Michelle in *Tekken* may be experienced twice – once from each character's point of view – with each perspective giving a deeper understanding of the game's overall story.

All these pieces of story and characterization act like a puzzle, which players must piece together in their minds as they play through the game. True experts know every character inside and out, not only adept at manipulating the character's moveset but also knowing their backstory, likes and dislikes, enemies and allies. A player in single-player mode in the arcade will play through one character's set of fighting sequences not only to beat the game, but to see how the character behaves in new situations, meeting new opponents or perhaps unlocking surprising people later in the game. These could be completely new characters, or perhaps returning characters, creating excitement at meeting an old, familiar character or fear of a dreaded foe. Sometimes characters from older games return as non-playable bosses, deepening the narrative structure from game to game. In this way, the lore of specific fighting game titles develops over the years to create a deep, rich narrative.

In recent years, this information has become readily accessible thanks to the internet. The *Tekken Wiki*, for example, has 1530 pages of information about every possible character, moveset, and environment on the diegetic side, as well as detailed information about non-diegetic elements like cabinet design, art style, and every port of every game on every console imaginable. The *Street Fighter Wiki* is even larger, with 2,680 pages to date, while the *SoulCalibur Wiki* has 3,605. These wikis have taken the intrigue and mystery out of fighting games, as the cultural capital of knowledge is no longer restricted to the elite. On the other hand, they have also led to more narrative tension and suspense: now that more people are expected to know the story, developers can take more chances with surprise reveals, twists and turns, to confuse and baffle the newcomer while delighting (or possibly angering) longtime devotees of the series. A problematic issue here is the 'retcon,' or 'retroactive continuity' – a new piece of information introduced in a later issue of a series which expands our understanding of earlier diegetic events, or changes our understanding radically. In positive terms, retcons can be inventive and playful, adding new interpretations to past events

that make the fictional world more enjoyable or interesting. Retcons can also solve problems or contradictions arising from differing characters' perspectives on certain events. In negative terms, retcons can be seen as unnecessary interference. Many players see the numerous retcons in the *Tekken* series as messing around with a good thing, and new releases are often derided in terms of the designers 'retconning the hell out of it.'[12]

Fighting games are more susceptible to retcons and narrative tampering than other game genres, simply because their story structure is not linear to start with. The sheer number of characters involved also makes it difficult to ensure that all characters' stories and backstories match up – the Osaka headquarters of the game company SNK (Shin Nihon Kikaku) famously had an entire wall devoted to its hundreds of characters with a chart showing the relationships between them (Ashcraft 2008a: 102). One thing that all fighting games have in common is the focus on difference between the characters themselves: all the games are predicated on experiencing a range of different fighting styles and adapting one's gameplay to beat each opponent. The fundamental premise of 'different fighting styles' means 'fighting styles from different places,' with characters specializing in karate, kung fu, boxing, and all manner of weapons techniques. However, the first game we can consider a 'fighting game' was based entirely in Japan, providing the template for the Japanese Self that later games would emulate and build upon by introducing various Others as a contrast.

Defining Japan: the Everyman and the Other

The first game to firmly establish a player-versus-opponent fighting game structure with two human figures onscreen was *Karate Champ* from 1984, developed by Technōs and published by Data East.[13] The characters, setting, and basic premise are all Japanese, as the gameplay involves two karate practitioners wearing either red or white *gi* (training attire), in the ancient Japanese colour scheme of 'us versus them.' The fighters are seen from a side perspective, and health points appear as numerals rather than as a health bar. Joystick controls and an action button allowed the player-character to punch, kick and block the opponent's moves, and perform feats of strength like smashing wooden boards with their bare hands. It was possible to play either against the AI or against another player. IGN names *Karate Champ* one of the ten most influential games of all time, as the prototype for fighting games to come (Geddes and Hatfield 2007). *Karate Champ* also set the template for those fighting games to be dominated by Japanese aesthetics, dojo-based training, and the privileging of Japanese characters.

Karate Champ features several environments and short cut-scenes before the action sequences, which mark the narrative as distinctly Japanese. The player can choose to train in a dojo setting; after selecting this option, the player's character is seen dressed in black, approaching a temple-like structure covered in snow. A pine tree completes the scene. Once inside, we see a large tatami-mat room with the sensei seated facing us. Behind the sensei is a traditional Japanese

alcove or *tokonoma*, decorated with flower arrangements (*ikebana*) and what might be candlesticks in the shadows. The *tokonoma* is framed by a grand purple curtain with diamond-shaped crests or *mon*, presumably the school symbol. The player, now attired in white *gi*, follows the moves of the trainer, watched by ranks of *gi*-clad peers kneeling in the traditional *seiza* position. In this way we are left without a doubt that we are in Japan. Karate is represented as the national sport, as action sequences take place in a huge stadium packed with people, with TV cameras in view, or otherwise in secluded locations like a bamboo grove or quiet hilltop. The cumulative effect of all this Japaneseness is to make Japan itself into a marketable commodity (Figure 3.1). *Karate Champ* was the first
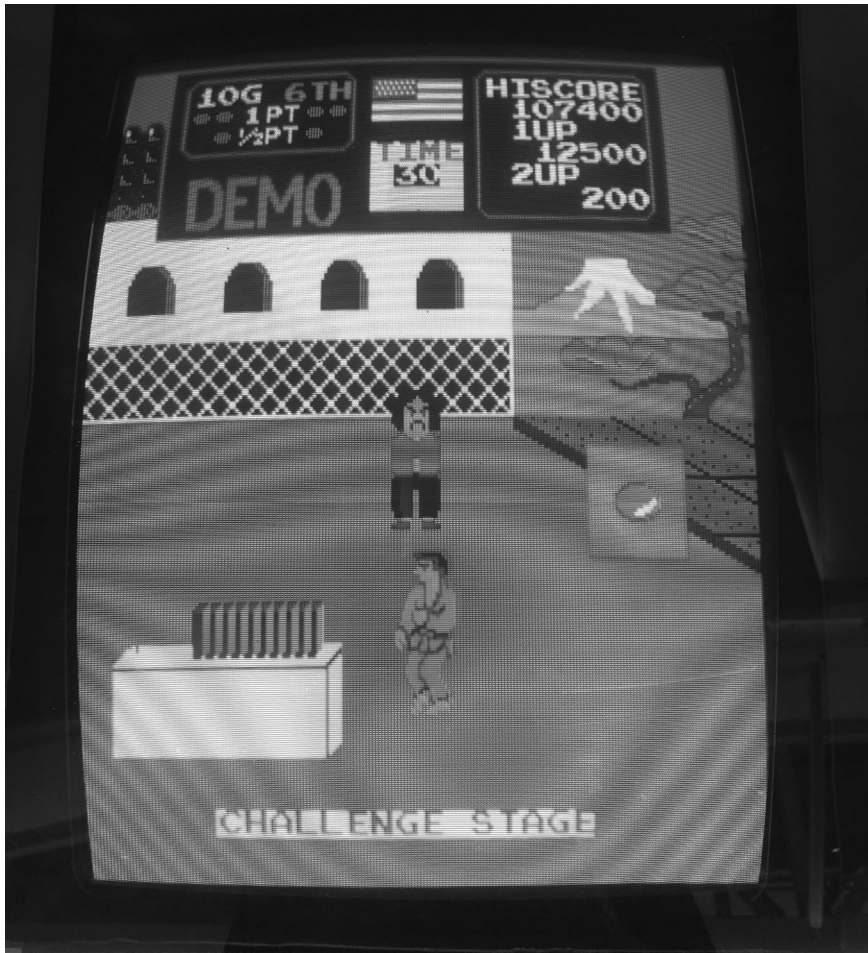

Figure 3.1 The courtyard in *Karate Champ* – note Mt. Fuji in the background.

Photograph by the author, courtesy of ReplayFX.

fighting game to be widely available in arcades, soon ported to the Apple II home computer and the Commodore 64.[14] In donning the white *gi*, players identified with the Japanese martial arts and strived to become the *Karate Champ* themselves. The popularity of *The Karate Kid*, released in cinemas earlier that year, contributed to the game's success (Loguidice and Barton 2009: 242).

The *Karate Champ* characters have been seen as the basis for Ryu and Ken, the two playable characters of Capcom's arcade game *Street Fighter* (1987), created by Nishiyama Takashi and Matsumoto Hiroshi.[15] Ryu is depicted in white sleeveless karate *gi*, white headband, red hair and red fighting shoes, while Ken has red *gi*, blond hair and bare feet. Both sport black belts, indicating their fighting prowess. The nameless protagonists of *Karate Champ* allowed the player to project themselves onto the blank slate, appearing without a background or any identity other than 'karate fighter.' Similarly, Ryu and Ken have no last names onscreen, although later game peripherals give Ryu and Ken some backstory: orphaned as a baby, Ryu is taken in by the karate master Gouken and raised in the dojo with Ken Masters as his training partner. Standing in as an 'everyman' for Japanese players, Ryu had an earnest personality much like the heroes of *Weekly Shōnen Jump* manga for boys. Ryu's famous Hadōken attack was indicated on screen by a powerful, fast-moving ball of energy, which would influence attack visuals in the *Naruto* and *Super Smash Bros.* games.[16] The Hadōken is one of the few fighting game attacks known widely by its name, and has even come to represent Japanese arcade games in general, serving as the cover image for Brian Ashcraft's *Arcade Mania!* (2008a).

In *Street Fighter*, there is no character select screen. Player One embodies Ryu, fighting against a series of ten AI opponents, or against Ken if Player Two joins the game. Directly following the insert coin screen, the player is shown four national flags to select a country in which to battle: Japan, the US, the UK or China. Ryu fights two characters from each country, after which he must defeat two bosses in Thailand to complete the game. Although Ryu's name appears in text with his face on the 'versus' screen introducing the battle, no names appear next to the health bars during the fight itself. Ryu's health is designated that of 'Player1,' underneath which is 'Enemy.' Ryu's name appears in text for the fight results: 'Ryu won the 1st round,' 'Ryu won the 2nd round,' 'Ryu won the fight over enemy.' In this way the fighter on screen is equally described as 'Ryu' and 'Player1,' with the emphasis on 'Player1' for the actual fighting, and the emphasis on Ryu for the narrative consequences. This reflects the direct action input needed from the player to win the fight, and send Ryu off to his next battle. Ryu's travel from one country to another is indicated by a world map and a small silver plane, flying from one national flag to the next.

Ryu's privileged position as the default playable character in *Street Fighter* makes the Japanese karate fighter the 'main character' of the series. The distinctive Japanese identity of Ryu as karate master became more distilled over time: Ryu's hair is red in the first game, changing to brown and then black as the series progresses. In this way Ryu becomes increasingly associated with a physical marker of 'Japaneseness.' Early game engines had little capability to account for

differences in skin tone, so distinctions between characters were made primarily through hair colour, costume, and body type. Characters in *Street Fighter* were coded as either light-skinned or dark-skinned, with Asian and Caucasian characters appearing the same as each other, and only Mike the African-American boxer shaded a darker tone. Like *Karate Champ*, *Street Fighter* used backgrounds to enhance the mood of the game, extending this to deepen character development. Its ten NPCs (non-player characters) all had specific background settings, depicting their place of origin. Players inferred the character's personality and story from what they saw on screen, in a narrative structure very different from the linear scripting of the RPG. As the world warrior, Ryu has no setting of his own, but in bonus games between rounds he breaks boards with his fists in a stone-paved temple courtyard. He also lands flying kicks on boards in a Japanese-style room with wooden walls, checkerboard flooring and square lattice-beamed ceiling. The facing wall is taken up by a large painting of two tigers on a mountaintop, complete with bamboo and drifting clouds. This presents a vision of Japan as an exotic 'Orient,' reinforced by the stereotypical settings of the two Japanese NPCs in the fighting roster.

The first Japanese NPC is Retsu, master of Shōrinji Kenpō (the Japanese variant of Shaolin kung fu). Retsu is bald with bold black eyebrows, black and white robes, and the same physical build as Ryu. His environment is a Japanese Buddhist temple, appropriate for the Zen-based philosophy of his training. The gate is detailed with *kawara* roof tiles, wooden doors with iron bolts and studs, and stone lanterns on either side. A pagoda towers in the background while autumn foliage is seen outside the courtyard. The second Japanese setting, associated with the ninja Geki, is a beach with windswept pine trees. On the opposite shore, lush green trees and a bright red *torii* gate denoting a Shinto shrine are reflected in the water. Mount Fuji dominates the background, while the foreground features a stone pillar with carven kanji characters and a rowboat moored with a rope.[17] The scene is reminiscent of one of Hokusai's *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints in the 'Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji' series. The combination of traditional scenic symbols provides the archetypal Japanese scene for the archetypal Japanese character, the ninja warrior. The hooded Geki throws *shuriken* stars, attacks with a clawed battle glove, and appears and disappears during battle. Compared to Geki's teleportation, other NPC attacks in the game are straightforward. Through these Japanese characters and scenes, the player experiences both Buddhist and Shinto symbols as well as the mystery of ninja techniques.

Ryu's mission to wander the world and experience the different fighting styles of other nations provided a rich narrative for exploration in anime, feature films, manga and comics.[18] Adaptations focus on Ryu's increasing mastery of karate, his relationship with his teacher Gouken and rival Ken Masters, and his inner struggle to overcome 'murderous impulses,' a plot staple from many martial arts tales and films.[19] But the fact that the default character is Japanese Ryu, rather than American Ken, sets up two fundamental ideas that would underpin not only the *Street Fighter* series, but most fighting games of the 1990s: first, the protagonist is Japanese, and second, the primary 'Other' to the main

character is American. Although Ryu's opponents from around the world represent a range of nations, they may be replaced at any time by Player Two joining the action. Ken supersedes all other fighters, the 'real' rival who must be beaten not only onscreen but in the real world of the game arcade. Player Two's embodiment of American Ken reflected an underlying Japan–American binary that dominated literature, film and the wider arts in the postwar era.[20] As Nicholas Ware puts it, 'To speak of Ryu is to speak of Japan itself,' and 'Ken is used to reinforce the "national-cultural fantasy" inherent in Ryu' (2017: 161–162). Ware sees *Street Fighter* as a metaphor for Japan–US postwar engagement, in terms of rivalry and safe onscreen aggression.

Street Fighter's first opponent from the USA is Joe, blond and stripped to the waist to show off his abdominal muscles. Wearing long red pants and white shoes, Joe fights in the train yards, with one train emblazoned with graffiti similar to the American flag. The spatial dimensions of the flag are reversed, with a smaller rectangle of red-and-white stripes in the top right corner, and the rest of the flag showing white stars on a blue background. The artist's playful rendition of the American flag upends its meaning: the numbers of states and colonies are lost in the haphazard representation, while the backwards orientation may be a roguish comment on America as Ryu's (and Japan's) rival. The second American opponent has a more portentous background – Mount Rushmore. It is interesting that the artists took such liberties with the flag but kept the mountain monument intact, the most realistic background in the game. Mike is African-American and much taller than Ryu, although similar in muscular build. Mike has a darker skin tone, close-cropped hair, red shirt, blue jeans and sneakers. The attire of both characters thus echoes the red, white and blue of the flag, while their names evoke American action icons GI Joe and Mike Tyson.[21]

Moving on to China, we find Lee, a kung fu master dressed in blue fighting gear and skullcap, with a long pigtail and Fu Manchu-style moustache. His scene is the Great Wall of China, and we fight on a crumbling section of wall while the fortifications stretch across the hills behind. The second Chinese opponent is the assassin Gen, wearing a long purple robe and crooking his fingers in classic Shaolin animal kung fu style. Gen is the oldest of the characters, with white hair and long beard, providing a prototype for the 'old master' character in other fighting games. Gen fights against a street backdrop with signs in both English and Chinese. It is notable at this point that the Asian opponents are all depicted with traditional clothing and anachronistic, exaggerated hair options, set against the more modern styles of the Western opponents.

The UK characters represent the two poles of class-conscious British society. First we meet Birdie, a leather-clad punk who sports a Mohawk and gold hoop earring in one ear. Birdie's tough street image is enhanced by his studded belt, vest and wristbands. He fights against a street backdrop with posters for restaurants and rock bands as well as the Block Heads Pub, covered in graffiti. A Rolls Royce-style convertible is incongruously parked in the alleyway. At the other end of the social spectrum, the next fighter Eagle looks like a valet or chauffeur from the 1920s, a blond, well-groomed man wearing black braces over a white

button-down shirt, brown cuffed trousers and black bow tie. Eagle fights with kali sticks in front of a crumbling stone wall in the countryside. A picturesque stone bridge spans a river in the background, with a village perched on cliffs at the left and a grandiose castle on the right. The *Street Fighter Wiki* comments on the class differences between the two UK fighters, noting that a Birdie is one point below an Eagle in golf, emphasizing Birdie's lower status.[22]

If all these levels of gameplay are passed, the airplane moves on to Thailand, where Player One faces two Muay Thai boxers.[23] Adon is the first opponent, with black boxing shorts and socks, white armband and headband, and red spiky hair. Adon fights in front of rice fields and a serene lake, with a large Buddha on the opposite shore, accompanied by eight stone pillars. We also see palm trees and thatched buildings, behind which are forest and hills. The final fight against Thai boxer Sagat takes place on a lawn with wide stone steps leading to another temple, with golden statues on plinths showing figures with swords and other weapons. Sagat is fearsome, extremely tall with an eye patch, and clad only in purple shorts and boxing gloves, with strapping at ankles and wrists. If defeated, Sagat says 'You've outlasted the best. You are now the strongest street fighter in the world!' The player sees a satisfying parade of the beaten-up faces of their opponents, followed by more text:

> You have earned the distinction of "King of the Hill." But remember, you have no time to rest on your glory, for there is always someone waiting in line to knock you off the top. Be prepared to be challenged.
>
> (*Street Fighter* 1987)

The end screens thus emphasize endurance and player-versus-player challenges, which are related: to experience the full range of opponents, the game had to be played in single player mode. Anyone approaching as Player Two could end the sequence by butting in as Ken, so players needed to spend a great deal of time in the arcade (or intimidate all possible comers) in order to play through the full sequence without interruption.

Looking at the array of characters in *Street Fighter*, the point of the stereotype is to make Ryu seem like a young and vibrant up-and-comer against the old Asian masters in China and Japan. It establishes a binary contrast between Japan and other nations, and draws distinctions between the fighting styles of East and West. This binary is predicated on a process of essentialization – creating a stereotype, or a limited representation, of a culture by taking its presumably 'essential' elements and then making those elements stand in for the whole. Thus Japan is the land of pine trees, Mount Fuji, Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples, and ninja, while other lands are denoted by a similar shorthand for their own cultures. In *Street Fighter*, the cultural shorthand gives us obvious, recognizable stereotypes which indicate the style of fighting that Ryu must overcome. In *Street Fighter II* (1991), this kind of character design was taken to extremes, bringing a new level of exoticism and spectacle to the fighting game genre.

Street Fighter II: essentialization extreme

The first thing a player notices about characters in *Street Fighter II* is the sheer muscularity of the figures. Ryu's physique is much more developed, with hugely bulging muscles and tendons visible on the surface of his straining arms and chest. Many characters are shirtless: Zangief, Balrog, Blanka, Dhalsim, Honda and Sagat all display impressive pectorals and abdominal muscles, although Honda's are offset by his large stomach, being a sumo wrestler. Of the other characters, Ken and Ryu wear loose karate *gi* that show off their pecs and sternum, while the Americans M. Bison and Guile wear tank tops that emphasize their impressive biceps. The only characters who are fully clothed are the mysterious caped Vega, and the first female character for fighting games, Chun-li.[24] Where the Muay Thai master Sagat and Russian pro-wrestler Zangief tower over the other characters, Chun-li and the Indian yogi Dhalsim have much slighter frames. The variety in body shapes is interesting and amusing, and part of the fun is to match up different characters with each other to see whether the physical disparity has any effect on the outcome of the match.

The introduction of Chun-li brought an extra dimension to character difference, as now gender was thrown into the mix. Although fully clothed, Chun-li's muscles are evident in her thighs in particular – fitting for a character whose special attack is the 'Spinning Bird Kick.' Chun-li is gendered in both appearance and behaviour – her round breasts are emphasized by circular patterns on her costume, while her hair is bound up in cute side buns tied with white ribbons. On winning a match, Chun-li jumps up and down with a gleeful expression, shouting '*Yatta!*' (I did it!) in a high, girlish voice. However, the fact that male characters are also known for their muscular chests, bulging biceps and burly thighs shows that characters of both genders were sexualized, their anatomy emphasized for more focus on the physicality of their fighting bodies. This paved the way for increasingly muscular body types over time. As the fighting game genre developed through the late 1990s into the new century, the representation of both genders became more and more ostentatious. Combined with the increasingly sexualized overtones of the game industry around the world, the decadent trajectory culminated in the hyper-sexual visuals of *Dead or Alive*.[25]

The focus on the body in *Street Fighter II* that set off a larger trend towards flamboyance and physical spectacle was helped by a division of labour between Capcom's Japanese and American offices. While Yasuda Akira and Nakae Tatsuya completed the in-game character portrayals in Osaka, much of the peripheral artwork for *Street Fighter II* was completed by American Mick McGinty.[26] This meant that marketing, cover art, posters and flyers for the game – what home console players saw before they opened the box and started playing – were American in sensibility: musculature was larger and more defined; colours were deep rather than bright; faces showed steely determination rather than other emotions. McGinty was well known as an air-brush artist, so his art style focused on the curve of the body to get a 3D effect. This worked especially well on curved body parts such as biceps, shoulders, breasts and buttocks.

Chun-li's thighs are famous not just for her Spinning Bird Kick, but from their gorgeously fulsome depiction in McGinty's art.

Chun-li's background setting is one of the more realistic in the game, a street scene in China with three shop fronts and a receding street lined with telephone poles. Other poles support a loudspeaker and a barbershop sign. To the right, a woman crouches by a running faucet to wash clothes or dishes in a bowl. To the left, a woman and child stand cheering in a drinking establishment while a man sits at a table with flasks and cups. The central shop sells meats and live chickens, one of which flaps wildly in a cage. A man wearing what appears to be a Mao-era military suit holds another chicken by the feet and head while a squatting man watches the fight. Motorcycles and bicycles go by, suggesting a crowded and busy town. Washing in the street and buying live chickens are things associated with China, not Japan, emphasizing Chun-li's foreign aspect. Other characters are far more exaggerated, with background environments to match. For example, the Indian yoga master Dhalsim fights in a Hindu temple, with a large, colourful painting of the elephant god Ganesh in the background. Surrounded by curtains and tassels, the painting is further embellished with a golden frame, pillars and a raised dias. Statues of elephants line the walls, each with gold decorations on their trunks, some with brass or ceramic pots at their feet. Dhalsim himself sports golden shorts, gold bands at his wrists and ankles, and a necklace of skulls. This amalgam conflates Hinduism with death veneration and the worship of Khali, collapsing the whole into an exotic picture of India.

One of the most interesting characters in the game is Blanka, the green-skinned jungle man from the wilds of Brazil. The fight against Blanka takes place in a lush, vivid environment evoking the Amazon basin. The foreground features two thatched structures with wooden slat walls, one with a crowd of shirtless men looking out the window, and one with a large fish hanging from the roof. The men inside have a dark skin tone, as do some of the onlookers thronging the dock. In the very centre of the stage is a large, vine-covered tree, with colourful flowers at the base and a bright green snake climbing the trunk. The river itself fills the middle ground while the background is a distant opposite shore. Brazil is thus depicted as wild, exotic, and 'Other' to all the developed nations. Apart from his bright green skin, Blanka also has fangs, claws, and an animalistic fighting style, with hand-like feet that grab the opponent. His special ability is electrification – when triggered, his body glows with a pulsing aura and any opponent touching him turns into a living X-ray. Presumably inspired by the electric eels that live in the Amazon, Blanka's ability sets him apart, in a fundamental ability of his body rather than physical movement. We are made to understand that Blanka is thus essentially Other – different by his very essence, with abilities stemming from nature rather than from long years of martial arts training.

This kind of essentialization – boiling a culture down to its perceived 'essential' elements and then having those stand in for the whole – lies at the heart of Orientalism, a rhetorical structure prominent in eighteenth and nineteenth-century art and literature from Britain and France, which represented the lands

of Asia as exciting, different, sensual and sexualized in an intoxicating alternative to life at home. As Edward Said famously argued, the rhetoric of Orientalism was made possible by real-world colonialism and Empire, enabling the travel, observation, and representation by artists, anthropologists and scientists who accompanied the military.[27] Souvik Mukherjee mentions Dhalsim briefly as an example of Orientalist depiction, drawing on Lisa Nakamura's analysis of racial constructions in online games.[28] The interesting thing about Yasuda Akira's creations in *Street Fighter* is that here we have a Japanese artist constructing the 'Other,' which raises questions about where or what the 'Orient' is supposed to be. This placement of Japan in relation to a supposed 'Orient' is a complex and interesting paradox, which is also related to Japanese history and Japan's relation to China and the idea of 'Asia.'[29] A closer look at stereotype construction in *Street Fighter II* shows discourses of Japanese identity informing the essentializing process.

Character artist Yasuda Akira has explained that the aim for character design in a fighting game is 'to develop a balanced set of characters who combine to make an imaginary world feel full and rich' (Hendershot 2017: 9). Game journalist Steve Hendershot interviewed Yasuda about *Street Fighter II*, concluding that Yasuda's characters 'often started as broad-strokes stereotypes, such as a Russian wrestler and an American military hero. Yasuda then had a knack for fleshing them out in imaginative, exciting ways that made the characters memorable and unique' (2017: 27). Asked about stereotypes, Yasuda made an interesting comment: 'Maybe I'm a weird Japanese person, but I *want* to make something stereotyped – something exaggerated. To be perfectly honest, I think it's okay if they're discriminatory – not in an offensive way, but in a way that's easy to understand and fun' (ibid). Hendershot explains Yasuda's strategy in terms of crafting unique characters that are all extremely different to one another, for purposes of recognition, and also in terms of 'getting people talking' (2017: 28). A caricature is more interesting and provocative than a realistic characterization, so the more over-the-top the better. Character construction veers on parody, over-exaggerating certain traits and features for the purpose of humour. But Yasuda prefaces his statement with a curious rationale – maybe it's *because* he's Japanese that he likes this kind of exaggeration.

What does being Japanese have to do with stereotype construction? *Street Fighter II* came out in 1991, when *Nihonjinron* was a buzzword in the media.[30] Translated as 'theory of the Japanese people,' Nihonjinron discourse sought to define Japan's essential elements and explain Japanese social structures, government, education and other institutions in terms of the fundamental geography and weather of the archipelago as well as physical characteristics of the Japanese people. For example, the traditional basic diet of rice was used to explain everything from farming practice and social family structures (which makes sense) to the unique physical formation of the Japanese person's stomach (which does not). Bookstores in the 1990s often had whole sections devoted to Nihonjinron books, as the public went wild for theories of Japanese uniqueness.[31] Nihonjinron discourse has since been criticized on the basis of racism, xenophobia and

cultural essentialism.[32] In context, 1990s Nihonjinron may be seen as a reaction to increased immigration policies following close on the heels of financial collapse, as the 'bubble economy' of the 1980s fell apart. In a rapidly shifting social environment, people wanted certainty and reassurance that Japan was still significant, a source of pride and security.

Street Fighter II was thus developed at a time when Nihonjinron discourse was at its height. The temptation to justify and rationalize all kinds of theories and ideas in terms of 'being Japanese' was extremely strong. If we put Yasuda's comments in their context, at the time of developing the character roster, they certainly make sense. But Hendershot's interview with Yasuda took place just last year. Why would Yasuda still be speaking in terms of a Japanese designer liking stereotype and exaggeration simply because he is Japanese? I would suggest that the ideas of Nihonjinron were so pervasive at the time of the game's design that Yasuda may have become used to explaining his methods in this way. Perhaps so many people asked him about the stereotypes in the game, the over-the-top character design and the possibly offensive imagery, that this became his stock answer – an answer perfectly suited to the Nihonjinron-obsessed 1990s, but sounding out of place today. Of course, a major component of Nihonjinron was also nationalism, a fierce pride in Japan that rose as a backlash against American 'Japan-bashing' in the 1980s, when car manufacturers in Detroit were losing out to imports of cheap, well-made and technologically advanced cars from Japan. Whether or not Yasuda was consciously aware of the discursive structures of Nihonjinron, the US–Japan dynamic is very evident in *Street Fighter II*, even more so than in the original game.[33]

This is most apparent in the shift to a militarized America in the character of Guile. The generic blond boxer Joe has been replaced by a definite Major in the US Air Force, complete with military uniform and chunky combat boots. Although Joe's train yard background in *Street Fighter* included a version of the American flag, in *Street Fighter II* the flag is accurate, and visible not only in the background but also on Guile's body, in the form of a tattoo on his shoulder. Guile fights on the tarmac at the air base, right in front of a warplane. Four male soldiers in dark green uniforms cheer from the sidelines, accompanied by two uniformed women with short skirts, high heels and long hair. Combat is militarized and sexualized, perhaps indicative of Japan's experience with the occupying Allied forces following World War II. It is interesting to me that the English characters of the first game have disappeared, making America the main Allied force to be represented in *Street Fighter II*.[34] At the World Video Game Hall of Fame in Rochester, New York, the exhibit honouring *Street Fighter II* showcases Ryu versus Guile in action-figure combat, showing the American perspective (Figure 3.2).

Introducing the military element into Guile's construction brings a whole new dynamic of Japan versus the American Other to the *Street Fighter* universe, underscored by the fact that the only other nation associated with military iconography is Japan. The sumo wrestler E. Honda, whose face is painted in kabuki style, has a traditional bath house for his background. The scene includes a large

Figure 3.2 Ryu versus Guile at the World Video Game Hall of Fame.
Photograph by the author, courtesy of the Strong National Museum of Play.

tiled bath with a sumo ring in the foreground, lanterns on either side, and a *noren* cloth over the doorway printed with '*yu*,' meaning hot water. A large wall painting shows a snowcapped Mount Fuji flanked by a kabuki actor on the right and a black-and-white rising sun on the left, with the sun's rays streaming down to Mount Fuji's slopes. This particular image of the sun comes from wartime iconography, as we saw in Chapter 2 with *Ōkami*. At the end of each fight, Honda's Rising Sun flashes bright red, the wartime flag coming to shocking life. This parody of Japanese nationalism establishes a firm military foundation for the Japan–US relationship in the game. It also provides a more pointed representation of Japan than Ryu's mild-mannered image, making Ryu the 'regular, relatable guy' in comparison to Honda. Ryu's relatability is not only created through representational methods: *Street Fighter II* is significant for the ways in which it utilized the character select screen as well as game hardware and peripherals to privilege the main Japanese character, a strategy that proved remarkably persistent in the genre.

The Japanese privilege in fighting games

In the original *Street Fighter*, Ryu was the default character, and the only way to play as Ken was for Player Two to beat Ryu and carry on through the levels. The idea that 'Player One equals Ryu' was ingrained in players. The new character select screen in *Street Fighter II* offered the player a choice of eight playable characters. Ryu lost some association with Player One, his diminished importance suggested by the cover art for the SNES port: Ryu lies flat on his back in the street, possibly unconscious, as an enormous Blanka erupts from the brick wall background to attack Chun-li. Since Ryu was no longer the only option for gameplay, the designers needed to indicate his 'main character' status in other ways. Approaching *Street Fighter II* in the arcade, Ryu's muscular back fills the entirety of the cabinet's side art, highly visible when the cabinet was placed on the end of a row of games. Ryu also appears prominently in the game's 'attract mode,' a looped cinematic sequence with a dynamic soundtrack that plays when the game is not in use. Ryu was privileged in merchandizing, with Ryu posters, T-shirts and lunch boxes filling store shelves. A Ryu action figure is displayed alongside *Street Fighter* cover art at the National Videogame Museum in England, representing the series as a whole (see Figure 3.3). Ryu became synonymous with *Street Fighter*, and today a search for 'Ryu' in the *Street Fighter Wiki* yields 800 results – 200 more than the next most popular search terms, 'Ken' and 'Chun-li.' One of Ryu's memorable quotes from the *Turbo HD Remix* edition even cements his philosophy as the *raison-d'être* of the fighting game genre itself: 'To live is to fight, to fight is to live!'

More significant was the way in which designers utilized the character select screen and user interface to privilege Ryu in arcade play. Once the coin is inserted into the cabinet, the eight playable character icons appear on screen. At this point, it is Ryu's icon that is highlighted as 'P1.' In this way, Ryu is once again positioned as the default character: the player must actively choose to

Figure 3.3 Ryu as the face of *Street Fighter*.

move the joystick away from Ryu's avatar in order to play as a different charac-
ter. If no selection is made by the player, action begins with Ryu when the time
runs out. Ryu's icon also appears in the top left of the character select screen,
visually occupying the first possible position. Text on the front of the arcade
cabinet appeared in a left-to-right direction (with Japanese instructions also
written horizontally), so the eye naturally came to rest at this point. Similar
tactics applied to later editions of *Street Fighter II* – one of the most interesting
is *Champion Edition*, with pictures of the characters permanently positioned
around the outside of the screen. Ryu in this case appears in the top right corner.
Later game series also kept this idea, with the most normative male Japanese
character filling the default P1 position in the select screen for the first title in
each series. In *Virtua Fighter*, this position is held by karate fighter Akira Yuki,
while the default character in *Tekken* is karate expert Kazuya Mishima. *Soul
Edge* placed Mitsurugi, the samurai sword-fighter, in this position, and he is the
first character to appear in the cinematic sequence of the original *Soul Edge*
arcade cabinet in attract mode.[35]

Ryu's normative status was strengthened by the outrageously exaggerated
appearances and abilities of other characters. In fact, Ryu and Ken now looked
slightly dull in comparison to the rest of the cast, and players enjoyed the liberty to

play as different characters, with their inventive and entertaining new moves. Honda's 'Hundred Hand Slap' kept opponents at bay with a barrage of hand moves accompanied by manga-like speed lines. Chun-li's 'Spinning Bird Kick' saw the fighter doing the splits and spinning through the air upside down, completely unharmed in the event of landing on her head. Dhalsim's arms and legs could shoot out to surprising lengths, the ultimate in rubbery yoga flexibility. These strange and wondrous fighting techniques play into the exotic atmospheres of other nations. Sumo, kung fu and yoga are taken to ridiculous lengths in a classic process of essentialization. As Hendershot explains, 'The whole world was Yasuda's canvas, inspiration and target, and every region got the same caricature-heavy treatment' (2017: 28). With Honda acting as the Japanese caricature, this cemented Ryu's position as the 'regular, everyday Japanese' fighter, reassuring the player of normalcy in the crazy world of Yasuda's imagination. While Ryu occupied a privileged position of the default or normalized 'regular guy' in *Street Fighter II*, the character select screen also opened up a whole new world of gameplay in the arcade.

Arcade play and its implications

The character select screen of *Street Fighter II* had interesting ramifications for the representation of both player and character during in-game fighting sequences. Once the player chose their character from the select screen, the fighting sequence began. But instead of 'Player1' and 'Enemy' appearing on the screen, characters were now referred to by name. Taking the player's identity out of the screen text meant located the player more definitely in front of the arcade cabinet. The in-game diegetic character inhabited their own onscreen world, while the player remained firmly in the arcade, managing the direct-action input with buttons and joystick. The 'doubled performance' of fighting games was solidified, and 'Player One' would not appear onscreen in any further games in this genre.[36] Further, the character's name and health bar now appeared directly above each character, rather than in the centre of the screen. Splitting the user interface into opposite sides of the screen emphasized the binary nature of the battle, with opponents pitted against each other more clearly.[37] This binary split was emphasized further with *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition*, released in March 1992. In this game two players could each choose to fight as Ryu, each with a different colour headband (red versus white, of course). The excitement surrounding this innovation may be seen by the fact that rival company SNK incorporated the idea for its SNES port of *Fatal Fury* in November 1992. This modification changed the identity signifiers of fighting games in new ways – now 'my Ryu' could fight 'your Ryu,' to see whose Ryu was more skilfully manipulated. Ryu's fighting skill was no longer held within Ryu himself, being only as good as his player. In this way the locus of competition moved further towards the people standing in the front of the cabinet, shifting the competitive aspect of gameplay more firmly towards the player in the arcade.

All these features demonstrate the increased player-versus-player (PVP) capabilities of *Street Fighter II*, but the biggest difference was in the number of

available characters for gameplay, providing an exponential increase in possible match-ups. In *Karate Champ* and *Street Fighter*, the player needed to learn one set of moves and then apply those moves against the NPC characters, accounting for up to ten distinctive fighting styles. In *Street Fighter II*, since each of the eight characters had specific movesets and combos, the adept player had to learn all of those in order to play *as* the character as well as playing *against* the character in battle. With 64 possible match-ups available, players gravitated towards specific characters whose moves they were most comfortable with, focusing more closely on one set of moves until they were second nature. PVP battles demanded split-second timing, especially in the later iterations of the game like *Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting* (December 1992), *Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers* (September 1993) or *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* (February 1994) which were speeded up for more exciting play.[38] Game developer Nishitani Akira added another four NPCs as villain bosses, resulting in an unheard-of 96 possible match-ups for each character.

Japanese arcade historian Ishii Zenji observes that the advent of *Street Fighter II* saw long lines and a crush of people around each machine, as onlookers tried to follow the onscreen action and pick up some tips and tricks from the experts.[39] Playing competitively in front of an audience was a thrilling, high-pressure experience, with the player as star performer. Arcades had seen this kind of showboating before, with the huge high scores of *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man*, *Galaga* and *Donkey Kong* in the previous decade. But now the player's opponent was not the cabinet AI or high scores of previous players, but another human being playing right next to them. In the US, the combination of high-score arcade mentality and physical competition was electrifying, and arcades reached a high point in popularity.[40] In Japan, many found the side-by-side physical setup of the *Street Fighter II* cabinet intimidating. Brian Ashcraft explains the Japanese solution to this problem:

> The game needed something to maximize its two-player possibilities – and encourage Japanese players to beat up random strangers. An unnamed arcade owner hit upon a clever solution: modify two cabinets so that they were connected to the same motherboard and then put those cabinets back-to-back. That way, expert players could continue playing on one coin, while lousy players kept feeding the machine in hopes of victory and were given a degree of privacy should they lose. This loser-pays model proved so successful that it was adapted not just by *Street Fighter II* developers Capcom, but by the entire Japanese gaming industry.
>
> (2008a: 93)

The back-to-back model for Japanese fighting games persists today. The contrast between individualized PVP in Japan and side-by-side PVP in America may have led Steve Hendershot to conclude that the mania for *Street Fighter II* was not as intense in Japan as in the USA (2017: 56). However, Ishii Zenji devotes many pages to the Japanese *Street Fighter II* scene, which by his account was

every bit as obsessive as that across the Pacific (2017: 39–44). One thing that everyone agrees on is that the play style of gamers in the US and Japan were quite different. Where star players like Alex Valle were physically aggressive with the machine and almost reckless in the timing of their attacks, Japanese experts tended to be more logical in the way they sized up the opponent and reacted with specific attacks and meticulous timing. Umehara Daigo, the first Japanese superstar to attend an international tournament in California, called it 'technical play.'[41] Umehara soon adapted to the US style, winning the 1998 *Street Fighter Alpha 3* tournament against Valle and earning the nickname 'the Beast' from his unstoppable trajectory and seemingly impossible wins, most notably his 2004 EVO final against Justin Wong, the '57 seconds that changed the world.'[42] The first global e-sports phenomenon, Umehara has been likened to Bruce Lee, with his EVO final seen as equivalent to Lee's *Enter the Dragon* in its worldwide impact on players of fighting games.[43]

Part of the reason why *Street Fighter II* had such an impact on the arcade scene and tournament play was Capcom's innovative release strategy on different hardware systems. With *Street Fighter II* available on the SNES, players could practise specific movesets at home in a familiar environment before tackling real PVP play in the arcade. Some scholars have argued that the emphasis on home training can be likened to Japanese martial arts training, where a significant investment of time and effort is expected in the dojo and in one's free time to be able to expect improvement (and eventually victory).[44] *Street Fighter II* thus set the template for the character select screen, user interface, increased PVP and tournament play, and home console training. But there were many other fighting games available in the 1990s, and players too impatient to wait for *Street Fighter II* – or sick of the hype surrounding it – would find plenty of alternatives in the game centre. While this is not the place for a comprehensive list of 1990s fighting games, major contenders were *Final Fight, Fatal Fury, King of Fighters*, and *Art of Fighting*, many from rival Osaka company SNK.[45] The last two fighting series I wish to consider in this chapter are Sega's *Virtua Fighter* and Namco's *Tekken*, which brought many innovations to character development and narrative beyond the confines of the in-game fighting structure.

3D gameplay and narrative innovation

Released in October 1993 for the arcade, *Virtua Fighter* was the launch title for the new Sega Saturn console in November 1994. The 3D characters were built from newly available polygon rendering technology, and environments were also 3D, with wide open deserts and beaches under bright blue skies, with remarkably realistic clouds. Characters followed the template set by earlier games, with a Japanese male character named Akira Yuki in the P1 position and a ninja Kage-maru, accompanied by Sarah and Jacky Bryant, siblings from San Francisco. Since Jacky has bright blond hair and red *gi* costume, the pairing of Akira and Jacky visually resembled Ryu and Ken. The introduction of Sarah is significant, as the first

Western woman in a Japanese fighting game. Her tall frame, blonde hair and jutting breasts formed the template for later, more sexualized figures like Nina in the *Tekken* series and Ivy from *SoulCalibur*. Asian characters are represented by Pai Chan, a female martial arts film star from Hong Kong, and her father Lau Chan, a cook with a long, braided pigtail, reflecting his loyalty to Chinese historical tradition. Europe is absent from the game, with the Western fighters including pro-wrestler Wolf Hawkfield from Canada and Jeffry McWild, a fisherman from Australia. It seems that Australia is cast in the role of the exotic Other for this game, as Jeffry McWild is wild indeed. His bushy beard, strong eyebrows, dark skin tone and spiky hairdo suggest an islander with dreadlocks, although dreadlocks are a cultural tradition from the Caribbean, not the Australian aboriginal community. The incongruent elements of Jeffry's appearance combine with his name to make Australia a place of mere exoticism, at odds with the comparatively realistic appearances and backstories of the other characters.

The positioning of Akira in *Virtua Fighter* is remarkably consistent, occupying the default P1 position in the first three games. After this, although other character icons are initially highlighted, Akira remains in the top left-hand corner of the character select screen, maintaining his presence and priority. *Virtua Fighter* had a fun element to the character select screen, as highlighting a character icon would trigger a profile screen, giving the character's name, country, age, job, blood type and hobby. Where Pai Chan's hobby was dance and her father's hobby was 'Chinese Poem,' reflecting their personalities, Akira was represented as a serious person, whose job (kung fu teacher) accorded directly with his hobby (kung fu). His blood type O indicates someone who is decisive and confident. In opening cinematics, Akira closes out the sequence, knocking down his opponent while facing the camera. The end to the *Virtua Fighter 3* opening sequence has Akira training alone in front of a giant red sun. Noticing the camera, he executes a perfect flat-handed strike towards the audience to end the sequence just as the music finishes. In contrast to Kage-maru, the mysterious ninja, Akira remains the ordinary everyman, striving for excellence through dedication to the martial arts. The *Virtua Fighter 2* cabinet featured Akira on both the left and right sides of the machine, a rarity which ensured his prominence on the end of a row in the arcade space (Figures 3.4 and 3.5).

Namco released *Tekken* for arcades and as a launch title for the original PlayStation in 1994. It had similar 3D character animations to *Virtua Fighter*, adding more detailed texture mapping to the models.[46] The Japanese karate fighter Kazuya Mishima was *Tekken*'s P1 default character, dominating the cabinet and cover art. Kazuya is the first character listed in the moveset explanations in the PlayStation manual, and is featured in the 'attract mode' for the cabinet. The black screen shows Kazuya preparing for the upcoming fight, tightening his red studded gloves and flexing his huge muscles before performing an awesome kick towards the camera.[47] All of Tekken's eight playable characters, male and female, have large chests, shoulders and thighs. The game setting is the finals of the 'King of Iron Fist' tournament, with battles taking place in exotic places such as a beach in Fiji, temple grounds in Angkor Wat and Kyoto, a rooftop in

Figure 3.4 Cabinet art for *Virtua Fighter 2*.
Photograph by the author, courtesy of ReplayFX.

Figure 3.5 Cabinet art for *Virtua Fighter 2*.
Photograph by the author, courtesy of ReplayFX.

Chicago, Monument Valley, Lake Windemere, the Acropolis, Venice, Szechwan, King George Island, and an unnamed stadium. Unlike *Street Fighter*, specific settings do not seem to match up with specific characters. The story of *Tekken* is the story of the Mishima family, introduced subtly through the cinematics and game action. A close analysis of the opening sequence and the game manual shows how Namco expanded the narrative capabilities of fighting games, establishing a new standard for storytelling in the genre.

After the load screen, the opening cinematic for the PlayStation port first shows the armoured figure Yoshimitsu, practicing his swordsmanship in a snowy bamboo forest. He is followed by King, a mysterious figure donning a jaguar mask in a Catholic church; Michelle Chang, running and leaping through the cactus-filled desert, holding a tomahawk; Law, looking and sounding very much like Bruce Lee, gathering his energy in a bare street; Nina, looking over her shoulder and aiming a gun before running offscreen; Paul, riding his motorbike along a city highway at night; and finally Kazuya, focusing on a candle he then snuffs out with a punch. In this way the PS port cinematic both opened and closed with Japanese male characters, both of whom are practising their fighting techniques. Yoshimitsu and Kazuya are the only characters who enact a fighting move in the sequence: the others are very active but the focus is on movement rather than fighting prowess. Law seems to be training but is not active, preparing his mental and psychic powers as his energy swirls around him like smoke. Yoshimitsu's bamboo forest and Kazuya's temple are established as Japanese settings in opposition to the Catholic church, busy streets and American desert, recalling the environments of P1 in *Karate Champ* and Ryu in *Street Fighter*. Kazuya is similarly attired as those template characters, with ragged white karate *gi* pants, black belt, and red shoes and gloves. The red-and-white palette mark him as Japanese, while his gravity-defying hair is a nod to 1990s style and the spiky-haired conventions of *shōnen* manga, or boys' comics.

If the player keeps the default choice of Kazuya, they are taken through eight battles to proceed to the final round. The select screen shows the character merely named 'Kazuya,' but once selected, his full name is announced: 'Kazuya Mishima' in the English-language version. The match-up screen, health bar and rankings show him as 'Kazuya,' but the result of matches is focused on the player: 'You win/ You lose.' This naming system follows the template of earlier games, but in *Tekken* the twist comes with the non-playable opponents in the final rounds. After playing a sub-boss in Round 8, Kazuya faces someone called 'Heihachi' in Round 9, an older man with flamboyant black and gold karate *gi*, bold eyebrows and a balding head with two upsweeps of hair on each side. After defeating Heihachi, a cut-scene begins: Kazuya approaches Heihachi's prone form, picks him up and carries him across the screen. We see him standing on a clifftop overlooking a green valley for a moment. Then Kazuya drops Heihachi over the cliff and we see the body fall. The camera cuts to a close-up of Kazuya, who turns and smiles enigmatically to end the game.

This is a 'cliff-hanger' indeed, and fans of the arcade game were intrigued as to who the old man Heihachi could be. Players of the PS port knew from the

game manual that it was Heihachi Mishima in the final round. The half-page explanation of the narrative runs as follows:

> Story of Tekken: the Iron Fist
> A worldwide martial arts tournament is nearing its final, with a large purse of prize money to the fighter who can defeat 'Heihachi Mishima' in the final round of competition. The contest is sponsored by the giant financial group, the 'Mishima Zaibatsu'…. Who will be the one to defeat 'Mishima' and take home the prize money and fame? Will it be you?
>
> (Namco 1994: 4)

Keeping the focus on the console player, Kazuya is not mentioned in this introduction. Attentive players will connect the dots and remember that Kazuya is introduced on the match-up screen as 'Kazuya Mishima,' understanding that Kazuya has killed his father at the end of the game. Why he is happy about this remains a mystery, unless the home console player reads further in the manual to get the character backstories. We are told unequivocally that Kazuya's reason for entering the tournament 'is for the purpose of causing a world scale coup d'etat after causing the death of his father' and that 'the scar on his chest was caused by his father's dropping him into a trench at the age of five' (Namco 1994: 12). The manual acts as both storyteller and spoiler, so some players would not open the manual until after completing the game.

Narrative was also delivered through the intricacies of playability and unlockability of characters in the select screen. All eight of the sub-bosses and Heihachi himself were made unlockable, playable characters in the PlayStation port. In this case, Heihachi's final boss is Kazuya's alter ego 'Devil.' This Devil character is also unlockable as a costume alternative for Kazuya, if the player completes the *Galaga* mini-game when loading the disc. 'Devil' is shorthand for the 'Devil gene' within Kazuya's body. We will examine this idea in terms of bioethics in Chapter 6. Here, it is enough to note that the epic narrative of *Tekken*'s Mishima family saga is hinted at in various ways throughout the first game, engaging player interest and motivating them to complete more of the game and play sequels in order to solve the mystery of Kazuya's smile.

The character select screen would be manipulated further in later games: in *Tekken 2* and *3* Kazuya was absent from the selection, heightening the tension and narrative suspense. If he had just won the first tournament, then where was he? Unlike the first game, no mention was made of the boss in the manual, so only skilled players who could complete the fighting sequences could find out the story. This shows a growing sophistication in the use of peripherals to deliver a certain amount of story and no more. Other methods were also explored: *Tekken 4* included a 'story battle' mode as well as regular arcade mode and time attacks, in which the fighting sequences were preceded by manga-style text narration of the character's backstory, while *Tekken 5* introduced a 3D action-adventure game called 'Tekken: Devil Within' as a selectable play mode starring Kazuya's son Jin Kazama in the lead role. In this way, the *Tekken* series

introduced many story-based elements to deepen player immersion in the game's fictional universe, keeping traditional fight sequence structures while manipulating them for narrative effect, and introducing new features to appeal to a broader audience.

Over the course of the series, Player One was situated in the role of Kazuya, Jun, Jin and Asuka Kazama, to experience the Mishima saga from the perspective of different family members. In opening cinematics, Heihachi and Kazuya are associated more with typical Japanese backgrounds such as temples and shrines, bamboo and pine groves, while Jin, the young up-and-comer, is shown training in the city. The youngest member of the clan and star of *Tekken 5*, Asuka rides her bicycle through hyper-busy city scenes evoking the streets of Shinjuku. The US–Japan binary is somewhat weaker in this series, but still present, as the mysterious G-Corporation maintains research labs in Nebraska and the genetic research of American college student Julia Chang becomes very important as the series progresses. In the first *Tekken*, American Paul Phoenix (wearing red) occupies the default Player Two position to face off against Kazuya Mishima, while he appears directly after Kazuya in the game manual. Their character descriptions contrast the 'cold-blooded' Kazuya with the 'hot-blooded American hand-to-hand fighter,' echoing the central rivalry of Ryu and Ken in *Street Fighter* (Namco 1994: 12, 14). As in most fighting games, the default player position remains Japanese while an array of international characters is displayed for the player's enjoyment.

Tekken is a significant title in the fighting game genre for its emphasis on narrative, but all the games analyzed in this chapter are interesting case studies of how ideology can be conveyed on a number of levels, through representation in terms of character construction and narrative, as well as specific user interface methods and PVP gameplay structures. Interface methods in particular may be seen as manipulation rules, with default settings guiding players into certain choices, while goal rules followed a simple win–lose binary in the doubled space of the screen and the arcade. Strict limitations on manipulation rules and goal rules in this genre forced designers to use other aspects of gameplay to elaborate on ideas of national identity and the ways in which a player identifies with their chosen character. From the cabinet to cover art, the health bar to the select screen, game manuals to action figures, the normative Japanese male took centre stage in the Japanese arcade and provided the 'Self' for both definitions of cultural identity and explorations of character and story in the genre.

Exporting Japanese culture: ideology and context

In Part I of this book, we have seen how Japan is packaged and marketed as a commodity both for its own sake and set against (and above) other places. Examining games merely as exportable market objects obscures their cultural content, but analysing the games as cultural artefacts helps show how designers have negotiated some difficult questions: how to convey the rich artistic heritage of Japanese tradition for a range of audiences, and how to define the Japanese sense

of identity or 'Self,' both on its own terms and in contrast with a range of Others. Scholarly debates about the exportability of Japanese culture, particularly regarding the *mukokuseki* aesthetic, show how essentialization distils a certain idea of 'Japanese culture' that designers wish to show the world. Examining *Katamari Damacy, Ōkami* and the fighting game genre, we see designers presenting a specific vision of Japan, in Japanese homes and streets, Japanese history and religion, and the Japanese martial arts. Designers showcase the best of Japan while at the same time making fun of cultural icons, depicting messy rooms, capricious gods, or a karate master's obsession. There is a sense of yearning for what has been lost, and a struggle to hold onto authentic Japanese identity in a turbulent age. This process of representing Japan is ideological in nature, conveying at its heart a love and pride for the nation, respect for tradition, and a dismissal of other cultures as merely 'Other.'

The representation of Japanese culture in fighting games perhaps reached its height in SNK's *Samurai Shodown* (1993), which placed the entire narrative in a Japanese historical setting. The first game is set in 1788 at the time of the Tenmei famine, with main character Haohmaru a *rōnin* or masterless samurai, wandering Japan to hone his fighting skills. Characters include Yagyū Jūbei, one of Japan's most romanticized warriors, the sword-making master Hattori Hanzō, and Kyōshirō Senryō, a kabuki performer who uses swordplay to enhance his dramatic art.[48] The villain is also based on a historical figure, the Christian martyr Shirō Tokisada Amakusa, bent on revenge.[49] Artist Shiroi Eiji contributed beautiful calligraphic brushwork to the character designs, and the music featured traditional Japanese instruments such as *taiko* drums, the *shakuhachi* flute, the *samisen* or three-stringed lute, and the harp-like *koto*. Japanese dialogue was preserved for overseas releases, emphasizing the national origin of the game. Although *Samurai Shodown* is not well known in the West, it was highly regarded in Japan and set the tone for the historical fighting games and war games to follow.[50] *Samurai Shodown* stands out for its focus on Japanese culture, concentrating on the Japanese Self rather than the Other.

Before we leave the fighting game genre, one question to ask is why so many proliferated in the 1990s. Certainly, arcade cabinet hardware and computer software had advanced to deliver extremely fast gameplay and realistic direct action input, as well as the memory to hold movesets and graphics for increasing numbers of characters. But Ishii Zenji argues that the most important thing to understand when considering the popularity of certain games at certain times is *jidai no nagare*, the ebb and flow of events happening in the real world of the arcade's context (2017: 14). Ishii maintains that arcades, as public spaces in the city, are more dependent on social context than home consoles. The game centre provided a space for people to escape the pressures of life, blow off steam and enjoy their leisure with others. Ishii states that this was especially important in the 1990s, after the 'age of the salaryman' had passed (2017: 276–277). At a time of social change and financial collapse, fighting games provided a reassuring vision of the Japanese Self in contrast to a range of threatening Others. Players could embody a strong physical form, and take pride in the fighting

game itself as a great Japanese export. It is of course debatable how much thought players would give to these issues while craning their necks to glimpse the latest combo move discovered for Kazuya Mishima, but the games certainly provided both a chance for escapism and an emphasis on Japanese culture, a potent combination.

The fighting games analyzed here had their heyday before the more serious problems of the 1990s arose – the Tokyo sarin gas attacks and the Great Hanshin Earthquake, both of which occurred in 1995, added to financial and social break-down to create a true 'age of anxiety' in modern Japan. Where fighting games provided adrenalin, escapism and national pride, the linear narratives of role-playing, action and adventure genres provided more extended gameplay, drawn out over many hours, in an explorable environment extending well beyond the limits of one screen. Maps, travel, and the idea of the quest were fundamental to the Japanese RPG, and much deeper characterization became possible, even within a single game title. The home environment of the console game also allowed for quieter, more reflective play. All these elements were conducive to more thematically oriented games, conveying the ideology of the designers through intertwining narrative arcs, symbolism, and recurring motifs in dialogue and cinematic sequences. The next part of this book examines prevailing ideas and anxieties in Japanese society through their articulation and problematization in linear narrative videogames. Common themes included changing attitudes towards the family structure and social roles in contemporary Japan, as well as the more political issues of nuclear power and bioethics.

Notes

1 Ryu's memorable quotes have their own page in the *Street Fighter Wiki*: http://street-fighter.wikia.com/wiki/Ryu/Quotes
2 These titles received more distribution in the West than SNK's *King of Fighters*, which dominated the Asian market. On the popularity of SNK titles in Asia see Ng (2006, 2015), Ashcraft (2008a: 100–102).
3 Frasca (2003: 231–232).
4 I discuss these limitations and player agency in Hutchinson (2007: 294–295).
5 Hutchinson (2007: 292–295) compares player-character identification in this structure to the single-player, single-character structure of the FPS (first-person shooter) and MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing game).
6 McAllister (2004: 84–87) argues that day-to-day production often limits realism and/or critical awareness. Freedman (2012: 289) reminds us to consider game engines and 'operational limits' in the possibilities and effects of representation. Chandler (2005) details methods to minimize localization costs, including pared-down text assets and simple dialogue.
7 Of these issues, gender representation has been the most fraught, connected to harass-ment of female gamers, designers and critics. Much has been written on gender stereotype in games, including the fighting game genre (Heintz-Knowles *et al.* 2001; Williams *et al.* 2009). This is partly attributed to the male dominance in game produc-tion and design (Cassell and Jenkins 1998: 10–14), also applicable to Japan (Fujihara 2014). On hegemonic racial structures in videogames see Everett (2005, 2009). Age in games is less analyzed, although the Williams study takes this into account. On sexuality and games see Malkowski and Russworm (2017); Shaw (2014).

8 Surman (2007) analyzes *Street Fighter* characters and gameplay as 'spectacle.' On gender stereotypes, player-character identification and immersion in Japanese fighting games see Hutchinson (2015b).

9 The idea of the 'Japanese Self,' defined through contrast with various Others, has been theorized at length: see Tanaka (1983), Morris-Suzuki (1998), Clammer (2001), Oguma (2002), and Hutchinson (2011).

10 Murray (1997: 51) and Atkins (2003: 23) criticize fighting games for lacking narrative and realistic characterization. Hendershot sees the plot and backstories of *Street Fighter* as 'afterthoughts' to characterization (2017: 67).

11 Variations on the *SoulCalibur* title include *soulcalibur* and *Soul Calibur*. As the last is also the name of the sword Soul Calibur, I will use the one-word version.

12 *Tekken 6* and *7* have come under particularly heavy fire: see the entertaining discussion 'Retcons Galore?': https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/boards/814542-tekken-7/69740559. Accessed 28 December 2018.

13 Technōs was an important development studio from 1981–1996; Data East produced videogames and pinball machines from 1976–2003.

14 Loguidice and Barton (2009: 243–247) discuss similar karate games.

15 Geddes and Hatfield (2007). Nishiyama created *Kung Fu Master* (1984), leaving Capcom to direct *Fatal Fury: King of Fighters* (1991) at SNK. He did not work on *Street Fighter II.*

16 Designer Nishiyama Takashi says his inspiration came from the powerful Wave Motion Gun (*hadōhō*) of *Space Battleship Yamato*, from 1974–75. The *Street Fighter Wiki* notes the similarity of the *Kamehameha* attack in *Dragon Ball* (1985): http://streetfighter.wikia.com/wiki/Hadoken. Accessed 28 December 2018.

17 The kanji on the pillar are blurred, adding to the mystery of the ninja character.

18 Hendershot (2017: 68–85) discusses the many and varied adaptations of *Street Fighter.*

19 Hendershot (2017: 72). The '*satsui no hadō*' appears in fan translations as 'a surge of murderous intent,' but the Japanese term is kept in game sequences.

20 On the Japan–US binary in literature see Inoue (2016), in art see Winther-Tamaki (2001). Miyoshi (1991) interprets Japanese postwar history, society and culture in terms of Japan–US inequality.

21 In 1987, the year of *Street Fighter's* release, Mike Tyson became the first heavyweight boxer to hold the three main boxing titles simultaneously: the WBA (World Boxing Association), WBC (World Boxing Council) and IBF (International Boxing Federation), making him a natural inspiration.

22 See Eagle's character page: http://streetfighter.wikia.com/wiki/Eagle, accessed 28 December 2018. Eagle may be an homage to Petrov, played by Robert Baker – one of Bruce Lee's opponents in *Fist of Fury* (dir. Lo Wei, 1972).

23 The game's Japanese origins are evident in the spelling of Thailand as 'Tailand,' a transliteration of タイランド (Tairando).

24 Character names were changed for the American release, ostensibly to avoid a lawsuit from Mike Tyson over his depiction in the game: thus the African-American boxer is known as M. Bison in Japan but Balrog in the US, while the Spanish character is known as Balrog in Japan and Vega in the US. The caped villain called Vega in Japan is named M. Bison in the American version (played by Raul Julia in the film adaptation). For more on this '26-year headache' of name-switching see Hendershot (2017: 233–234).

25 Developed by Team Ninja and published by Tecmo, 1996. On the *Dead or Alive* series see Loguidice and Barton (2009: 251). For more on sexualization and gender in fighting games see Hutchinson (2015b).

26 Hendershot (2017: 58–61) discusses Capcom's East–West art styles; Consalvo (2016:159–170) discusses Capcom's global development strategies.

27 On the constructions of the Orient made possible by colonial force see Said (1995); on Orientalism and Japanese literature see Hutchinson (2011); on Orientalism and postcoloniality in videogames see Mukherjee (2017).

28 Mukherjee (2017: 57–58). Nakamura's (2002, 2008) examinations of racial constructs in digital media have been influential for videogame analysis, particularly her work on online games like *World of Warcraft*.

29 This paradox is a prominent feature of Meiji-period Japanese literature (Hutchinson 2011), informing colonial structures in games like *SoulCalibur* (Hutchinson 2016, also see Chapter 9 of this volume). Tanaka (1993) discusses Japan as an 'Orient.'

30 Yoshino (1992) traces the postwar roots of the discourse to its resurgence in the 1970s and 80s, showing how the ideology percolated through business and education to extreme prevalence in the 1990s. Kowner (2002: 170) calls Nihonjinron an 'industry' of hegemonic ideology.

31 On the main premises of *Nihonjinron* discourse see Yoshino (1992: 10–32), Kowner (2002: 170–171).

32 Dale (1986) is unflinching in his criticism of Nihonjinron discourse; also see Befu (1987); Mouer and Sugimoto (1986, 1995).

33 Ryan (2011: 135) considers this dynamic regarding Nintendo exports to America in the early 1990s.

34 Although the Soviet Union was technically a US ally in World War II, it had little influence in the occupation of Japan.

35 This changed over time, and *SoulCalibur's* P1 default position was used more to show who would be more prominent in particular titles. The latest release, *SoulCalibur VI*, has Mitsurugi in the P1 default position for Arcade Mode. For clarity I will keep the localized onscreen name order for the characters in this discussion.

36 'Doubled performance' refers to this split between characters occupying the game-world while players occupy the arcade (or living room floor, etc.). See Hutchinson (2007: 295–296), Surman (2007: 210).

37 For this reason I have referred to fighting games as 'binary combat games' (Hutchinson 2007).

38 This was partly to counteract the popular 'illegal copycat game' *Street Fighter II: Rainbow Edition* which sped up the game by around 30 per cent and added new, exciting moves (Hendershot 2017: 31–33).

39 Ishii (2017: 39–44).

40 On the US *Street Fighter II* scene, its star performers and rivalry between different arcades, see Hendershot (2017: 16–17, 34–37, 42–48).

41 Hendershot (2017: 51). Some players subscribe to the ideology of 'Asian hands,' the idea that Japanese players are naturally better at fighting games, leading to feelings of worship and/or resentment towards players like Umehara (Harper 2017: 112–115). 'Asian hands' can be aspirational, with players aiming for the deft touch and smooth immersion of Japanese experts. Goto-Jones sees both discourses as 'gamic Orientalism' (2016: 113).

42 A detailed account of the EVO final (Evo Moment #37) and explanation of Umehara's technique is found in Goto-Jones (2016: 41–51). Harper notes that Umehara's animalistic nickname gives him greater 'mystique,' betraying Orientalist discourse in American game communities (2017: 115).

43 Goto-Jones (2016: 42ff). Gaming site Kotaku lists this final as 'the most important pro-gaming event in history' (Breslau 2011).

44 Goto-Jones (2016). Kijima (2012: 263–265) describes arcades in Osaka as dojos, rival gyms that act as 'home turf' for players.

45 For more on these titles see Hendershot (2017: 23–25), Ng (2006, 2015), Ashcraft (2008a: 100–102). Midway Games released *Mortal Kombat* in 1992, but the American game traded heavily on violence, blood and gore, leading to the first videogame censorship case in US history and the creation of the ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board): Kent (2001: 461–480).

46 Hunt (2002: 201–202) charts *Tekken*'s aesthetic developments driven by the technological improvements to PlayStation consoles over time.

47 On the console this sequence is shown after choosing Arcade Mode.
48 Yagyū Jūbei is the hero in a series of nine films from Tōei (1961–1963); famed martial artist Sonny Chiba played Yagyū Jūbei in two films by Fukasaku Kinji and the TV series *The Yagyu Conspiracy (Yagyū ichizoku no inbō)*, from 1978–1979. Sword-maker and warrior Hattori Hanzō is a staple of Japanese samurai dramas, played by Sonny Chiba in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (2003).
49 Amakusa led the Shimabara rebellion in an uprising of Roman Catholics against the shogunate. Executed at the age of 17, he is a popular figure in manga and anime.
50 These included *Dynasty Warriors* (1997), Kōei's popular game based on China's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* saga. On *Three Kingdoms* games in Asia see Kwon (2013).

Part II

Ideology and critique in Japanese games

4   Absentee parents in the JRPG

> Hating your own father, huh? Sounds like a luxury to me. I don't even remember my parents.
>
> Wakka, *Final Fantasy X*[1]

Part I of this book looked at how Japan has been packaged as a cultural product – a consumer object and site of nostalgia – for the domestic and overseas market. Part II examines Japanese videogames in terms of their ideology, including social commentary and political critique. The ways in which social anxieties and concerns of the day are reflected in videogames have much in common with traditional media forms: character, narrative, background music, art style and setting all involve the player in the fiction of the game text, much as a viewer of film or a reader of literature feels transported to another world. But gameplay involves the player in the text by different means as well, to reinforce the underlying messages of the game designer – not least through the elements of player action and decision-making, which can in turn be manipulated for specific emotional effects. In this part of the book I hope to show how language and social realism, player agency and embodiment, and player-character identification all function as sites of ideological intervention. The case studies are mostly long, narrative-heavy games, particularly those in the role-playing and action genres, dealing with pressing issues of social change, nuclear power and bioethics.

These issues reached a head in Japan just as videogame design was also reaching a high point, building through the 1980s into the 1990s. Due to rapid changes in Japanese socioeconomic structures in these decades, many artistic works across various media explored social issues involving problematic youth and the breakdown of the central family unit. Absentee parents and abandoned children are common motifs in Japanese literature, films, manga and anime of the period. In videogames, these issues most often appear in the JRPG (Japanese role-playing game), to the extent that the absentee parent has become a cliché of the genre, the object of jokes and parodies.[2] In this chapter I will explore this trope of the absentee parent in the JRPG in detail, showing that it is intricately linked to quest-based gameplay and linguistic immersion in the social environment of the game-world. It is also part of a broader discourse on the social realities of Japan at the

end of the twentieth century. I will compare Japanese videogames with some examples from Japanese literature and film to show their commonalities, and to highlight the specificities of ideological expression in the videogame medium.

RPGs and JRPGs

It may be helpful to point out some basics about JRPGS and RPGs in general here. In the simplest of terms, the goal of an RPG is to experience a role and reach the end of the adventure, 'beating' the game by completing the narrative and defeating the final boss (an enemy character controlled by the computer). Depending on their skill and game literacy, a player may or may not be able to finish the game. In this case, playing the role becomes the aim in itself. When a player is fully immersed in gameplay, they feel as if they are living the narrative, identifying strongly with the main character.[3] RPGs tend to be quest-based, meaning that the player-character must fulfil and complete a certain number of tasks and missions that allow progress in the game, with tasks growing in complexity and difficulty over time.[4] A great deal of learning, training and strategizing must take place for successful interaction with puzzles and opponents. Usually, but not always, the player controls one character and then adds various other characters to their questing party as they travel through the gameworld. These characters are then employed during battle, each with a particular skill that helps the party overall.

Role-playing games around the world draw on similar motifs of high fantasy, swords and sorcery, *Dungeons and Dragons*-style battle mechanics and statistical character development. 'Getting in character' and playing the role are important for in-game immersion, and close player-character identification is highly valued. Daniel Mackay argues that the main goal of RPGs is to engross the player, 'to transport them far from their everyday lives,' and 'much of the appeal of role-playing games is in the player's engrossment in the fictional world *through* the character. In this sense, the character becomes the imaginary point of contact between the player and the fictional world' (2001: 28). This applies to tabletop RPGs as well as videogames, although the specific mechanics of engrossment – also called immersion or involvement – will differ.[5] Part of the immersion process is recognizing that the game is part of a wider genre, behaving in accordance with expected rules and conventions. Certain opening sequences are very common in RPGs, such as sitting in a tavern or performing simple fighting exercises like killing rats:

> The reproduction of these tropes is expected of RPGs. They represent formal elements that serve to signify the status of the game artifact. Their re-presentation invites comparison to other games that share in their likeness. This is, in some way, what it means to work within an idea of genre.
> (Voorhees, Call and Whitlock 2012: 12)

The repetition of familiar scenes, narrative themes and formal elements appears in both Western and Japanese RPGs: 'A player need only mention series such as

Final Fantasy, Dragon Quest, Knights of the Old Republic, or *Baldur's Gate* to invoke not only a litany of signifiers but also the anticipation of gameplay conventions, both ludic and narrative' (2012: 13). The games I analyze in this chapter are thus part of a broad, global genre known as the fantasy RPG, with common themes, objectives and narrative patterns.

Jérémie Pelletier-Gagnon (2018) observes that the term 'JRPG' was used first by North American and European gamers on internet discussion boards, to set Japanese videogames apart from Western RPGs. This was partly in response to the breakdown of a previous system of binary definition based on 'computer-RPGs' versus 'console-RPGs.' When each tradition began to borrow heavily from the other, the technological basis of categorization became obsolete, replaced by a cultural comparison. Pelletier-Gagnon also examines the paradoxical tension of a 'Japanese RPG' created not only in the studio offices of Tokyo but also in offices around the world.[6] The term 'JRPG' is thus not an uncritical or uncontested term, but a term which people generally agree to be more useful than not, pointing to a certain genre accepted by fans, critics and the industry as something distinct.[7] So what constitutes a JRPG? Most critics agree that the JRPG provides deep immersion through strong emphasis on story and character development.[8] The Japanese RPG tends to have a more linear narrative structure than its Western counterpart, with fewer meaningful choices in the script that change in-game events.[9] JRPGs tend to have turn-based battle sequences with the questing party arranged on one side of the screen against their opponent on the other; but the Japanese origin of a game is not always visually apparent.

Although many JRPGs follow anime-style conventions in character design, others use *mukokuseki* or 'culturally odourless' aesthetics, with blond, blue-eyed characters blending into their European high-fantasy settings.[10] Analysing the visual aspect of JRPGs, some scholars focus on the idea of 'cuteness' (*kawaii*) in the genre, while others draw attention to the 'media mix' of manga, anime and games as a seamlessly interconnected mega-text based in the same fictional universe.[11] Tomàs Grau de Pablos (2014) takes a different approach, analysing the particular methods used to create 3D space that gives a certain 'feel' to the JRPG environment. Others have analyzed specific game titles in terms of Japanese values, attitudes and religious beliefs imbued in the narrative.[12] Matt Barton makes the distinction that Western games tend to be darker in tone, while JRPGs mix lighter humour and silliness into the character design and plot to ease tension and appeal to a wider audience (2008: 208, 214). All these approaches are helpful when thinking about the defining elements of the genre.

Unlike fighting games played in the arcade, RPGs are played on a PC or home gaming console connected to a television.[13] That television may be placed in the living room (domestic public space) or child's room (domestic private space), but the assumption is that the RPG will be played primarily by one person. Japanese RPGs tend to be long, taking anything from 50–100 hours or more to complete. JRPGs are known for their 'grinding,' the painstaking process of killing minor recurring opponents over and over again to accumulate greater Health and Magic points for characters, gaining strength (or levelling up) in

order to tackle the next challenge. This all takes time, but gameplay rewards patience and courage – players who avoid shortcuts in favour of battling their way through the game environment will level up more efficiently, often collecting rewards like treasures or potions dropped by monsters they have felled in battle. Rare treasures are hidden in the gameworld, and completionists seek these out to add extra challenge to their gameplay. The main point is that JRPGs occupy the player for a significant length of time, and they tend to be a solitary occupation.[14] This allows for a high degree of player-character identification, immersion in the gameworld, and rich narrative experience.

Chris Kohler points to the 'meteoric rise' of the role-playing genre in Japan before the rest of the world, achieving high sales and global popularity in a short space of time (2005: 83). There is an element of exoticism and Orientalism to discourse on the JRPG, with fans, critics and academics expecting Japanese games to be somehow different or strange when compared to Western games (Picard 2014). However, too much strangeness is a bad thing: Schules (2012) has shown how poor localization produces 'immersive dissonance' in the JRPG.[15] The case studies for this chapter were all big-selling titles in the global market, successfully localized into English and other languages. I will examine some slippages below to highlight the relationship between language and social realism in the game environment, but in general the games analyzed provide a smooth immersive experience. Many games under discussion formed series that endure today, seen in the latest titles *Final Fantasy XV* (2016)*, Tales of Berseria* (2016), and *Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (2017). Others have crossed genre boundaries, producing such interesting games as *Dragon Quest Builders* (2016), blurring the definition of 'JRPG' and extending it to new audiences and new modes of play. Through all these games, shared character types, tropes and narrative themes provide common ground for the JRPG as a whole.

Absentee parents, youth and the quest

I have taught Japanese videogames at UD for ten years, and without fail, every semester, one bright student will look at the syllabus and send me the link to the 'Grand List of Console Role-Playing Game Clichés,' a popular and funny website by Mark Sachs dedicated to commonplace formulas and truisms of the JRPG genre. In the top ten are two of note:

> Logan's Run Rule: RPG characters are young. Very young. The average age seems to be 15, unless the character is a decorated and battle-hardened soldier, in which case he might even be as old as 18. Such teenagers often have skills with multiple weapons and magic, years of experience, and never ever worry about their parents telling them to come home from adventuring before bedtime. By contrast, characters more than twenty-two years old will cheerfully refer to themselves as washed-up old fogies and be eager to make room for the younger generation.

<u>Single Parent Rule:</u> RPG characters with two living parents are almost unheard of. As a general rule, male characters will only have a mother, and female characters will only have a father. The missing parent either vanished mysteriously and traumatically several years ago or is never referred to at all. Frequently the main character's surviving parent will also meet an awkward end just after the story begins, thus freeing him of inconvenient filial obligations.

(Sachs 2004)

I find it significant that these two rules are presented together, as numbers 5 and 6 in the list. There are 192 'grand clichés' in all, most of them ringing true for the majority of Japanese role-playing games. Sachs says:

Games like *Final Fantasy*, *Grandia*, and *Skies of Arcadia* set a standard of majesty and wonder and immersion that American game designers are challenged to match. And yet, as I play the latest masterpiece to come out of Japan I sometimes can't help the feeling that, somehow, I've seen it all before.…

(Sachs 2004)

The formulaic nature of the JRPG has led some critics to call the genre 'stagnant,' with the player's progression through the linear narrative more like a visual novel than a role-play experience.[16] Games of the 1990s in particular tended to follow a set format. Big-selling titles such as *Final Fantasy, Legend of Zelda, Dragon Quest, Tales of …* and *Fire Emblem* all share the basic building blocks of absent parent, quest-based adventuring, and the search for origins, often accompanied by amnesia on the part of the young hero. This raises a few questions. Was there something about the 1990s in Japan that led to this kind of focus on the absent parent, or is it just a useful narrative device? If this trope is also present in other Japanese media, then why is the JRPG so well known for it? Should the absentee parent cliché be understood differently in the context of the videogame medium? These are the questions I hope to answer in this chapter.

   Of course, the absentee parent motif is common in literature and folktales around the world. Literary genres like the *bildungsroman* are based on the idea of a young man setting off alone to discover the world and himself. The absentee parent narrative certainly enables the hero to embark on an exciting quest without 'inconvenient filial obligations.'[17] The youth in the text is an independent subject-agent, with a freedom unknown to young readers at home. In Japan, such adventures were found in war tales and detective stories for boys, manga adventures serialized in *Weekly Shōnen Jump* magazine, and long-running anime series with a young male character in the lead role, from *Naruto* to *Pokémon*.[18] Videogames are no exception, and JRPGs have been marketed to the young audience, as we shall see below. The hero of these tales is the *shōnen*, the youth, on the verge of becoming an adult but still young enough to jump

around, play and get into trouble. The character's visual design is fairly consistent: the spiky hair, big eyes and cheeky grin combine to show the character's dynamism – how *genki* he is – his 'get up and go.' This admirable quality in the young Japanese male was established in the Meiji period, when the Boy Scouts appeared in Japan and Samuel Smiles's book 'Self-help' extolled the values of *risshin-shusse* – standing up on your own two feet and getting out into the world to make something of yourself.[19] The tension in the JRPG (and in many Japanese cultural products) is that this sounds like a lot of work. Youthful exuberance is balanced by insecurity, as the hero must adjust to his place in the world and define his identity. Meanwhile, the three great values of friendship, perseverance, and winning that provided the criteria for editorial decisions at *Weekly Shōnen Jump* also define the party-based battles and grinding of the JRPG.[20]

As a narrative device, the absentee parent provides a good excuse for other characters to help the hero. In quest-based narratives, finding NPCs (non-player characters) to talk to is one of the immediate objectives of entering any new space in the gameworld. NPCs will offer information, useful items or even their own skills, joining the party and travelling together with the hero. While most JRPGs follow this model, Nintendo's *Legend of Zelda* series has the main character Link exploring the world on his own, sometimes with a sidekick or guiding sprite to help him. *Legend of Zelda* is seen more as an adventure game rather than a JRPG, but is also one of the most well-known examples of a young hero facing obstacles under his own power.[21] In this case, the offer of help from NPCs is even more important, illustrated early in the first game, *The Legend of Zelda* (1986). In a famous scene, the wandering hero enters a cave where he meets a wizard, who says 'It's dangerous to go alone. Take this,' and hands Link a sword. This is Link's first weapon, and is useful indeed. Until the player discovers this cave it is extremely difficult to explore the gameworld, as Link is attacked by monsters at every turn. Armed with a weapon, Link can defeat the monsters and progress onto different screens, exploring the world map to piece together the spatial dimensions of the game as well as its central mission.

Link has seen many incarnations since then, with 19 *Legend of Zelda* games released across many different platforms (not including spin-offs). Consistent elements in character design are Link's green outfit and pointed ears, his quest to save Zelda and the kingdom of Hyrule from the evil Ganon, and his isolated social status. In most games, as we find in *Twilight Princess* (2006), Link lives alone in a village with children and adults present. He appears as a young man on the verge of adulthood, ready to prove his worth as a true member of society. This 'verge of becoming' position is useful for both narrative and gameplay, as the player can use Link as a blank slate to explore the world, learn about it, and discover Link's purpose and mission.[22] Link is not a child – throughout the series children appear in idyllic terms, running, laughing and playing in the villages while adults do the work of shopkeeping, guarding, and tilling the fields. Link's family becomes significant in some titles – Link lives with his uncle at the beginning of *A Link to the Past* (1992), while his missing sister provides the plot for *Wind Waker* (2002), in which his grieving grandmother also appears. In *Breath*

of the Wild (2016), Link's father once fought as a soldier in the Hyrulian guard, making him complicit in civil war and environmental destruction. However, the parents themselves do not appear in the game, and Link remains a free individual agent.

Most JRPG series feature abandonment narratives, with the main character's parents dying early or vanishing in mysterious circumstances. Square's *Final Fantasy* series (1987–2016) is renowned for using main characters who have been orphaned or abandoned. The 'absentee parent' trope is present for *every* game in the series, from *Final Fantasy I* through to *XV*, affecting not only the main character but also others in the party. In *Final Fantasy III* the entire questing party is made up of orphans, with all four companions left parentless from the same cataclysmic event. Even when parents are present, irreconcilable arguments between the generations make young party members unwilling or unable to return home. As with Link, the lack of parental authority allows young characters the freedom to embark on heroic quest narratives, but in *Final Fantasy* the search for the missing parent often forms the quest itself. Similarly, *Secret of Mana* (Square, 1993) has the main character searching for their missing mother.[23] Variations include lost siblings – the young Alis Landale of *Phantasy Star* (Sega, 1987) seeks revenge for her brother, killed by the government.[24] Sometimes both parents and siblings are lost: protagonist Cress Albana in *Tales of Phantasia* (Namco, 1995) lost his parents when the marauding army of Mars razed their village to the ground, while his best friend Chester lost his sister. The 'absent parent' plot device allows for many variations on revenge narratives, seen in Nintendo's *Fire Emblem* series. In *Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon and the Blade of Light* (1990) King Cornelius is betrayed and killed, leaving Prince Marth to avenge his father and rescue his sister. The second game *Fire Emblem Gaiden* (1992) turns the plot around, so that the young hero Alm defeats the evil Emperor Rudolf only to find out that the Emperor is in fact his father and his namesake, Albein Alm Rudolf.[25]

In sum, early JRPGs from the 1980s and 90s created a template for the genre, using similar losses of family members as the impetus for adventure. Since these games were developed for home consoles, young players could play for hours (without worrying about school curfews in the arcade), losing themselves in the narrative and feeling that they *were* the main character. The lack of parents in the stories gave the players a freedom to explore, to grow, and develop their own problem-solving abilities. Miyamoto Shigeru says of the first *Legend of Zelda*:

> I tried to make a game where the next move the player is supposed to take is not already determined. Each player has to decide the route he or she thinks is best and take the best possible action, and by doing so, players can encounter a variety of wonders. Another big element is that the player themselves can grow. In the game you see and feel that Link actually grows. At the same time, players can become better game players. I believe that this is the most definitive difference with RPG games that make use of parameters to show such a growth.
>
> (DeMaria and Wilson 2004: 240)[26]

The idea of growth was thus extremely important for both main character and player, providing one of the main forces behind game design in terms of maps, challenges, obstacles and opponents. Alice Byrnes (1995) has analyzed the 'child's journey' in literature as a metaphor for on-going development and personal growth. This certainly applies to the JRPG, and may be one of the reasons for its high sales and wide appeal among both children and adults.

Some companies specifically targeted the younger audience through savvy use of artwork and advertising venues. In 1986 Horii Yuji from the Enix studios designed *Dragon Quest* with a manga-style aesthetic, using character designs by *Dragon Ball* creator Toriyama Akira.[27] The game achieved widespread popularity and fast sales by running articles and advertising in *Weekly Shōnen Jump*. Kohler reports that the magazine's circulation increased from 4.5 million per week to over six million as a result of the *Dragon Quest* tie-ins, with a *Dragon Quest* manga serialized later (2005: 87). Although *Final Fantasy* is better known in the West, *Dragon Quest* (or *Dorakue* for short) was more popular in Japan:

> Though Enix expanded to release other titles, Dragon Quest remained its bread and butter, becoming the single most popular game series in Japan and an indelible part of the country's popular culture. Dragon Quest was so popular that the Tokyo government demanded that Enix not release new games on school days after children across the country skipped school *en masse* to line up for the latest version.
>
> (DeMaria and Wilson 2004: 374)

Dragon Quest remains popular, with 11 main titles and numerous spin-offs, plus manga, anime and light novel adaptations. Many of the main games are still available in re-releases on contemporary platforms such as mobile phones and Kindle. Character goods are readily available at street stalls and department stores in Japan, with the appealing monster Slime providing a cute rounded shape perfect for plush toys.

On the subject of marketing games to children, the ultimate JRPG example is *Kingdom Hearts* (2002), designed as a co-production between Square Enix and Disney Interactive. Square's Nomura Tetsuya supplied new character designs in the *shōnen/shōjo* style for the Japanese characters, and Disney contributed its roster of Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy and pals, with settings such as Wonderland, Halloween Town and associated characters like Alice and Jack Skellington. *Kingdom Hearts* is often listed among other JRPGs with the absentee parent trope, but Sora's mother appears early in the game, waking up her teenage son through an off-screen dialogue. After an invasion destroys their island home, Sora searches not for his parents but for his lost friends Riku and Kairi. Travelling from world to world and battling the Heartless, Sora encounters many characters from Square's *Final Fantasy* games, including Cloud Strife (*FFVII*), Squall Leonhart (*FFVIII*) and Auron (*FFX*), among others. To my mind, this game falls flat not only for the disjunctive clash of art styles and character designs, but also in its consumerist leveraging of past characters. Square

Enix's latest offering, *Final Fantasy XV* (2016) is more successful in referring to past games, with happy-go-lucky Prompto singing songs about Chocobos and humming the *Final Fantasy* victory tune in battle.

Lineage and legends: searching for origins

Related to the absentee parent trope in the JRPG is a broader search for family origins. We see this in the main plot of the first two *Dragon Quest* games, notable for their emphasis on family and lineage. The player's first task is to name their character, a questing hero descended from the great warrior Erdrick.[28] To enhance the mythic feel, *Dragon Quest* uses archaic language, translated wittily into 'Olde English' in the localized version. For example, whenever my character Cedric visited the King of Tantegel, the King would say: 'Brave Cedric! Thou art returned to us! By my troth, thou growest mightier with each passing day!'[29] The encouraging speech strengthens the player's connection to their character, who 'grows mightier' through the player's increasing skill. Through the game, NPCs comment on the hero's physical resemblance to the legendary Erdrick, reinforcing the player's desire to fulfil the ancestor's legacy. Gameplay strengthens the connection, as acquiring various items of Erdrick's ancient armour and accoutrements allows the hero access to shrines and caves where sages bestow magical items upon him. At the end, the hero faces some choices – to fight or join with the Dragonlord, and if he wins the fight, to marry Princess Gwaelin or strike out on his own. Defeating the Dragonlord and winning the Princess's hand are preferable; if the player chooses to join the Dragonlord and rule on the side of evil, the game abruptly ends. Marriage leads directly to the next game, as *Dragon Quest II* follows the story of the hero's descendants (and therefore the descendants of the mighty Erdrick) taking place 100 years later.

The generational adventure idea was also exploited to great effect by *Fire Emblem: Genealogy of the Holy War* (1996), developed by Intelligent Systems for the SNES. The story is told across two generations, with the young Seliph avenging his father Prince Sigurd, betrayed and murdered in years past. Sega's *Phantasy Star III: Generations of Doom* (1990) follows the story of three generations, with the Orakian hero Rhys serving as the first player-controlled character, succeeded by his son and grandchildren as the story unfolds through time. In these ways, the absent parent trope has been expanded and built upon to incorporate ancestors and descendants. This variation adds extra layers of mystery and urgency to the narrative, as the player-character must look through the spatial environment to discover lost objects, as well as sift through the memories of aged people who knew their relatives, before those memories disappear. Both ideas of uncovering the past are suggested by the word 'legend' (*densetsu*) common to many JRPG titles, including *Zeruda no Densetsu* (*Legend of Zelda*), and *Seiken Densetsu*, which became the *Secret of Mana* series in English. *Dragon Quest II* had the Japanese sub-title *Akuryo no Kamigami* (Pantheon of Evil Spirits), but the English-language title 'Luminaries of the Legendary Line'

emphasizes the epic narrative of lineage by adding 'legend' and the alliterative reference to Erdrick and his descendants. *Dragon Quest III* follows the tale of Erdrick himself, the localized title *Into the Legend* highlighting this aspect of the game.[30] *Dragon Quest III* broke sales records on the day of its Japanese release, and by all accounts it was this game that caused all the school truancies noted above.[31]

Square's *Xenogears* (1998) takes the 'absentee parent' and 'search for origins' tropes to new levels by incorporating the main character's own lost memories into the gameplay. The main character Fei Fong Wong is adopted, brought to the village three years prior to the game's action. Fei has amnesia and must recover memories of his past as he travels through the gameworld. Fei is himself descended from Abel, whose longing for his lost mother defines much of his character. *Xenogears* thus uses the lost parent, amnesia, and generational storytelling to great effect. Its late placement in the decade of the 1990s shows how the 'absent parent' trope developed to this point in the JRPG genre. The games mentioned in this section span a number of different gameplay modes even within the genre – tactical roleplay, turn-based battle, some with adventure and strategy elements – but their shared focus on lost parents and memory bring them together into a coherent thematic whole.[32] I think there are two reasons for this thematic focus in the JRPG. One has to do with the 'RPG,' meaning gameplay dynamics, and one has to do with the 'J,' meaning the reflection of Japan's social context in the 1980s and 1990s. The gameplay dynamic has several aspects, which I will look at in turn before examining the context of the JRPG.

Amnesia, immersion and social realism

Narratives involving lost and absent parents, hidden lineage, and revenge are linked closely to memory and the search for origins, making amnesia another great role-playing game cliché. Amnesia, or any kind of memory loss, enables the player to find out the main character's back story at the same time as the character, producing a high degree of identification. Katie Whitlock (2012) compares the use of lost memory in *Final Fantasy VII* (Square, 1997) and *Final Fantasy X* (Square, 2001) to show its function in narrative, performance, and character development. I will be looking at *FFVII* more closely in the next two chapters, so here I would like to concentrate on *Final Fantasy X*, variously pronounced as *Final Fantasy* 'ex' (following the Japanese title *ekkusu*) or 'ten.' Providing perhaps the most well-known example in the JRPG genre of a young hero with both amnesia and a lost parent, *Final Fantasy X* entered *The Guinness Book of Records* as the fastest-selling RPG in history, with pre-orders in the millions (Glenday 2008). The first game in the series to have a direct sequel, *Final Fantasy X-2*, the game was remastered in high definition in 2013.

The opening line of *Final Fantasy X*, 'Listen to my story,' is spoken by a young athlete named Tidus, who has lost his memory and slowly uncovered his origins through a long and arduous journey. It is now the player's role to play through Tidus's story as he recounts it, piecing together his backstory and

coming to understand the important role that Tidus has played in redeeming the world of Spira. Tidus grew up in what is now the 'lost city' of Zanarkand, destroyed 1000 years in the past. He has been projected into the future and must find out what happened to his city as well as his family. Tidus's mother died when he was very young, for which he blames his father Jecht, a good-for-nothing drunk who disappeared early in Tidus's life. Tidus's hatred for his father is seen as an indulgence by his friend Wakka, as we saw in the quote at the beginning of this chapter: 'Sounds like a luxury to me. I don't even remember my parents.' But Tidus's relationship with his missing father proves critical to the main narrative. Tidus (and the player) can discover information about the past by talking to NPCs, or by finding Memory Spheres – small round objects that release stories and memories recalled by various people.[33] When Tidus finds Jecht's Memory Sphere, he realizes that he is actually following in his father's footsteps. As a warrior-hero, Jecht had accompanied a famous Summoner – a spiritual leader and fighter – on his last mission to save the planet from a monster called Sin. As Tidus carries out his mission to aid the Summoner Yuna, he replicates Jecht's mission to aid Yuna's father in times past. In this way, Tidus's relationship with his missing father illuminates past events and ultimately dictates the terms of the final boss battle: Jecht sacrificed himself and took the form of Sin in order to save the world of Spira, so Tidus must fight against his own father to defeat Sin in its current incarnation.

Thinking about *Final Fantasy X* in terms of narrative structures, the 'absent parent' plot device leads to a number of different outcomes. If reasons for a parent's death are known, this most commonly creates a revenge narrative. If the parent turns out to be still alive, this can lead to a happy ending and reconciliation, or alternately, open the way for a number of interesting plot twists. Perhaps the parent is now the enemy; the hero may kill the parent by mistake; or the hero may turn out to be a clone of the parent. These plot devices are used extensively across media and across the globe (see *Star Wars, Oedipus Rex* and *Judge Dredd*, for example). But the Japanese case is interesting for the conjunction of absent parents and clone narratives of the 1990s, pointing to anxieties not only over changes in family structures and society, but also over reproductive technology and its possible abuses. In Chapter 6 I will return to the question of bioethics in the JRPG and other genres. Here, I would like to note that the clichéd 'absent parent' narrative has some unique qualities in the videogame medium. The player here is controlling the hero; the player's actions decide whether Tidus will win the battle, and his success in the quest depends on the player's skill as a gamer. When the parent is the final boss, the degree of player-character identification forged during gameplay works against the player's own psyche, as they must now kill their avatar's parent to win the game. Videogames thus have an added layer of emotional intensity in the parent's death – literally at the player's own hands.

The 'search for origins' narrative has a number of other effects particular to the RPG. Most importantly, it creates a sense of social realism, building a network of realistic and believable relationships in the game. Although *Final*

Fantasy X uses Memory Spheres, the main way in which Tidus finds out about his past is by questioning others. This means seeking out other characters distributed throughout the gameworld and pressing an 'action' button in order to speak to them. The character may or may not have anything interesting to say. Some will be annoyed. Some will offer information freely; others will only give information after the player completes a side quest. A chance meeting could turn into a deep conversation, shedding light on the main character's past, or it could result in the new character swearing to join the hero on their quest. These interactions create a feeling of real bonding, and relationships are formed and deepened through the narrative. Alison McMahan (2003: 73–75) argues that the quality of social interaction within a game is one of the main ways in which immersion is produced in the player, together with other factors such as social realism and perceptual realism (whether characters, objects, environments and events in the game are believable). Amnesia, the absent parent, and the search for origins can be seen as language-based shortcuts to achieving social realism and thereby immersion. Recalling Mackay's idea that engrossment in the story and environment takes place *through* the character, it appears that the designer's placement of that character in relation to others in the environment, and communication between characters, are key to the immersive experience.

Language is an important mechanism by which the main character is situated in relation to other people and the wider environment in the gameworld. The player invests meaning in their character through acquiring knowledge about the character's background, personal belief system, attributes such as physical attractiveness or strength, and attitudes towards others. When the main character suffers from amnesia or some kind of identity crisis, the ways in which surrounding characters talk about and speak to the avatar will have a profound effect on the player. Playing the game in the original Japanese, this is achieved through the honorifics people use when addressing you, what kind of suffixes people attach to your name, or the use of slang to create a casual intimate atmosphere. All these linguistic hints help the player piece together the social status and other attributes of their character. Language also establishes the background and personality of other characters, and creates a co-operative group dynamic, binding the group together in the face of opposition. Because the player-character functions as part of a larger questing group, communication and dialogue are integral to the success of the quest.

The importance of language to the JRPG is immediately apparent from the vast amount of in-game text assets contained in each game product. Localization expert Heather Maxwell Chandler has shown that the RPG has more text assets to be translated than any other genre (2005: 138–141). Douglas Schules (2012) looks at language in the JRPG in terms of a linguistic code, enabling gameplay in similar ways to ludic rules and algorithms. When the linguistic code breaks down, gameplay is compromised, and the player experiences 'immersive dissonance.' This is possible in the case of grammatical and typographical errors in the original language, but the possibility for error is greatly magnified in the localization process. Schules uses the example of *Lux-Pain* (Killaware, 2009) as

a poorly localized game in which linguistic codes and immersion break down completely. It is unclear from the translation whether the game is set in Japan or America, confusing player expectations regarding characters' behaviour and tastes. Because JRPGs are so language-dependent, any linguistic error can compromise social realism and player immersion. While translation provides many opportunities for this kind of dissonance, cut-scenes are also a major source of problems for immersion in the JRPG.

Cut-scenes and immersion in the JRPG

Early JRPGs depended on text and dialogue boxes to introduce characters, establish relationships between them, and provide narrative exposition. Over time, dialogue boxes shifted to voice acting, and increasing use of FMV (full motion video) for cinematic sequences.[34] The JRPG genre, and *Final Fantasy* in particular, tends to use lengthy cut-scenes, which can be seen as disrupting active gameplay.[35] In any game, cinematic sequences are common at the beginning and end, as well as important turning points, such as defeating a difficult boss. But in the JRPG, cinematic cut-scenes are used much more frequently. The genre's dependence on story and character lends itself well to cinematic expression. Cut-scenes are activated on meeting important characters, and are often used for flashbacks and emotional interactions between characters – usually points of high dramatic interest. If the cut-scene is particularly moving, it evokes the player's empathy with their own character or other characters in the game. Since so many JRPG narratives depend on amnesia and the search for origins, cut-scenes often deliver startling revelations about the past, raising narrative tension and deepening the player's understanding of the character. In other words, the break in gameplay not only shows the character's psychological development, but also strengthens player-character identification.

Just as in a film or a book, this kind of intense character development, high tension and drama involves the player in the narrative. But unlike a film or book, there is a sense of disjunction between *doing* and *watching* when the cut-scene starts. Scholars have examined the 'interactive fallacy' of the videogame from many different angles, but I agree with James Newman (2013: 73–78), who argues that cut-scenes provide a space for mental reflection, where the player can process what has happened in the game to that point and plan their next moves. In providing a physical break from the demands of active gameplay, the cut-scene gives a mental and emotional jolt to the player, keeping them invested in the story and propelling them forward in both the narrative of the game and their own levels of progress. In the most basic terms, once the cut-scene has finished, the player once again takes up the controller and restarts gameplay based on what they have just found out. This gives a renewed sense of mission for the player, who must act on what they know and make the character go somewhere or do something. Although the JRPG is highly linear, I would argue that this disjunction between cut-scene and gameplay is highly effective in creating a *sense* of agency in the player.

In playing any game, the player is not experiencing complete suspension of disbelief so much as a delicate balance, simultaneously embodied in the physical environment of the living room and also in the fictional world of the game environment. As Jesper Juul (2005) has demonstrated, the player is at all times doubly conscious of the game as a constructed set of rules that limit movement and action, and as a play-performance of narrative progression through a fictional world. Cut-scenes intrude on this balance, as neither rules nor play-performance. As pre-rendered inserts into the game action, they are clearly designer-directed sequences. Some designers manage the balance more deftly than others. One problem arises when cut-scenes are unskippable, as with *Final Fantasy X*. If a player failed at a task, they had to sit through the task's cinematic introduction again before retrying it. When the cut-scene was long, this created interminable re-loading and boring repetition. Conversations between characters became unnatural, and the player's attention was drawn to the constructed nature of the medium. This problem applied to both Japanese and localized versions of the game.

Two problems in localized versions did not affect Japanese players as much as the foreign audience. First, a lengthy cinematic cut-scene showed a romantic interlude between Tidus and Yuna, as they swam together in a forest pool under the night sky. The scene was accompanied by a beautiful song, 'Suteki da ne' ('Isn't it Wonderful?'), retained in its Japanese version in the English-language release. Players accustomed to English-language text and dialogue throughout the game to that point were shocked on hearing the Japanese song, which they were unable to understand. The sense of disjunction was emphasized by the fact that *Final Fantasy X* was the first game in the series to use voice acting, and by the enhanced photorealistic graphics which made Tidus and Yuna look more physically Japanese in this scene, especially in terms of their facial features.

Another problematic cut-scene in *Final Fantasy X* was the infamous 'laughing scene,' in which Yuna encourages Tidus to laugh in order to lift his spirits. One of the most important Japanese values embodied in the questing party of the JRPG is the idea of social harmony or *wa* (和), with each member working together for the good of the group. Tidus laughs alone and very loudly, forcing the laughter until it becomes natural. This raises the spirits not only of Tidus and Yuna, but also of the group, as Auron, Wakka, Lulu and Kimahri look on from their guard posts. In this scene the disjunction is based on cultural difference. Where Japanese players found the scene unremarkable, Western players found it confusing and embarrassing. The use of laughter to ease tension in Japanese culture is leveraged into the overall quest narrative, bolstered by game dynamics in Tidus's battle ability 'Cheer.' Notably the first ability that Tidus can learn, 'Cheer' raises the strength statistics of all active party members and bolsters their defence against physical attacks. Through this battle dynamic, gameplay reinforces the narrative, as 'Cheer' allows Yuna's journey to be hopeful and optimistic even in the direst circumstances.

The 'Suteki da ne' scene and the laughing scene caused disjunction for the overseas audience based on linguistic and cultural differences. But the

unskippable cut-scene was problematic for all players. In these examples, the player's sense of agency is lost, along with the sense of belonging to the world of Spira that the game has tried so hard to establish. If cut-scenes in and of themselves can be seen as disruptive, then any additional disruption is experienced as overload. In the role-playing genre, where social realism and feeling 'in-character' are paramount, these problems can be particularly troublesome.

Designers of other JRPG series have found innovative ways around the cut-scene problem. One method is to make the extra content optional, retaining the player's sense of decision-making and choice. Namco's *Tales Of...* series uses 'skits' between characters to explain or establish personal relationships. Called 'chats' in Japanese (*chatto*), skits are triggered by pressing a designated button on the controller. Portraits of the anime-style characters appear on the screen, and dialogue appears as text (accompanied by voice acting in later games). The characters' faces change to show different emotions as the conversation progresses. Skits are used for comedy and drama, as well as idle chit-chat that does little to progress the main storyline but adds depth to character interactions. Characters talk about themselves, each other, events that have just occurred in the gameworld, or the party's next objective. In this way, the skit acts as a reflective space which helps the player position themselves and their progress in the bigger picture of the narrative as a whole. Players who actively choose to see the skits experience a greater understanding of each character's psyche and personality, and gain extra insight into their motivation and reasons for in-game objectives. In terms of 'interactivity,' the skit places the player into the mode of a viewer of anime or reader of manga. However, the fact that all skits are optional allows players the choice of whether to engage in this extra level of character exposition.

Another method is to integrate the cut-scene more closely into gameplay mechanics such as world travel and spatial exploration. Nintendo's *Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* uses innovative cut-scene integration to evoke the memory flashbacks so necessary in the genre. At the opening of this game, Link awakens from a 100-year sleep with no memory of his identity or purpose. For reasons unknown to him, he possesses a piece of technology called a Sheikah slate which holds photographs of certain locations in the Kingdom of Hyrule. If Link travels to each of these places, he is assured by a tribal elder, he will remember the events which transpired there, and piece together his shared past with Princess Zelda. In terms of gameplay, Link's memories are stored in actual locations in the gameworld. The player must find each location based on the perspective and direction of its photograph, as well as hints from the travelling artist Pikango. Arriving at the location, the player loses control of Link as a cut-scene plays: Link takes out the photograph, compares it to the current location, and his eyes widen in shock as he experiences a moment of recognition. An embedded cut-scene then plays, opening and closing with a sepia-toned sequence, as he remembers an event from 100 years ago. In this way memory loss and the accessing of memory serve a large role in gameplay, as it is up to the player to navigate the world map and place Link in the correct position to activate the

cut-scene. Accessing Link's memory is thereby constructed as an act of agency on the part of the player.

   Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild and the *Tales Of...* series have thus found different methods to deliver cut-scenes in ways that incorporate player choice and action. Another way to avoid the problem of the 'passive' cut-scene is to use a dedicated game mechanic to deliver social meaning instead of any kind of cinematic sequence, in which case the social ideology of the game will permeate the gameplay in its entirety. The later *Persona* games of Atlus's *Shin Megami Tensei* series depend heavily on social relationships for character development and narrative progress. The 'S-link' (or social link) introduced in *Persona 3* (2006) is based on older mechanics of dating simulations, in which the more time the protagonist spends with a character he is dating, the stronger their feelings become for him, resulting in sex or a love relationship. [36] Atlus used this idea to create a sophisticated battle mechanic. Each character has a 'Persona' which can be summoned during battle, to carry out actions such as attacking or casting spells. The Persona is an aspect of the character's psyche, and can be strengthened through the character's own actions in the gameworld. Developing a relationship with another character (for example, by engaging in conversation) will grow the Social Link represented by that character and raise its rank, allowing more powerful Personas to be summoned in battle. In this way, social interaction outside the battle arena has a direct impact on the battle itself.

   Persona games in general may be understood as a sophisticated mixture of simulation and role-play elements, sharing many features with dating sims and visual novels. Like these genres, the *Persona* games include multiple endings, dependent on player choices at turning points in the narrative. *Persona* games tend to be set in realistic town environments, with characters spending time in schools, movie theatres, cafés and their homes. The feeling of realistic life simulation is enhanced by onscreen information about the day of the week, time of day, phase of the moon and so on. Characters need to eat, socialize, study, and exercise to maintain successful statistics like intelligence, charm, courage and strength. Such games have been criticized for taking the place of 'real life,' with the stereotype of the *otaku* attaining social relationships only in the virtual world. Nonetheless, the importance that all these games place on social interaction demonstrates the designers' acknowledgement that social interaction is important in life.[37] As may be inferred from the word 'persona,' one of the main themes of the series is the depths of the human psyche, with characters aiming to discover their true selves. The relationship between the individual character and the wider social environment is perhaps one of the greatest recurrent themes of the *Persona* series, as well as its dating sim and visual novel cousins.

The self in society

This relationship between individual and society lies at the heart of the role-playing genre in Japan. The 'role' indicates both construction of self, and the positioning of that self in relation to others. The player controls the main

character, identifying most closely with that character as their representative on the screen (their avatar). But in most JRPG games with a questing party, the player simultaneously identifies with the party as a whole. The doubled identification process is expressed with humour in the earlier *Final Fantasy* games, through the visual presence of characters on screen. During world map travel or going from one place to another, the player-character appears as an individual. But entering a location in which a cut-scene is to take place, the main character comes to a stop. Standing still, the other characters in the party pop out of his body, in a very physical reminder that they are with him at all times. They, too, are facets of the player's game experience, and the player must take charge of their statistics, health, weapons, equipment, and magical spells. Game strategy involves not only the main character but the entire party, and the player must switch fluidly between acting in-character and as-manager, overseeing the party's health for a successful outcome. In battle sequences, the player actively controls the actions of all party members in the fight, deciding whether a certain character will use a magical spell for attack or healing, equip a certain weapon for specific damage effects, or warp out of the dungeon altogether. In this way, battle sequences show the player as a multi-faceted 'self' rather than a single individual.[38]

The correlation of single player to main character is not always consistent. In some games, the main character is not always present for the entire adventure, replaced by sub-characters while incapacitated or imprisoned. In other games, the main character can be selected or changed at will, from a number of selectable people in the party. The most flexible case is *Final Fantasy VI*, in which up to 14 characters may be accessible, and chosen to make a party of four. In *Final Fantasy X*, the player can swap Tidus out for other characters in battle, although once normal gameplay resumes it will be Tidus who is controlled by the player. In later games, the entire party appears on screen during travel, moving through an active 3D environment in which monsters or other enemies may be encountered at any time. Party members also acquire varying degrees of autonomy, through pre-set battle actions. The many battle dynamics of the *Final Fantasy* series would make an interesting research project in their own right, shifting from turn-based direct input to programmable actions to real-time active scenarios. But in general, the player simultaneously controls a main character *and* the party as a whole, creating an interesting interpretation of the 'self' in this genre.

I believe that the 'self' in the JRPG draws on older forms of identity construction, voice, and point of view in Japanese literature, most notably the polyphonic tradition. In polyphonic literature, the reader hears not only the voice of the main character but also the voices of others in the story, experiencing a shifting point of view and narrative tone. We see this kind of fluidity in Heian-period literary conventions, but also in the novels of some modern writers.[39] It is not always clear exactly which character we are meant to sympathize with, creating an interesting dynamic between the author, who is manipulating the reader, and the reader, who is trying to determine whether the main character is trustworthy. The unreliable narrator is a big feature of polyphonic literature, and we see it

clearly in *Final Fantasy X*. When Tidus tells us 'Listen to my story,' we know that the entire adventure will be told from his point of view. But in fact, Tidus does not have to be present in all battles, and a major turning point in the narrative is told from Yuna's point of view instead. This makes us wonder, is Yuna's romantic reverie really a product of Tidus's wishful imagination? Did it really happen that way? It depends on how much we identify with Tidus as the singular self, or whether we are happy to entertain other voices as authentic and alternative representations of reality. In the polyphonic JRPG, the reader/player is at once the main character 'self' and also, at the same time, all the other selves as well.

In many ways, the JRPG as a genre has much in common with the *shishōsetsu*, the 'I-novel' that dominated Japanese literature for most of the twentieth century. The 'I-novel' focuses on the idea of the self as the individual in the modern age, situated in a complex and rapidly changing society. The I-novel and the JRPG involve the reader/player in the idea of the 'self' in very similar ways. Both are long, linear narrative forms which involve the reader/player in a deep relationship of intense identification with the main character. Both take a first-person viewpoint, in a similar search for meaning and origins. The psychological development of the main character is *your* psychological development, as you experience narrative events and think through their impact and meaning. Finally, the main character cannot progress mentally or emotionally in the narrative without coming into contact with others. It is the obligation of social interaction which provides much of the tension of the I-novel, as well as the mechanic of gameplay progress in the JRPG. Without contact with others, no progress can be made for the individual in modern Japan.

The I-novel was very much a product of its time, an expression of anxiety in a rapidly changing world. Japan is well known as a country which moved through the stages of feudalism to modern nationalism, industrialism and democracy extremely quickly, in a mere 100 years compared to the centuries of development experienced in Europe.[40] Novels of the Meiji period (1868–1912) are full of the sights and sounds of modernity, with clanging streetcars, factory gates, crowded department store counters, and electric lights. The I-novel was a method by which writers attempted to locate and cement their own place in this modern world, moving physically through the 'apparition' of urban Tokyo and intellectually through an onslaught of new ideas from Western literature and philosophy.[41] The emotional toll this took on writers and artists is clearly apparent from their work. In short, the I-novel arose in reaction to contemporary events, both reflecting and reflecting upon modern transformations. In the same way, the JRPG reflects anxieties of its own time. Although the 'absent parent' cliché is used in service to the RPG genre, providing effective justifications for many narrative structures, linguistic social immersion, and character-building, it is also a reflection of social breakdown in late twentieth-century Japan. Now that we have examined the relation between the absent parent and the 'RPG,' it is time to look at the absent parent in relation to the 'J' of real-world Japan.

Social context of the JRPG

Absent parent narratives are common in Japanese media, from literature and film to manga, anime and videogames. This theme was increasingly common from the 1980s onwards, when the stability of postwar Japanese society began to crack under various pressures. Many scholars have written on the breakdown of Japan's family system and the idea of 'one billion people who are all middle class' (*ichioku sōchūryū*).[42] In the 1960s and 70s, the idea of the middle class had formed a strong national identity, with the *sarariiman* (salaried white-collar worker) and his full-time housewife enjoying social stability, status and prestige through full-time employment and the consumer lifestyle.[43] From the 1980s particularly, middle-school children experienced intense pressure to succeed in academics and make their families proud.[44] These social and educational values were parodied in Morita Yoshimitsu's 1983 film *The Family Game*, a hilarious social satire that threw a harsh light on exam pressure, class inequality, and rigid family roles. The school bullying (*ijime*) that formed the backdrop to the film became a buzzword in newspapers, as juvenile delinquency, youth violence and school refusal increased.[45] School-based gang warfare was played for laughs in Yoshida Satoshi's manga *Shōnan Bakusōzoku* (sometimes translated as 'Biker Bombers of Shonan Beach'). Serialized from 1982–1987 in *Shōnen King* magazine, it was a comedic take on juvenile biker gang warfare and school life in the suburbs of Tokyo. Japan's education system was heavily criticized in TV series like *High School Graffiti* (*Hai Sukūru Rakugaki*, 1989), which depicted disaffected violent youth, most of whom remained unable to be taught by their empathetic teacher. Backed by the raucous punk music of The Blue Hearts, *High School Graffiti* was an exaggerated look at youth problems which were nonetheless very real for some.

The figure of the adolescent in Japanese society is most famously depicted in *Akira*, the global anime phenomenon based on Ōtomo Katsuhiro's best-selling manga series from 1988. *Akira* includes all the symbols of juvenile delinquency in the 1980s: bike gangs (*bōsōzoku*), drug abuse, social upheaval and untrustworthy adults. The two main characters, Tetsuo and Kaneda, are raised in an orphanage, dropped off by their parents and left to fend for themselves. The education system is portrayed as a joke, with violent teachers and sleeping students. Adults are unable to contain the powerful upheavals that Tetsuo experiences in his body and mind, and friendship disintegrates under the force of Tetsuo's individual strength. Susan Napier emphasizes the dynamism of teenage rebellion set against the 'monolithic and indifferent state,' an 'all-out adolescent resistance to an increasingly meaningless world' (2005: 41, 42). Napier reads *Akira* as 'a fresh expression of an alienated youth's search for identity,' and a tale of vengeance on the social order which abandoned him (2005: 43, 47). In *Akira, High School Graffiti* and *Shōnan Bakusōzoku*, children are set against an oppressive adult system. Parents and family are largely absent, in contrast to the stifling overprotection of the mother in *The Family Game*. In all cases, the children use violence to overcome inequities in their harsh school-based world.

If the 1980s showed cracks in the Japanese social system, the 1990s saw its collapse. Rampant inflation and an overheated real estate market were among factors that led to the economic 'bubble' bursting in 1991–1992, taking expectations of lifetime employment and secure social status along with it. The 1990s brought a deep economic recession to Japan, with the next ten years called 'the lost decade.' The post-bubble economy featured more economic inequality, instability, and more awareness of social class.[46] Former breadwinners lost their pride while other members of the family now needed to work; part-time jobs increased; 'freeters' (people without full-time employment) and NEETs (people not in employment, education or training) found more flexibility but less stability in life.[47] The sharp economic downturn had a number of social effects, including a rise in homelessness, psychological disorders and suicide (Vogel 2013: 163). Mary Brinton argues that non-elite youth were most affected, with 'psychological problems related to how they develop their sense of identity and their ability to trust society' (2011: xvii). From the 1980s through the 1990s there was a rise in single parent households, with higher rates of divorce, school truancy and bullying, juvenile crime, and 'compensated dating' (*enjo kōsai*), where schoolgirls would date older men for cash and other material rewards.[48]

The feminist critic Ueno Chizuko examined many of these social trends in her 1994 book *The Modern Family in Japan*. Ueno commented extensively on the disintegration of the traditional Japanese family system, and the effects of transitioning to the nuclear family or newly constructed ideas of 'family' which may not include blood ties. One effect of the social change that Ueno noticed in Japanese pop culture was the prevalence of 'new illusions of family' in novels and manga. Novelists like Yoshimoto Banana often created orphan protagonists, allowing readers to deny problematic relationships with their real parents and relate closely to the characters without parents. Orphan characters had a long tradition in stories written for young girls, often published in girls' magazines (Ueno 2009: 37). Ueno argued that in these stories, 'being an orphan does not mean isolation or severance but a starting point from which the person can start various relationships freely' (2009: 38). Ueno links this to another popular theme in Japanese media, in which children are able to connect to their previous life by some supernatural means. A previous life is something which has already ended, something 'involuntary and absolute,' in opposition to the fluid instability of the modern family (2009: 38–39).

Ueno Chizuko takes the orphan figure and narratives of previous lives in literature and manga as indicators of family instability in the 1990s. The JRPG genre may also be seen as a body of work that comments on the absent parent in Japanese society. Where Ueno makes the case for schoolgirl comics providing a psychological outlet for young people in a time of shifting social roles and structures, I would make an equal case for the JRPG providing this outlet in the digital realm. The JRPG focuses heavily on the development of the individual through relationships with others, providing an attractive virtual environment for those whose real-world social life is lacking. Commentators on Japanese youth in the 1990s have noted a lack of self-identity in the context of a 'relationless

society' (*muen shakai*) where people have trouble making friends, dating, and relating to family members (Vogel 2013: 166). The games detailed in this chapter may be read as social commentary, focusing ever more closely on the figure of youth and the importance of social structures, emphasizing stability and the forging of relationships as the way to cope with an uncertain world. Whether this commentary amounts to critique is another question, but the argument has certainly been made for films of the era which depict social breakdown affecting children.

Compared to artistic works from the 1980s, works from the post-bubble 1990s are much darker in tone. In 1995, Japan was rocked by two terrible events one after another – the Great Hanshin Earthquake in January and the Tokyo sarin gas attacks in March. Natural disasters and terrorism are by definition things that people can do nothing about, creating a sense of powerlessness. *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, airing on TV Tokyo from October 1995 to March 1996, encapsulates the shift very well.[49] In this series children are used and manipulated for adult ends, forced to fight against alien invaders in giant robots. The main characters have lost their parents to suicide or simple neglect, while the main character Shinji fights to assert his will against his all-powerful father, Ikari Gendo, and the Human Instrumentality Project, which seeks to merge all humans into one being to end their loneliness and isolation. The series ends with Shinji's realization that he needs other people in order to thrive, but this positive denouement is undone by the much darker films that followed in 1997, in which Shinji decides the fate of mankind is absolute loneliness, deserving only of death.[50]

The absolute mistrust of adult authority seen in *Akira* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is echoed in Takami Koushun's 1999 novel, *Battle Royale*. Fukasaku Kinji's film adaptation in 2000 attracted a strict R15 rating thanks to its violent, bloody scenes of middle-school students forced to kill one another on an island. The main premise of the story has the fictional government of a totalitarian Japanese state creating the 'Battle Royale' law, resulting in a television survival game broadcast as a warning to wayward and uncontrollable youth.[51] A strong contrast is drawn between the government and military establishment on the one hand, and innocent students on the other. Education is presented as an extension of military power over the citizens. In the character back stories (more detailed in the novel), most children have been abandoned, betrayed by their parents, sold into prostitution, or otherwise physically or mentally abused in childhood. Even the so-called 'normal students' have been victims of bullying in the school system itself. The suicide of the protagonist's father, which opens the film, feels similar to the suicide of Asuka's mother in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. But where Anno's work was animated, Fukasaku's use of actual middle-school students as actors made the violence feel much more real. The film and novel have both been analyzed as serious critiques of the Japanese government and educational system.[52]

In the early 2000s, novelists and filmmakers continued to use the late 1980s and early 90s as the setting for their explorations of social issues affecting children. For example, Kirino Natsuo's bestselling book *Grotesque* (2003) depicted

compensated dating and prostitution at Q High School, a prestigious private school in Tokyo. The book was partly based on the famous 'TEPCO office lady murder case' of 1997. Koreeda Hirokazu's award-winning film *Nobody Knows* (2004) was similarly based on the Sugamo child abandonment case of 1988. Koreeda's film follows four children abandoned by their mother, forced to fend for themselves in Tokyo. The oldest son Akira finds himself in charge of a young family at the age of 12, but is unable to save his sister from death. The film was widely understood as a critique of Japanese society which turns a blind eye to juvenile problems.[53]

The artistic focus on child abandonment and homelessness is not limited to fiction. *Homeless Middle School Student* (2007) is an autobiographical novel by Tamura Hiroshi, set in the summer of 1992 when he became homeless at the age of 13. The book became an instant best-seller, translated into many languages and adapted into manga, anime, TV drama and film. Alisa Freedman argues that the transmedia phenomenon represents 'a dominant strand of popular culture that promotes the family as the backbone of Japan and the sole unit of care' (2011: 388). Homelessness is depicted as personal adversity to be overcome, and not the government's problem. Much has been written on homelessness and precarity in contemporary Japan, but scholars agree that the 1990s were a major turning point in the socioeconomic crisis, with widening inequality, the relation-less society, and socially withdrawn youth (*hikikomori*) dominating public and intellectual discourse.[54] Perhaps the most pessimistic commentator is Michael Zielenziger (2006), who sees increasing numbers of *hikikomori* as symptomatic of a fundamentally broken society.[55]

From the range of examples mentioned in this section, we can see that child abandonment, homelessness, juvenile delinquency and other youth problems have been common themes in Japanese literature, film, television and manga, either produced in the 1980s to 1990s or using that time frame as a background setting. Just as these artistic works have been understood as social commentary and critique, the Japanese role-playing games produced in the same period can also be studied in similar ways. It is clear that the 'absent parent' trope is not just a JRPG cliché but also holds a very specific social meaning for Japan at this point in time. The narratives of the JRPG can be seen as intimately concerned with family structures and the empowerment of youth in response to the breakdown of traditional social ties. This raises the question, what can the JRPG bring to this representation that other media cannot?

Games as commentary and critique

I believe that the media-specificity of videogames can offer hope to the player in powerful ways. In the examples I examined above, *Akira* ends with the creation of a new universe, while *Neon Genesis Evangelion* ends with an epiphany that individual human beings need company and community to live fulfilling lives. *Battle Royale* urges the young audience to 'RUN!' and *Nobody Knows* engages the audience's empathy. The audience connects to and sympathizes with the

child characters, feels a sombre realization of social injustice, and comes away with either a hopeful outlook or a motive for action. In the case of a videogame, the onus is always on the player to act: if you don't do anything with the controller, Link or Tidus will just stand still.[56] At the end of the game – and this is true for all JRPGs of the classic era – you must overcome the final boss, save the planet, and keep fighting to the end. The overriding message to the player is 'Don't give up hope!' If the player loses at the first attempt, the save point offers an opportunity to try again. Perhaps the characters need to be levelled up, which is just a matter of putting in the time and effort to make the characters stronger. The emphasis on action, hope, and success through effort gives a *feeling* of control and agency to the player. The empowerment that young players found through playing the JRPG was reflected back into other kinds of narratives, particularly online serials and light novels, which took gameplay as the basic motivation for world-building.[57]

In this chapter I have argued that the JRPG medium provides intense player-character identification, a high degree of social realism constructed through language, and a long, linear narrative, allowing for a deep exploration of themes and issues. As such, the JRPG as an artistic medium provides effective commentary on social issues in particular. Family instability is so common in JRPG narratives that it has become a running joke, one of the all-time great JRPG clichés. But as is often the case, the cliché is rooted in social reality and may be seen as part of a much broader cultural commentary, a critique of the status quo and a lament for vanished institutions and social structures. It is perhaps no surprise that many of these narratives take place in a fictional world under threat from economic collapse, government totalitarianism, corporate monopolies and uncontrollable technology. As we saw in the last chapter, the Japanese game scholar Ishii Zenji emphasizes the idea of *jidai no nagare*, the 'flow of the times,' when analysing videogames. The social context – what was happening in Japan at the time the games were made – is important for our understanding of the games themselves. While this chapter has focused on JRPG narratives of the absent parent, these narratives are often thematically connected to other social, political, or economic anxieties. The following chapters will examine concerns over nuclear power and bioengineering, particularly cloning and other anxieties surrounding human reproduction.

Commentary and critique may both be understood in terms of the ideology of the game designer. As Gonzalo Frasca (2003) has argued, ideology may be put forward in a game through representation (including character and narrative), goal rules, and manipulation rules. Ideology is also put forward through specific mechanics of player-character identification and embodiment, as studied by James Paul Gee (2003, 2009) and Torben Grodal (2003). In the next two chapters, I analyze how player-character identification and embodiment work to effectively convey a game's ideology to the player. Controlling the main character, the player experiences active rather than passive learning. Identifying with an unreliable protagonist, the player becomes hyper-aware of the game as a constructed product, and thereby aware of the designer and their ideological goals.

This has been accomplished most effectively in two games which are widely hailed as innovative and critically astute: *Final Fantasy VII* (1997) and *Metal Gear Solid* (1998). The two protagonists Cloud Strife and Solid Snake are among the most recognizable videogame characters in the world, and the player-character identification process in both cases is convoluted and complex. Indeed, the complexity of the central figure is a large part of what makes the critique in these games so effective. I would suggest that the social commentary of the JRPG in the 1980s and early- to mid-1990s paved the way for these two games to emerge at the end of the century, targeting nuclear energy and bioengineering with clear and compelling critique.

Notes

1 See full script at Auronlu (2008).
2 Although non-Japanese games have also explored the absentee parent idea, the extent to which JRPG narratives depended on this device in the 1990s made it a defining point of the genre.
3 This applies to all RPGs, including tabletop games like *Dungeons and Dragons*, multiplayer online games like *World of Warcraft*, LARPing (live action roleplay) or war reenactments. See Fine (1983), Mackay (2001), Zagal and Deterding (2018).
4 For more on quest-based game structures see Aarseth (2004, 2005).
5 Mackay (2001: 23–26). Calleja (2011) prefers the term 'involvement' to the vague 'immersion', while McMahan (2003) prefers 'engagement.'
6 Pelletier-Gagnon (2011, 2018); also Consalvo (2009, 2016).
7 Pelletier-Gagnon (2018) observes that much of the inconsistency and vagueness of the term arose from its original use by fans on the internet, rather than rigorous critical categorization. Schules, Petersen and Picard (2018) further discuss JRPGs and their RPG context.
8 Schules (2012: 92–93) overviews the literature on this point.
9 Barton (2008: 208) notes that the linear narrative frames many discussions of JRPGs compared to Western games. Later JRPGs included multiple endings and more replayability.
10 Iwabuchi (2002) discusses *mukokuseki* aesthetics in the global marketplace.
11 Schules (2015) analyzes *kawaii* aesthetics in the JRPG; Picard and Pelletier-Gagnon (2015) discuss games and the 'media mix.'
12 Mitropolous (2009) examines Shinto in *Final Fantasy VII*, for example, while Washburn (2009) analyzes the negotiations of history in *Final Fantasy X*.
13 Picard (2014) states that the JRPG's strength in the overseas market created assumptions that Japanese games are only played on console systems, so Japanese PC games have been understudied. Enix designer Hidaka Tōru sees PC and console titles as interconnected: since console RPGs like *Dragon Quest* took so long to create, smaller PC games like *Ghandara* were a 'buffer product' to maintain sales (Szczpaniak 2014: 58–59).
14 Some titles incorporate multiplayer options: *Secret of Mana* was one of the first RPGs with a two-player configuration. *Tales Of...* games allow several players to control different characters.
15 For more on localization between the Japanese and US markets see Carlson and Corliss (2011).
16 Bioware co-founder Greg Zeschuk famously derided JRPGs for their 'lack of evolution' in a *Destructoid* interview (Plunkett 2009). Visual novels are text-heavy, requiring the player to read text boxes and click to continue, making choices along the way.

17 This narrative convenience is seen throughout English literature, abounding in orphans and children packed off to the countryside in wartime, as in C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia.* Other works depend on absent-minded Victorian parents, as in E. Nesbit's *Five Children and It* or *The Phoenix and the Carpet.* Charles Dickens invoked the image of the orphan as an impetus for social justice.

18 Okabe (2019) discusses manga detective stories for boys. *Weekly Shōnen Jump*, published by Shueisha from 1968, is one of Japan's longest-running magazines.

19 *Scouting for Boys* was published in Japanese in 1910, while the Yokohoma troop hosted Baden Powell in 1912. The Boy Scouts of Japan were officially founded in 1922 (Wilson 1959: 29–31).

20 Schodt (1996: 89–90) discusses *Weekly Shōnen Jump*.

21 Barton discusses RPG versus action-adventure elements in *Legend of Zelda* games (2008: 209–212; 394–398).

22 Link's voicelessness is an oft-cited game element enabling deeper player-character identification with the 'blank slate' character. Boyan and Price (2017: 118–119).

23 *Secret of Mana* was originally released in Japan as *Seiken Densetsu 2.* The first game *Seiken Densetsu* (1991) was released in North America as *Final Fantasy Adventure.*

24 *Phantasy Star* is a series of single-player RPGs with many spin-off titles, including eight text adventure games and the MMORPG *Phantasy Star Online* (2000): Barton (2008: 223–228).

25 Designer Kaga Shōzō aimed for increased player agency with the strategy-based series, describing its difference from *Dragon Quest* as the player saying not 'I got here, how far did you get?' but 'I did it this way. Here, let me show you!' http://shmuplations.com/fireemblem/ Accessed 20 December 2018.

26 Jennifer deWinter (2015) provides an in-depth look at Miyamoto Shigeru and his principles of game design.

27 *Dragon Ball* is one of Japan's best-selling manga series, appearing in *Weekly Shōnen Jump* from 1984–1995 and collected into 42 *tankōbon* volumes by Shueisha. The anime *Dragon Ball* (1986–1989) and *Dragon Ball Z* (1989–1996) regularly air on American television, making Toriyama's style highly recognizable.

28 Like *Secret of Mana*, any name can be entered for the main character, but NPCs consistently refer to that character as 'he,' creating dissonance if a female name is chosen.

29 I played the remastered version, released in 2016. *Dragon Quest* also uses many puns – on translating these see Hidaka Tōru's comments in Szczepaniak (2014: 73).

30 Many different versions and localizations of the *Dragon Quest* games exist. On their first American release they were sold under the title *Dragon Warrior*.

31 Kohler (2005: 87).

32 Barton details specific battle mechanics in titles discussed here (2008: 208–228).

33 See Smith (2002) on the past-oriented dialogue of *Final Fantasy VII*, and the role of dialogue itself in the JRPG genre.

34 *Final Fantasy X* was the first game in the series to feature simultaneous text and voice acting, plus real-time facial expressions.

35 On cut-scenes in game structure see Newman (2013: 73–78); for a broader overview of narrative and interactivity see Lee, Park and Jin (2006).

36 The male pronoun is deliberate. More recently '*otome* games' with female protagonists have become more popular, written for the female audience largely by female game designers.

37 For more discussion see Kwan (2016: 179–180).

38 This is one of the main differences between party-based games and single-player, single-character games like *The Legend of Zelda*.

39 A clear example is the positioning of the self in the novels of Nagai Kafū, particularly *Sneers* (*Reishō*, 1910). See Hutchinson (2011: 160–161). For Mikhail Bakhtin's critical theory on polyphony see Vice (1997: ch. 5).

40 The degree to which the Tokugawa period (1603–1868) is seen as 'modern' varies, as feudalism gave way to centralized bureaucracy. Wray and Conroy (1983: 5–41).

41 The hero of Kafū's novel *Sneers* calls Tokyo an 'apparition' and a 'monster,' just like modernity itself (Hutchinson 2011: 164).

42 For example Allison (2013: 21–42), Rosenbaum (2015: 2–5), Ronald and Alexy (2011: 8–12).

43 Slater (2011: 104–105).

44 Fukuzawa and LeTendre (2001) document the 'intense years' of Japanese middle school, where academic pressure is greater than in other nations.

45 Fukuzawa and LeTendre (2001: 2); Aspinall (2014).

46 Slater (2011: 111–114), Rosenbaum (2015: 2–5), Ochiai (1997), Shirahase (2014 [2009]).

47 On freeters see Kosugi (2008 [2003]). Vogel (2013: 162–166) discusses changes to employment structures and new social patterns from the 1990s. See Hidaka (2011) and Dasgupta (2013) on changing ideologies of the salaryman.

48 Vogel (2013: 150); Fukuzawa and LeTendre (2001).

49 In the JRPG, the shift can be understood in the difference between *Final Fantasy VI* (1994) and *Final Fantasy VII* (1997). The latter is much darker in tone, although the two games deal with very similar thematic material.

50 The first film, *Neon Genesis Evangelion: Death and Rebirth* (March 1997), re-edited the first 24 television episodes with about 27 minutes of new animation. The second film, *The End of Evangelion* (July 1997), retells the last two TV episodes plus new material.

51 Pagel (2011) contextualizes the film in terms of real-world attitudes towards juvenile delinquency and government directives aimed at children.

52 Pagel (2011); Taylor-Jones (2013: 65–72).

53 See for example Jacoby (2011), Nolletti (2010).

54 See Allison (2013); Vogel (2013: 158–159); Horiguchi (2011).

55 Zielenziger (2006) compares Japan to South Korea, experiencing a similar modernization trajectory yet avoiding such extreme youth problems. Although *hikikomori* comprise a small minority of the population, anxiety about the future has driven many young Japanese people to avoid education, employment and marriage. The videogame *Catherine* (Atlus, 2011), illustrates these dilemmas in the character of Vincent Brooks, tormented by social obligations and unable to commit to either woman in the narrative (Whaley 2015, 2016).

56 Nitsche (2008: 32) says 'Any chain of events of video games depends on the player as an integral part of the textual machine.' Aarseth (1997) describes the player's physical actions as the 'ergodic participation' necessary for the avatar's in-game actions.

57 Most notably the light novel series *Record of Lodoss War* (1988–1993) and *Slayers* (1989–2000), and the online novel *Sword Art Online* (2009): Saito (2016: 318–322).

5 Nuclear discourse in *Final Fantasy*

In ancient times, there were weapons too powerful for mankind to use. Those weapons were sealed in Eureka … but now their time has come.

Doga, wizard in *Final Fantasy III*[1]

While we are powerless to stop earthquakes, tsunamis, and other natural disasters, this is not true of nuclear disasters. If we shut down and dismantle all our nuclear power plants, we will no longer have nuclear accidents.

Kan Naoto, former Prime Minister of Japan[2]

This chapter examines nuclear discourse in the *Final Fantasy* series of role-playing games, first released by Square in 1987.[3] While the first three games in the series feature epic battles between Light and Dark forces, later games focused on more specific narratives and the different kinds of battles that humans can experience, running the spectrum of political, religious and environmental conflicts. Chris Kohler notes how the simple binaries of good and evil in early *Final Fantasy* titles grew into complicated entanglements of war guilt and complicity, beginning with *Final Fantasy IV* (1991).[4] This game introduced an element of critique, exploring political power, human responsibility and moral choices in war. Where the sequel *Final Fantasy V* (1992) lacked this kind of intense moral dilemma, *Final Fantasy VI* (1994) returned to serious issues of war responsibility, together with technological advances and a dystopian feel. These elements come together in *Final Fantasy VII* (1997) in a clearly developed critique of nuclear power used for both energy and weapons. Total war against civilian towns is reprised in *Final Fantasy IX* (2000), while *Final Fantasy X* (2001) depicts soldiers vaporized in a religious war, and the solemn aftermath of battle. These games that span the end of the century reflect deeply on the human abuse of technological power, including the use of various energy sources, mined minerals, and weapons of incredible force.

   In this chapter I will show how the *Final Fantasy* series explores issues of nuclear power, using allegory and direct representation. I will detail several scenes from the games to show how nuclear power is represented – as raw material for energy and weapons, and as a radioactive element that can affect the human body. Although the designers have not explicitly commented on the

anti-nuclear viewpoint of the games, this aspect has been noted by fans in both Japan and the West.[5] The anti-nuclear ideology is conveyed through scripted dialogue, visual cues, battle dynamics, cinematic sequences and overarching narrative themes. The issue of human responsibility for technology is also developed through the series in the enigmatic figure of Cid, an engineer who appears in different incarnations from game to game. As we saw in Chapter 4, the linear plot structure, deep psychological characterization and sheer length of the narrative in the JRPG lend themselves well to a textual study. However, unlike other narrative forms, games demand action and decisions from players. This can create a more self-reflective environment, conducive to the reception of ideas. In this chapter I will show how player engagement with the ideology of *Final Fantasy* is created through gameplay dynamics such as decision-making, item use, and character identification. But first, I will place *Final Fantasy* in its context, as part of a much wider discourse on nuclear power in modern Japan.

Japan's nuclear discourse

The Japanese arts are well known for their use of atomic imagery, with memories of the 1945 bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki resonating through Japanese literature and film to manga, anime, the fine arts, photography and dramatic performance.[6] The focus on nuclear energy and weapons in Japanese media may be understood as Japan's nuclear discourse, a set of artistic and political utterances on the use of nuclear power for both military and peaceful purposes. Although nuclear power is a global issue, it resonates in specific ways through Japanese culture and the arts, carrying a host of meanings particular to the Japanese experience. 'Nuclear power' implies not only the fear of atomic weaponry and the importance of world peace, but also a deep sense of Japanese victimhood and the need to avoid the past mistakes of others. The horror of atomic weapons has been portrayed through direct representation, as in Ibuse Masuji's realistic novel *Black Rain* (1965) or Nakazawa Keiji's autobiographical manga *Barefoot Gen* (1973–1974), and also through allegory, as in Honda Ishirō's film *Godzilla* (1954).[7] The immediate postwar years saw harsh censorship of any artistic works depicting atomic weapons, the Allied bombing of Japan, or even the Occupation of Japan itself, which lasted from 1945–1952.[8] In the enforced silence, as Etō Jun (1989) famously argued, the Japanese people suppressed their memories of the war and suffered cultural trauma. Mark Williams and David Stahl (2010) have shown that much of this cultural trauma continues to reverberate through the Japanese arts, with allegory providing a much-needed outlet for otherwise taboo subjects.[9] Taking anime as an example, scholars have provided nuclear readings of Matsumoto Leiji's *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974–1975), Ōtomo Katsuhiro's anime *Akira* (1988) and Anno Hideaki's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–1996), among others.[10] Both direct representation and allegorical retellings add to the nuclear discourse in Japan, expressing the deeply-held anxiety towards atomic energy that pervades Japanese culture.

In the same way, Japanese videogames can be divided into those that show atomic weaponry directly, such as Kojima Hideo's *Metal Gear Solid* series, and those that tend to explore nuclear power by allegory, such as *Final Fantasy*. Nuclear power appears in various guises through the series, taking the form of Magic or Magitek, Mako and 'Sin,' the last providing a religious overtone to the anti-nuclear critique. I will examine these allegorical representations of nuclear power below, providing evidence from each text to support the nuclear reading. Interestingly, the series started out by including much more obvious and direct references to nuclear power, mostly in terms of weapons and attacks. For example, the strongest boss in *Final Fantasy* (1987) was 'Warmech,' whose 'Nuclear' attack targeted all foes in the field of battle, dealing massive physical damage. Warmech had a 3/64 chance of appearing in any one game, giving it a fearsome reputation. Worst of all, its pre-emptive strike could wipe out the entire questing party before the player could even take their turn. Other enemy attacks in the series included the 'Atomic Ray,' a powerful Fire attack used by Red Dragons, and the 'Atomic Blast' (also called 'Fission'), notable in *Final Fantasy IV*. Atomic Blast had the notable effect of killing the user, emphasizing its danger and last-resort status. For their part, the questing party could equip weapons such as the Atomic Scissors from *Final Fantasy VII*. These 'nuclear' and 'atomic' attacks make sense in a game series based on war and battle. It is telling that the monster which destroys the town of Lindblum in *Final Fantasy IX* is named Atomos, as citizens assure themselves that the Queen would 'never commit an atrocity.'[11] Other references to nuclear power were found in locations, such as the Power Plant in *Final Fantasy Legends* (1989), from which the player must obtain 'Plutonium' to progress in the game.[12] Power plants called Mako reactors are also integral to the narrative in *Final Fantasy VII*, as we shall see below.

The existence of power plants alongside atomic weapons in the early games reflects the dual nature of Japan's nuclear discourse, portraying nuclear power as simultaneously the source of (negative) destruction and (neutral or positive) energy. Utsumi Hirofumi (2012) has shown that the majority of Japanese people held the two images in their minds simultaneously from the 1960s through to 2010, with the destructive power of atomic weapons balanced by the promise of clean nuclear fuel. Even after the Chernobyl disaster of 1986, pride in Japan's 'scientific-technological' self-image mitigated fears of radiation (Utsumi 2012: 196). But the safe use of nuclear energy became a real talking point in Japan in the 1990s, following a spate of accidents and citizen protests over the location of new power plants. Accidents occurred at the Mihama plant in Fukui prefecture (September 1991), the Monju plant in Fukui prefecture (December 1995), and the Tōkaimura nuclear plant in Ibaraki prefecture (March 1997). Citizens protesting power plant construction were rewarded when plants were cancelled in Hōhoku, Yamaguchi prefecture in 1994, and Kushima, Miyazaki prefecture, in 1997. A more serious accident occurred in the Tōkaimura uranium reprocessing facility in September 1999.[13] The *Final Fantasy* series was thus produced in a context of nuclear accidents in the real world.

Much narrative tension in Japan's nuclear discourse comes from the fact that the neutral energy may turn to destructive force at any time, whether due to human failings or the material's inherent instability. Conversations between characters tend to focus on issues of responsibility and control: how can nuclear power be contained, and how can humans use the power in a responsible and ethical way? This question has become more significant in recent years, as Japan experienced a massive 'triple disaster' in March 2011, when an earthquake off the coast of Fukushima created a tsunami and nuclear meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Since this disaster – now known by its date as merely '3.11' – the nuclear duality has dominated Japanese discourse, as artists struggle to come to terms with an energy source that contaminated vast areas, with little trustworthy information supplied by the government. Recent scholarship has focused on post-Fukushima literature and film as a processing of national trauma, a struggle to come to terms with the duality of nuclear power, its dangers, and burden of accountability.[14] The connections between power plants, radiation, and atomic energy take on added significance in Japan, as current traumas revisit wartime memories.

Studies of Japan's nuclear discourse have tended to focus on cultural representations of the atomic bombing on one hand, and political protests against nuclear power plants on the other.[15] Less attention has been paid to the image of nuclear reactors in the postwar imagination, or transnational issues of mining and the disposal of radioactive material. The *Final Fantasy* series focuses strongly on mining, whereas Kojima Hideo would take up the issue of nuclear waste in the *Metal Gear Solid* series. The importance of mining in the nuclear energy cycle is emphasized by Simon Avenell (2017: 148–176), who describes Japan's own 'atomic aggression' in transnational terms, affecting not only indigenous Australians whose lands were exploited for uranium, but also Pacific peoples whose islands were used for nuclear testing and proposed by Japan as a dumping ground for nuclear waste in the 1980s. Mining itself is a recurrent theme in the *Final Fantasy* series, since gameplay and narrative hinge on the use of crystals – shards of immense power that are found underground. Much of the narrative of the early games revolved around who could unearth or gain access to the crystal and use its power, for good or evil ends. Enemies in the series take the form of powerful Empires and energy corporations, mining precious resources to create advanced technology and weapons of war. Many of the most powerful weapons in the series have also been sealed underground, as explained by Doga in *Final Fantasy III*, only to be unearthed in times of great peril. The idea that some weapons are 'too powerful for mankind to use' is a recurrent theme in the series. A potent mix of political power, technology, mining and energy bind the most critical works in the series together, contributing greatly to the nuclear discourse of postwar Japan. In the pages below I will focus on three case studies – *Final Fantasy VI, VII* and *X*, as the three strongest narratives in the series depicting nuclear power through allegory. Following convention, I will shorten the titles to *FFVI*, *FFVII* and *FFX* for the discussion.

Final Fantasy VI: **Magitek and mistakes of the past**

Released in 1994 for the SNES console, *FFVI* opens on dark thunderclouds, flickering with lightning within. After the title and a cinematic sequence (added when the game was ported to the PlayStation console), the camera pans down to a snowy scene overlaid with text: 'Long ago, the War of the Magi reduced the world to a scorched wasteland, and Magic simply ceased to exist.' Next, we see a town with many bridges and wooden buildings, with the words '1,000 years have passed…. Iron, gunpowder, and steam engines have been rediscovered, and high technology reigns.' This is the town of Narshe, where the action will begin. The scene switches to a grey factory interior – the Magitek factory run by the evil villain Kefka: 'But there are those who would enslave the world by reviving the dread destructive power known as "Magic".' Finally, against a backdrop of snowy mountains, we see the words 'Can it be that those in power are on the verge of repeating a senseless and deadly mistake?'[16] In this way, the opening scenes of *FFVI* set an ominous tone of a world in peril, recovering from a terrible war in which unimaginable power was unleashed.

Our first task in the game is to find a magical creature called an Esper and deliver it to Emperor Gestahl for use as a weapon. The Esper is located in the mines of Narshe, appearing as a crystalline form buried in the earth. The Elders of Narshe are concerned about the Gestahlian Empire's use of Magic for weapons in the new war, worrying it 'will surely lead to global destruction.…' The main Elder muses: 'The War of the Magi…. The mythical battle that set mankind back a thousand years…. Can this really be happening? People will never learn …' (Skinner 2003). Magic (*madō*) symbolizes the human abuse of technology, and tinkering with powers beyond human control is seen as a mistake of the past that can easily resurface. 'Madō' is often translated as sorcery, and may also mean 'the path of evil,' 'black magic' or the 'netherworld' where evil spirits roam in Japanese mythology. In *FFVI*, Magic is feared as a destructive force, and people depend on new technologies while dreading further technological development.

The power of Magic is deployed in battle via 'Magitek Armour' (*madō āmā*), with translator Ted Woolsey deftly blending 'magic' and 'technology' to not only create a new word but imply a new kind of weapon. Magitek Armour appears as a mechanical suit enclosing the wearer. Its firing capacity is signified by an extremely bright light, which even in the pixelated graphics of 1994 is visually more powerful than the standard weapons used by other characters. Like most *Final Fantasy* games, weapons are a mix of Japanese swords, shuriken, nunchuks and bare-handed martial arts, plus Western weapons like crossbows, morning stars, spears and daggers. The master engineer Prince Edgar is a technological powerhouse, equipped with weapons such as a blinding Flash and a Bioblaster that poisons the opponent. But among all the weapons of the game, Magitek Armour stands apart. It inflicts a high degree of damage and is distinctly recognizable on screen during the entirety of a battle sequence, unlike most weapons which only appear in characters' hands at their time of use. The emphasis on Magitek's bright light, sorcery and severe damage links closely to elements

of the nuclear discourse in Japan. It is worth remembering the bewilderment of Japanese citizens trying to comprehend the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as the atomic bomb was experienced as an explosive light which levelled cities and caused irreparable harm to survivors' bodies. Further connecting Magitek and Magic in *FFVI* to nuclear weaponry, it is significant that Magitek Armour is highly experimental and volatile.

The connections between *FFVI*, nuclear discourse and Japan's role in World War II have been noticed by the *Final Fantasy* game expert Auronlu.[17] In Auronlu's extensive online blog, Tumblr feed and 'Let's Play' run-throughs of *Final Fantasy* games, connections are made to real-world political contexts, historical events and social memes in Japan. In the wittily titled 'Final Fantasy VI, Ep. IV: The Esper Strikes Back,' Auronlu examines the arrival of the player's party at the imperial city of Vector, where Kefka's Magitek factory is located. Vector has just been attacked by a large number of Espers, and the Emperor Gestahl is astonished by their natural powers. Auronlu comments:

> When Gestahl says, "The power of the Espers … I had no idea …" I couldn't help thinking of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. An awful lot of 20th century Japanese pop culture seems to serve as a catharsis, coming to grips with two diametrically opposed distressing things: Japan's attempt at empire-building in WWII, and the unspeakable horror of two atom bombs *and* the deadly fallout from U.S. nuclear testing landing on their homeland, which is often symbolized by taint/pollution/poison. Those two events seem to play out again and again in some form in everything from *Akira* to *Nausicaa*, if you're on the lookout for symbolism.
>
> (Auronlu 2013)

Auronlu's blog gives voice to a number of fans (also represented on the *Final Fantasy Wiki*) who see connections between the narrative of *FFVI* and real-world historical events. The game itself does not directly mention nuclear power, but the attentive player does not have to look too hard for the deeper significance of conversations in this area of the game, which references the Asia-Pacific War in a number of ways. Emperor Gestahl invites the party to a banquet, joined by the engineer Cid. We are told that Kefka has 'been imprisoned for unspeakable war crimes,' and we discuss whether to execute him, pardon him or leave him in jail. All attendees toast their hometowns, and Gestahl sincerely apologizes for the wholesale poisoning and destruction of Cyan's hometown Doma. The player may choose one of three responses:

'What's done is done….' (1 point)
'That was inexcusable!' (5 points)
'Apologize again!' (3 points)

In this scene, the player/character speaks for the whole party, including Cyan himself. Auronlu points out that *FFVI* is the first game in the series to offer so

many optional responses in the course of a conversation, drawing particular attention to the response 'That was inexcusable!' On choosing this option, the Emperor Gestahl mutters more apologies and bows to the questing party. Auronlu sees this scene as a 'WWII metaphor,' referring to the moral question of what constitutes 'inexcusable' conduct in war. This question played an important part in the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunals.[18] On the one hand, the Allies felt that Japan's atrocities in Asia and treatment of prisoners of war were inexcusable, while on the other hand, Japan felt that America's use of the atomic bomb was equally inexcusable. As defence lawyer Ben Bruce Blakeney argued, 'If the attack on Pearl Harbor had resulted in the "murder" of 4000 persons, how about Hiroshima?' (Brackman 1987: 96). When the Emperor Gestahl apologizes for Kefka's behaviour, the option 'That was inexcusable!' brings our attention back to the innocent civilians of the town of Doma, and the fact that civilians are so often the target of wider military operations.

   The distinction made here between the Emperor, who apologizes, and General Kefka, who is imprisoned for war crimes, reflects the historical situation of the Tokyo tribunal, which left Emperor Hirohito out of the proceedings while Tōjō Hideki and others were tried for aggressive war in Asia. The fact that Kefka poisoned Doma of his own accord, rather than following orders from Emperor Gestahl, is also significant, as many questions remain regarding Emperor Hirohito's relation to Japanese military actions in WWII.[19] This scene also echoes perceptions of the Nanjing Massacre of 1937 – Japanese soldiers have been depicted in Japanese school history textbooks as acting of their own accord, and certainly not following orders from their superior officers, an issue which has gone all the way to Japan's Supreme Court.[20] The other two dialogue options are also illuminating: 'What's done is done' shows the stoic Japanese attitude of *shikata ga nai* – no matter how bad things get, we must accept situations as they are and just get on with life. But 'Apologize again!' allows the player to register dissatisfaction with Gestahl's apology. While some defendants at the IMTFE expressed remorse over their actions, others maintained that they had nothing to apologize for, since war itself was not a crime.[21] This attitude is still maintained by some Japanese nationalists and right-wing politicians, impeding efforts towards dialogue and reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific region. Over the years Japanese Prime Ministers and government officials have offered various apologies and expressions of remorse for Japan's wartime actions with differing degrees of formality, but any mention of 'apology' and 'war' in Asia remains highly controversial and politically significant.[22] This minor scene in *FFVI* may be brief, but I find it loaded with political meaning, remarkable in the JRPG genre.

   While much may be read into Gestahl's dialogue in this scene, the presence of the engineer Cid at the banquet is also noteworthy. A recurring character through the series, Cid is the embodiment of human ambition, technological development and ethical responsibility.[23] His aircraft allow characters (and thereby the player) free access to new areas of the world map in each game, while his years of study and experimentation have bestowed weapons upgrades

and rockets to in-game governments and characters alike. Cid also functions as a plot device, as his technology is often revealed to be destructive or dangerous, either by mistake or by design. Thus in *FFIV* it is Cid's superior aircraft, the Red Wings, which allow the kingdom of Baron to completely destroy Damcyan and begin its quest for world domination, while in *FFV* Cid accidentally damages the Four Crystals of Light by trying to amplify their power. Here in *FFVI* Cid is the inventor of Magitek technology who also performs genetic experiments, while the next game *FFVII* sees him obsessing over space travel in Rocket Town. In *FFX* Cid appears as the captain of an Al-Bhed airship, advocating the right to use technology even against religious taboos. The overarching question of whether Cid is good, evil or merely human can be taken as the series' meditation on human nature. I would suggest that Cid is a significant character in Japan's nuclear discourse, embodying Japan's own uneasy relationship with technology and the nuclear duality.

Final Fantasy VII: reactors, radiation and the Planet

FFVII was released as the flagship title for the original PlayStation console in 1997.[24] Of all the games in the series, *FFVII* is the most directly concerned with the ethics and safety of power plants, depicting the effects of building reactors on coal-mining communities, as well as what happens when the reactor inevitably explodes. Nuclear power is thinly disguised as 'Mako' energy, described in the narrative as an extremely efficient power source when compared to other fuels like coal.[25] The Shinra Electric Power Company, also known as Shinra Corporation, has built many Mako reactors to extract energy from the Lifestream of the Planet.[26] Mako is non-renewable, and the extraction process causes vegetation and animals around the reactor sites to die. As a result, Midgar appears as a dark blot on the world map. The only plants that grow in Midgar are in the beautiful gardens of the flower-seller Aeris.[27] Shinra's monopoly on Mako energy makes the president of Shinra the effective ruler of the Planet, as the mayor of Midgar admits: 'I'm mayor in name only. The city and everything in it is really run by Shinra, Inc. My only real job is watching over Shinra's documents….'[28] From the start, the narrative establishes both the importance of energy production and the corrupt nature of those who control it.

The paper trail of Shinra's documents, discovered by the player over the course of the game, reveals the breadth of their monopoly: Shinra Corporation runs a weapons program and space program, as well as overseeing urban development and scientific research. Files on these programs are kept in the Shinra Building in Midgar and the basement of the Shinra Mansion in Nibelheim. As the player explores the gameworld, more information is discovered, but the player must actively move their character up to bookshelves and press the 'x' button to read the information. The player feels like a sleuth, uncovering the dirt on Shinra and coming to a fuller understanding of the company's reach. This underscores the seeming untouchability of the powerful corporation, visually reinforced by their towering buildings and access to airships,

drones, mechanized weapons and loyal armies. The main player-character Cloud Strife is dressed in the uniform of SOLDIER, the military arm of Shinra, but it is not immediately apparent whether he is loyal to Shinra or not. Cloud's first major task in the game is to blow up Midgar's Mako Reactor 7, to help the guerrilla resistance movement called AVALANCHE. The player is thus positioned against Shinra and the use of Mako reactors from the very start of the game, trusting in Cloud's actions rather than his appearance. The tension between appearance and intent is leveraged throughout the game to keep the player in suspense.

Cloud's possible complicity is given a physical manifestation, as his eyes glow bright blue. This glow characterizes all members of SOLDIER, exposed to Mako radiation as part of their training to gain superhuman strength. The glow is thus seen by many characters in the game, including President Shinra himself, as evidence of Cloud's membership of Shinra's military.[29] But over the course of the game, we find out that Cloud never joined SOLDIER himself, but was exposed to 'Mako Radiation Therapy' as part of a scientific experiment.[30] Cloud is exposed to so much Mako that he suffers severe 'Mako poisoning' twice in the game – once in the past, as a result of the scientific experiment, and once in the real-time narrative of the game when he falls into the Lifestream and becomes saturated with the material. The immediate symptom of Mako poisoning is an inability to move or speak, resulting in a vegetative state. The fact that Mako leaves a 'glow' as an aftereffect of exposure, is described in terms of 'radiation,' and causes poisoning resulting in deathly immobility, suggests that Mako is the equivalent of nuclear energy.

Like *FFVI* with its crystals and Magitek, *FFVII* explores conventional questions of traditional nuclear discourse through allegory – Mako is never expressly described as 'nuclear' energy, yet this is implied throughout the narrative. The narrative itself provides a strong critique of nuclear power, based on the exploitation of mining communities. This theme is explored through the experience of Barret Wallace, Cloud's friend and leader of the AVALANCHE resistance movement. The mountain town of Corel is home to a ruined Mako reactor, which was built over the protest of the citizens. In a flashback we see Barret's friend Dyne saying: 'Our coal's been protected for generations. Our fathers, and theirs before them, risked their lives for it. We have no right to throw it away so easily!' Barret replies: 'No one uses coal nowadays. It's the sign of the times,' laying the groundwork for the reactor's construction. Shinra's representative Scarlet promises that the corporation will guarantee the town's livelihood after the reactor is complete, but this is a lie, and Barret is held responsible for the destruction of his hometown when the reactor explodes.

The Corel narrative shows the unstable nature of Mako energy and the duplicity of Shinra, providing motivation for Barret's involvement in AVALANCHE. It also illustrates the effect of power plants on the communities that host them. Since the closing of the mines, the townspeople of Corel have become desperate, begging passers-by to buy something at their stores and complaining about their poverty and misery. The first miner Cloud encounters says:

> Corel sure has gone to pot! It used to be a famous coal mining town! There used to be more jobs than you could shake a…. Well, you get the picture! Now it's nothing but a miserable pit! Me, my bulldozer…everything's out of work. Got no job … I can't even show my face. 'Bout all that's left is for me to just live in this hole all day.[31]

The effect of power plants on surrounding communities is underscored by Cloud's experiences in Gongaga Village, another town with a ruined Mako reactor. The first thing we see on entering the village is a cemetery, in which a woman is kneeling at a grave. The woman says 'Three years ago when the reactor exploded, my husband …' and trails off into silence. When pushed for more (by the player pressing the 'x' button), she says 'Do people really need reactors to live? Aren't there more important things in life …?' She does not move from her kneeling position, and all we can do is walk away. In town, the Item Seller, Innkeeper, Mayor and Weapons Seller elaborate on the reactor explosion:

> Shinra built the reactor, without even thinking about the town's safety. And this is the result.

> One day, there was a huge explosion. Many townspeople died in it.…

> The Shinra people told us that everyone would be happy once the Reactor was built. But, all it brought us was sadness.…

> We voted to outlaw the use of Mako energy and live with nature, ever since the explosion.[32]

The Gongaga scenes reinforce the danger of the Mako reactors, and reveal that Mako can also be made into weapons. Now head of Shinra's Weapons Development Program, Scarlet arrives in the village and searches the ruined reactor for 'Huge Materia' to make an ultimate weapon.[33] Later in the game we see the results of Scarlet's efforts, with the massive cannons of Junon and Sister Ray deployed against the resistance. *FFVII* thus joins the Japanese nuclear discourse in its insistence on the duality of nuclear power, used for both energy and weapons.

The game also comments explicitly on the relationship between nature and technology, through the character of Bugenhagen, an elder in Cosmo Canyon. This community is dedicated to the study of the Planet, living in harmony with nature. Bugenhagen alerts Cloud and his party to the suffering of the Planet, clearly blaming Shinra:

> Every day Mako reactors suck up spirit energy, diminishing it. Spirit energy gets compressed in the reactors and processed into Mako energy. All living things are being used up and thrown away. In other words, Mako energy will only destroy the Planet.
>
> (*FFVII*, 1997)

FFVII thus goes one step further than the previous game – Mako energy is not only non-renewable and unstable like Magic, but its use hastens the death of the Planet itself. Bugenhagen professes his love for both nature and machinery, yet wonders if humans are good or bad for the Planet overall. Like *Godzilla* and *Akira, FFVII* questions the nature of humanity and whether we are responsible or ethical beings when it comes to the use of technology and power. As a scientist who truly loves both nature and technology, Bugenhagen may be seen as a counterpoint to Cid in the series.

The narrative ends with a hopeful scene of planetary renewal, with pale green tendrils of the Lifestream emerging from the depths of the Planet to save it from a meteor impact. After the credits, the title 'Five hundred years later' heralds a final cinematic sequence showing the remains of the city of Midgar, overgrown with greenery in the midst of a lush forest. Now that the use of Mako energy has been stopped, the Planet has healed itself.[34] There is much in *FFVII* that points to a concern for our own planet and the wasteful use of natural resources. Since the 1980s, a broadening sense of the global environment (*kankyō*) has included anti-nuclear discourse in Japan.[35] Both messages intertwine in *FFVII*, serving as a commentary on and warning against the use of nuclear power for weapons and energy.

Ideology and impact: player agency and embodiment

If game texts may be taken as part of the nuclear discourse in Japan, concerned with the use and abuse of nuclear power, then what makes a game different from other texts in terms of how the message is conveyed to the audience? The anti-nuclear ideology of *FFVII* is expressed not only through the main narrative, but also through item usage, battle dynamics and the manipulation of player agency. Mako is not only extracted from the Planet by Shinra's reactors, but is also found in its natural state throughout the gameworld, in the form of 'materia.' This rock-like solid may be gathered by characters, kept as an item in the inventory, and used to fuel magical attacks in battle. Materia grows and mutates into different forms depending on the frequency of use, producing more powerful magical attacks over time. The unstable nature of the element, which caused the destruction of Mako reactors in Corel and Gongaga, can nonetheless give important advantages to the player. The gameplay dynamic of item usage in the battle system ties into the narrative to show how a natural element may be innocuous or helpful when used in the right way, but harmful in the hands of the corrupt. Human responsibility thus becomes a major theme in the game through non-narrative means, complementing and underscoring the meaning of the central story.

Another powerful way in which games can convey ideological messages is through the manipulation of player agency, most obviously in what the player can or cannot do in the gameworld. The JRPG as a genre is often criticized for allowing very little leeway in the script, and many dialogue choices in *FFVII* have no bearing on the narrative development. Instead, a high degree of agency

was given to the player in the fully explorable game environment. As in other games in the series, the World Map of *FFVII* is progressively accessible by foot, by Chocobo (a large, yellow bird-like creature), and then by a series of vehicles culminating in an airship. Players could revisit areas as many times as they liked to buy more items from shops, talk to new NPCs, find hidden items and so on. However, unlike earlier games, some areas of the map were completely inaccessible unless the player obtained a certain breed of Chocobo which could traverse mountains and other obstacles. These Chocobos could not be found within the gameworld but had to be bred specially from other Chocobos lured from the wild, secured in a ranch and fed special food. The Chocobo strategies of *FFVII* were complex and challenging, targeted at serious players and completionists who would gladly spend hours of gameplay on side missions. Although the dialogue was quite restrictive, exploration options afforded the player an exceptional amount of freedom in the game environment.

Exploration also resulted in deeper knowledge of the narrative, including the nature of the enemy Shinra and the identity of Cloud himself. For example, the Shinra mansion basement in Nibelheim held a key cut-scene and documents revealing the truth of Cloud's exposure to 'Mako Radiation Therapy,' as well as the character Vincent Valentine. Acquiring Vincent was completely optional, even though his backstory explained Aeris's origins and Shinra's genetic experiments. The backstory of another optional character, Yuffie Kisaragi, explained the history of Shinra's colonial-industrial expansion over islands in the Western seas.[36] Players who explored the whole world and took the trouble to add Vincent and Yuffie to their party would thus gain deeper insight into the evil nature of the Shinra Corporation. Further, certain cut-scenes would only be triggered in certain areas with the right characters in Cloud's party. In other words, the amount of narrative backstory experienced by the player was directly tied to the time and effort that the player invested in exploring the Planet and revisiting areas with different party members. This amount of player agency and control was crucial to the player's emotional involvement in the narrative.

As Christopher Wood has noted, *FFVII* 'is known for leaving the first-time gamer with an experience that is nothing short of profound' (2009: 167). The game created an unprecedented sense of emotional involvement in the narrative by giving the player a sense of power and control, then suddenly stripping it away.[37] The death of Aeris at an advanced point in the narrative is often cited as the one event that most changed game plot development from the 1990s onward.[38] The shock experienced by the player is intense, encompassing a feeling of loss and mourning for a loved character in the story but also the shock of losing a valuable party member in the game. Aeris's death represents a loss of time and effort that the player invested in levelling up a character, assigning materia, weapons, armour and other equipment, and strategizing the best and most well-balanced membership of the questing party. If (like myself) the player had always included Aeris in the party for her healing powers, an enormous sense of frustration would be felt at the realization that it was now necessary to level-up another character from scratch to perform the same healing function.

Aeris's death is thus a brilliant combination of narrative surprise and player frustration. This event makes the player grasp the strategic nature of any character in the game, in a self-conscious realization that the player is only a person in the non-diegetic space, playing the game called *Final Fantasy*. A high degree of self-awareness is engendered in the player, who feels manipulated by the developers, realizing afresh that the game is merely a product that was constructed and created by a development team.

A similar kind of reflexivity is produced by Cloud's identity crisis. Although Cloud begins the game as a swaggering hero in SOLDIER's uniform, it soon becomes apparent that this personality is more like a façade or a role that he is playing. This fact is understood by Aeris but not by Cloud himself. Discovering the truth of Cloud's past takes the entire game, and with each new revelation the player is surprised and perplexed. Cloud cannot remember ever joining SOLDIER, and memories of his hometown Nibelheim are particularly confused. His memories are illusions, and he has no idea who he is. The combination of mental crisis and Mako poisoning put Cloud in a vegetative state for part of the game, during which time the player must control Tifa and then Cid as the main character. This disrupts the player's identification with Cloud, and yet intensifies our concern for Cloud's wellbeing. While Cloud is on life support, an earthquake plunges him and Tifa into the Lifestream, and they find themselves inside Cloud's subconscious, trying to access different memories and versions of Cloud's identity. At one point Tifa is talking to the supposedly 'real' Cloud in the centre of the screen, with three possible Cloud identities surrounding them – but the actual 'real' Cloud is floating above the whole scene writhing and clutching his head in pain. Cloud's psychological crisis is, to a large degree, the player's crisis of identification. The player is constantly wondering, 'who is this character that I'm playing?' This manipulation of the identification process takes control and agency away from the player, and yet has the effect of increasing player-character identification through our confusion and concern.

Player agency was thus manipulated in *FFVII* in ways that had not previously been experienced by gamers. The jarring disruptions in character identification made the player focus more closely on the intricate narrative twists and increased player immersion to the point where commentators now call the game a 'world-changing RPG.'[39] The high degree of reflexivity in the game text made the player hyper-aware of connections between the gameworld and reality. By establishing direct and visible links between diegetic and non-diegetic space, *FFVII* made the player consider the relationship between the game and reality in new and thoughtful ways. The player had to engage actively with the issues, not just sit back and watch passively as events unfolded. Under the player's control, Cloud is the one who destroys Midgar's Sector 7 reactor and kills everyone below. A key member of the player's party, Barret is the one who argues for the reactor in Corel and betrays the town. Complicit in the nuclear enterprise, the player feels more motivated to fight against Shinra for the good of the dying Planet. The anti-nuclear message of *FFVII* is not just 'read' by the player but fully experienced, carried in the guilt of Cloud and Barret and in Cloud's continuing battle to define

his own identity. This kind of player experience has been described as 'embodiment,' providing deep engagement with the ideology of the game text.[40] Living through the narrative as the person controlling the main character, strategizing and making choices that inform details of narrative development, makes the message of the game more likely to 'stick' with the player as the result of active rather than passive learning (Gee 2003).

I would also suggest that the linearity of the JRPG, combined with the tightly controlled limitations on what the player can and cannot do, affords the developer more power to present their desired ideology. As mentioned in Chapter 3, manipulation rules are subtle and effective methods of conveying the ideology of the developer, alongside goal objectives and narrative elements (Frasca 2003: 231). The JRPG player is keenly aware of the limitations of the genre, experiencing frustration when their movement is restricted or when there are few dialogue options. However, this also makes the player more aware of the game as a constructed space and authored product. The ideology of the game is not taken as 'natural' but as a point of view that the developers want to get across, and the player can actively engage with it in a critical way. This is especially true for games like *Final Fantasy VII* which incorporate self-reflexivity into the text in creative ways. The embodied experience of gameplay combines with the linear plot of the JRPG to force the player into decision-making practices with which they might not always agree. This gives a self-conscious quality to the gameplay which makes the player reflect on their actions. If this does not always result in internalization of the developer's ideology, it certainly necessitates engagement with it, making an impact on the player through their own lived experience.

Final Fantasy X and apocalyptic visual style

The last game I want to analyze in detail here is *Final Fantasy X* (2001), whose main character Tidus we discussed in Chapter 4. *FFX* is an epic story of lost civilizations and religion, as well as cultural and racial difference. The game may also be read as part of Japan's nuclear discourse, using allegory to posit nuclear power as something outside the realm of human control and yet ingrained in the mechanism of modern energy production and consumption. The narrative is deeply concerned with technology and the abuse of power. On the world of Spira, 'machina' or machinery is forbidden by the prevailing religion. The player finds out through Tidus' conversations with other characters that it was the abuse of machina power that destroyed the civilization of Zanarkand in ages past. While the priests of Yevon preach that machina power is the source of evil, the Al-Bhed people continue to use the technology, and are widely despised as heretics. The player meets various Al-Bhed characters – including Cid, the airship captain – who speak another language, incomprehensible without the use of dictionaries found in the gameworld. The Al-Bhed are clearly constructed as ethnically and culturally different to the rest of Spira's people, meaning that technology and the limitations on its use lie at the heart of racial and religious difference in the game's narrative. The first main turning point is Operation

Mi'ihen, where the priests of Yevon and their Crusader army have joined together with the Al-Bhed to fight the giant monster Sin. Dialogue in this scene concerns the fact that the Al-Bhed are heretics, yet at the same time are desperately needed in the fight against the common enemy. The Al-Bhed are deployed on a high cliff overlooking the ocean, with an arsenal of machina weapons, while the Crusaders plan to ride their Chocobo mounts against the enemy from the ground. Once the Al-Bhed fire their weapons, however, Sin retaliates, and the Crusading army is vaporized in the blast.

This scene is extremely powerful. The setting is on a huge scale, with the vast ocean, towering cliffs and beach far below. Humans are dwarfed by both the natural environment and also by the monster Sin, which appears to be just as tall as the mountains even though part of its body remains submerged in the water. Sin is a terrifying apparition worthy of any *kaijū* movie – massive, covered in scales, with a whale-like mouth and dark colouring. That the scales themselves can peel off and become weaponized creatures, swimming towards the beach, adds to the awesome and awful nature of the enemy. It seems clear that the only hope of the attacking force lies in the power of machina, as human strength is far too weak to prevail against such an opponent. Once the Al-Bhed machina are destroyed, the efforts of the humans on the beach seem doomed to failure. The valour of the Crusaders in the face of impossibly overwhelming odds is thus firmly established before they charge, embodying the sacrifice so valued in Japanese tales of tragic heroes such as Minamoto no Yoshitsune or Saigō Takamori (Morris 1975). For Western players, the Crusaders bring to mind similar tropes of wartime bravery, seen in Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Charge of the Light Brigade*. The fact that the Crusaders charge anyway, clearly aware of their puny size in comparison to the enemy, demonstrates their courage and heroism. In contrast, Tidus and his companions up on the cliff run away, showing a more practical attitude in the face of danger.

The scene is further intensified by the choice of music and sound. Playing in the background through Operation Mi'ihen is the *FFX* battle theme, composed by Nakano Junya and heard through the game whenever the field of play changes to the turn-based battle dynamic.[41] Hearing this music during a cut-scene makes a deep impression on the player, who has been accustomed to switching into an active battle mode of play whenever they hear this particular theme. The player has thus been trained to leap into action at the sound of this music, and their inability to do so during the cut-scene produces high tension and a sense of disjunction. Sounds of battle such as weapons priming and firing, waves crashing against the monster Sin as it rises from the deep, and shouts of the humans on shore add to the dramatic tension. Yet it is the absolute silence that follows the obliteration of the Crusaders which arguably makes the most impact. After the black-and-white particles of vaporization fill the screen, the screen as a whole fades to white, which in the narrative has so far signalled a flashback or Tidus's memory. In this case, it turns out that Tidus has been knocked unconscious on the beach. The scene fades back in to the sound of waves, and the narrative resumes.

At this point Tidus is able to explore the beach and examine the bodies of the Crusaders that litter the sand. Depending on the player's actions, Tidus could examine one, two or many more of the bodies. Inspecting a body yields a short phrase of text that appears on the screen, lamenting the loss of the young and heroic Crusaders. If the player inspects all the bodies, the cumulative effect of reading the textual epitaphs is a feeling of sadness and regret for wasted life. The epitaphs are as follows:

> Rest in peace.
> A peaceful death. Probably had no clue.
> Still so young.
> Too late to help them.
> Slightly warm, but no sign of breathing.
> Staring at the sky, lifeless.
> Reclining, breathless.
> Instant, painless death.[42]

The dynamic energy and intense battle of Operation Mi'ihen is thus followed by a meditation on death, emphasizing the human toll of war. Significantly, the text also reiterates the instant nature of death in the vaporizing blast of Sin, emphasizing the power of the energy released, as well as the idea of 'peace' achieved in an unknowing death.

Operation Mi'ihen may be studied from a number of different perspectives – as a turning point in the complex narrative, as a case study in the use of sound and music, or as a point of deep player-character identification through the intense emotion of battle coupled with the psychological development of Tidus in the scene. In terms of visual style, the explosion at the centre of Operation Mi'ihen is consistent with shared conventions in manga, anime, and other texts in Japanese visual culture. While manga, anime and games have their own media-specific conventions of representing certain kinds of ideas, there is also a shared visual shorthand pointing to specific meanings in these texts. The vaporizing blast in Operation Mi'ihen is immediately recognized as sharing many elements with similar releases of energy in anime such as *Akira* or *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. The blast is represented by a rapidly expanding bubble-like hemisphere, and stark contrasts of black and white are common. Examining the emphasis on apocalyptic visions in Japanese animation, Susan Napier makes a clear case for the similarity of representation across anime from the 1980s to the present (2005: 249–274). Extending Napier's argument to include manga and games, we see the apocalyptic visual style mirrored in thematic narrative concerns, where apocalypse, war memory and nuclear power are represented either directly or by allegory in Japanese texts.

As we have seen, the *Final Fantasy* games have represented 'ultimate power' in terms of Magitek, Mako and Sin. The force that humans are attempting to control is never expressly described as 'nuclear' energy, yet this is implied throughout the narrative. Ironically, it is this avoidance of specific nuclear terminology that allows

contemporary American audiences to read the text in terms of energy and power divorced from the Japanese cultural context. It is difficult to imagine a Japanese player of *FFVII* who would not connect Mako energy to nuclear power, but Western commentators have argued that Mako is a fossil fuel.[43] However, continuing through the narrative right to the end often makes the allegory clear.[44] Once Tidus and his group have recovered from the Mi'ihen attack, they board a ferry to cross a large body of water known as the Moonflow. Tidus's companion Wakka is a fervent believer in Yevon and a staunch opponent of using machina for any reason. As the ferry moves into deeper water, Wakka draws Tidus's attention to a sunken city beneath them. The ensuing dialogue is easily comprehended as a not-so-thinly veiled reference to nuclear war:

TIDUS: A sunken city!

WAKKA: A machina city– a thousand years old! They built this city on top of bridges across the river.

LULU: But the weight of the city caused the bridges to collapse, and it all sank to the bottom.

WAKKA: Right. It's a good lesson.

TIDUS: A lesson?

WAKKA: Yeah. Why build a city over a river, ya?

TIDUS: Uh…. Well, it would be convenient, with all that water there.

WAKKA: Nope, that's not why. They just wanted to prove they could defy the laws of nature!

TIDUS: Hmmm? I'm not so sure about that.

WAKKA: Yevon has taught us: When humans have power, they seek to use it. If you don't stop them, they go too far, ya?

TIDUS: Yeah, but don't you use machina too? Like the stadium and stuff, right?

LULU: Yevon, it decides … which machina we may use, and which we may not.

TIDUS: So what kind of machina may we not use, then?

WAKKA: Remember Operation Mi'ihen? That kind.

LULU: Or war will rage again.

TIDUS: War?

YUNA: More than a thousand years ago…. Mankind waged war using machina to kill!

WAKKA: They kept building more and more powerful machina.

LULU: They made weapons so powerful…. It was thought they could destroy the entire world.

YUNA: The people feared that Spira would be destroyed.

WAKKA: But the war did not stop!

TIDUS: Wh-What happened then?

YUNA: Sin came, and it destroyed the cities and their machina.

LULU: The war ended … and our reward … was Sin.

WAKKA: So, Sin's our punishment for lettin' things get out of hand, eh?

TIDUS: Man, that's rough.

WAKKA: Yeah, it is.

TIDUS: But, it's not like the machina are bad.
LULU: Only as bad as their users.

(Auronlu 2008)

As in *FFVII*, the dialogue takes place in allegorical mode. But *FFX* is much more direct in its linkage of technology and power to weaponry and war. The Moonflow dialogue may be seen as a meditation on the human ability to use technological power versus the human responsibility not to abuse that power. In return for abusing machina power, the people of Spira are now suffering from the attacks of Sin. 'War' and 'Sin' are thus seen as interconnected, and placed firmly within a religious context, giving a moral dimension to the use of machina and technology. *FFX* thus lifts the idea of human responsibility to the religious plane, invoking the English-language word 'sin' to connect the world of Spira to Christian theology.[45]

This linkage of technological power and apocalypse to the Christian idea of sin is not new, appearing in *Akira, Neon Genesis Evangelion* and also Miyazaki Hayao's 1984 film *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, among others.[46] But unlike anime, the videogame medium places the player directly into the narrative through the experience of the main character. In the process of character embodiment, the player not only feels as if they are in the gameworld while immersed in the narrative and action, but they also take on some on the worldview and attitudes expressed by characters in the game and the overall story. In terms of the worldview of *FFX*, the player as Tidus is thrust into a world of moral uncertainty, caught between the fundamentalist believers of Yevon and the practical (if heretical) Al-Bhed. The question of technology and responsibility is thus experienced by the player in a more direct way than by the anime audience, giving a greater connection to the nuclear discourse of postmodern Japanese media.

Replaying *Final Fantasy:* nuclear nostalgia

Ten years after the release of *FFX*, Japan experienced the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi plant in March 2011 were rated seven on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale, which ranges from zero (no threat to safety) to seven (major accident). For comparison, the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986 was also rated a seven on this scale. The triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown in Fukushima changed the popular perception of nuclear power in Japan. Looking at Japanese newscasts, internet sites, journalistic books, manga and documentary films since the date now known simply as 3.11, it is clear that 'nuclear power' has come to imply domestic disaster, the failure of nuclear power plants, a public health crisis, a loss of faith in a 'clean' power source, and a feeling of being lied to by those in authority. Then-Prime Minister Kan Naoto released a memoir of the disaster titled *My Nuclear Nightmare*, explaining his role in the events and emphasizing the role of human choice in relying on nuclear power. Kan reached a

simple conclusion: 'If we shut down and dismantle all our nuclear power plants, we will no longer have nuclear accidents' (2017: vii). But even though Kan and his successor Noda Yoshihiko advocated an end to nuclear power in Japan, taking all reactors offline by May 2012, Abe Shinzō started them back up again, beginning with a reactor in Kagoshima in August 2015.[47] While public anti-nuclear protest was very strong in the years immediately following the Fukushima disaster, fervour has since waned, with the *Japan Times* describing the anti-nuclear movement as 'struggling' to regain momentum at the five-year anniversary mark.[48] Even now, public confidence in both TEPCO and the government remains very low, particularly in regards to food safety and rebuilding in the Tōhoku region.[49]

The shifting perceptions of nuclear power since 2011 are reflected in artistic works, such as the stories in the anthology *March was Made of Yarn*, and films like Sono Sion's *Land of Hope* (*Kibō no kuni*) and Uchida Nobuteru's *The Calm Everyday* (*Odayaka na nichijō*), all from 2012.[50] These works share some continuities with pre-3.11 nuclear discourse, such as the importance of human responsibility and restraint when dealing with nuclear power. However, the new mode of nuclear discourse draws more attention to energy sources for domestic use, rather than atomic weaponry and materials of war. At the same time, the focus has shifted away from avoiding the past mistakes of others, and towards learning from the domestic experience of Fukushima. In short, when looking for someone to blame for the current nuclear disaster, the enemy is no longer the USA but Japanese leadership. The perceived victimhood of postwar Japanese identity remains, but the subject of the enemy has changed, from the American Other to the Japanese Self. Rather than praying for world peace and hanging 1,000-crane offerings at the Hiroshima Peace Park – symbolic acts of resistance – Japanese citizens must now protest bodily on the streets, elect representatives who share their anti-nuclear stance, and take concrete steps to change their own domestic future.[51] The new nuclear discourse is thus one of discomfort and dissonance within Japan, rather than a shared experience which could bond Japanese people together in the face of foreign aggression.

In this atmosphere, replaying *FFX* takes on a new meaning in the Japanese nuclear discourse. *FFX* was at one time just a 'classic game' to be played for nostalgia value. The object of nostalgia was the PlayStation 2 (for which the game was a flagship text, showing the true capabilities of the new console), the 'retro' feel of visual style and fashion in the game (including Tidus's spiky haircut and Lulu's Gothic-inspired costume), and Uematsu Nobuo's soundtrack. But playing the game in 2018, particularly for the Japanese audience, the nostalgia of *FFX* may well be one of longing for a simpler time, a simpler mode of nuclear discourse, when the enemy was the Other and not the Self. The comparison across time periods is helpful when we consider the massive popularity of *FFX* in its remastered HD version, released for the PS3 and PS Vita in 2013, the PS4 in 2015, and Microsoft Windows in 2016. *FFVII* has similarly been updated and re-released on the PlayStation Network, compatible with PS3, PS Vita and PSP (2009), the PC (2012) and Steam (2013), iOS and PS4 (2015), and Android

(2016) systems. Both games are awaiting release on Nintendo Switch and Xbox One in the coming year. Replaying the two games, the darker *FFVII*, rooted in the corruption of government and industry in the mid-1990s context of power plant accidents, feels more reflective of the current mood.

Playing games from the Japanese 'nuclear discourse' is an experience much like watching *Godzilla* or *Akira* – a doubled experience where the player is at once enjoying an immersive narrative and game environment, and also on some level aware of deeper symbolism and ideological concerns. As with any text created in any medium, the degree of impact achieved by the ideology has much to do with the receptivity of the player, their state of mind when playing, how much they know of Japanese culture and attitudes towards nuclear power, and so forth. However, it may be said that the bombing of Hiroshima and the nuclear meltdown at Fukushima are events that registered on the international consciousness. 'Japan' and 'nuclear power' are closely linked in the global popular imagination. Playing games from the *Final Fantasy* series, we can see the recurrent motif of nuclear weapons and nuclear energy. While other games in the series certainly involve wars between nations and empires, the three games discussed above are most clearly understood as belonging to Japan's nuclear discourse.[52]

The Japanese concern with nuclear power – in the form of both weapons and energy – has played a large role in the *Final Fantasy* series, even up to the present day. The first game in the series to be made post-Fukushima, *Final Fantasy XV* (2016) focuses strongly on energy sources, with the clifftop town of Lestallum dominated by a massive power station run by EXINERIS industries. The EXINERIS supervisor Holly sends the player's party on various missions to check on steam valves and electricity poles to ensure that the power supply is not disrupted during a time of political upheaval. The allegorical power source in this game is a fallen meteor, dispersing its radiant heat into the earth. But halfway through the game, the player-character Noctis must enter the heart of the power station on the verge of a meltdown, dressed in a full-body radiation suit. As the power plant glows a bright orange, Noctis must complete the mission before time runs out, bringing to mind the highly dangerous forays of Japanese workers entering the radioactive sites at the Fukushima Daiichi plant.

The main storyline of *FFXV* concerns the evil Niflheim Empire, complete with Magitek soldiers, while a powerful Crystal will once again determine the fate of the kingdom.[53] The reappearance of Magitek soldiers in this game speaks to another concern of the series, closely connected to the nuclear discourse in Japan. Magitek soldiers are bioengineered weapons, products of scientific experiments with no soul or will of their own.[54] The treatment of Magitek soldiers in the *Final Fantasy* series reflects a deep unease in Japanese society regarding genetic engineering. *Final Fantasy VI* and *VII* may be read equally well as texts intimately concerned with the biological capabilities of humans and non-humans, genetic experiments, and the effects of experimentation on scientific subjects. The interlinking of bioethics and nuclear discourse in a wider range of Japanese videogames is the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1 Quote from *Final Fantasy III* (1990) from my own gameplay notes. Note that Internet searches for 'Final Fantasy 3 script' yield scripts for *Final Fantasy VI*, as the third game released for the US market. I follow the Japanese numbering for the original releases, with *FFI-III* released on the NES and *FFIV-VI* on the SNES console.

2 'Preface to the English Translation,' *My Nuclear Nightmare* (Kan 2017: vii).

3 Square merged with Enix in April 2003 to form Square Enix, one of the foremost RPG development companies in the world.

4 Kohler (2005:110–113).

5 Internet searches for 'final fantasy' and 'nuclear power' or 'anti-nuclear' (in Japanese, ファイナル・ファンタジー and 原子力 or 反核運動) deliver numerous discussion threads on the possibilities of nuclear allegory in *Final Fantasy* games. Other articles take the nuclear aspect for granted, as in *The New Yorker*'s recent assumption that *FFVII*'s opening scene takes place in 'a nuclear reactor' (Parkin 2017).

6 On atomic bomb literature see Treat (1995); on atomic bomb cinema see Shapiro (2002). Contributors to Jacobs (2010) examine nuclear metaphors and messages in a range of art forms including manga, anime, poetry, sculpture and film.

7 On Godzilla and the apocalyptic imagination see chapters by William Tsutsui and Alan Cholodenko in Freedman and Slade (2017). An early version of my *FFVII* case study and Japanese nuclear discourse appears in the same volume (Hutchinson 2017b).

8 Dower (1991: 410–415) lists the censorship regulations in detail, as well as a number of works censored for their attempted depiction of Hiroshima and A-bomb victims.

9 Hashimoto (2015) also considers public commemorations and newspaper editorials as popular culture's reprocessing of war trauma.

10 See Ashbaugh (2010), Napier (2005: 221–222, 257–8, 268–9), Tsutsui (2010: 18–20).

11 See Kunzelman (2017) for an excellent critical reading of this game and its themes of war, violence and justice.

12 Originally released in Japan as *Makai Tōshi SaGa* (Hell Tower Warrior Saga), this stand-alone RPG was marketed in North America as *Final Fantasy Legends*, having so much in common with the Square series.

13 Cavasin (2008) discusses Tōkaimura's role in anti-nuclear protest and the environmental movement.

14 See DiNitto (2014) and Hein (2014). Aldrich (2017) and Reiher (2017) examine the erosion of trust in the Japanese government, largely as a result of misinformation spread after the Fukushima disaster. Essays in Hindmarsh (2013) examine social, political and environmental effects of the disaster.

15 See Hasegawa (2004: 128–73) and Aldrich (2010: 119–51); Wöhr (2014) examines Japan's 1970s anti-nuclear movement in relation to eco-feminism, with leadership and membership shifting between young, old, female, male, urban and rural populations.

16 Quotes are from the PlayStation re-release of the game (Skinner 2003). For the SNES version see: www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDMWp1oLoA0

17 'Auronlu' is an amalgam of two character names from *Final Fantasy X*, the warrior Auron and mage Lulu.

18 The term 'Tokyo War Crimes Tribunals' refers technically to the IMTFE (International Military Tribunal of the Far East) in Tokyo, 1946–1948, but also generically refers to war crimes trials across the Asia-Pacific, including Guam and the Philippines (Maga 2001: xi). Much time was taken in the trials defining what constituted a 'war crime' and whether war could itself be determined illegal (Brackman 1987: 96).

19 On the controversial decision not to indict Hirohito at the IMTFE, and the Emperor's role in WWII see Brackman (1987: 77–78, 86, 195) and Maga (2001: 34–42).

20 Nozaki (2008) analyzes the court cases regarding Japanese school history textbooks.

21 During the trial Tōjō Hideki expressed no remorse, and was widely seen as a hero for claiming responsibility for Japan's defeat and absolving the Emperor of blame for the

Pacific War (Brackman 1987: 350–351). Maga emphasizes the lingering question and controversy over 'whether Japan was, indeed, a villain in World War II' and 'whether it needs to apologize for that villainy' (2001: 4).

22 Dudden (2008) examines various apologetic expressions used by Japanese officials over time. Controversy hinges on translations of specific words and whether they express acceptable levels of true apologetic feeling (Mok and Tokunaga 2007).

23 Cid's role in the series has ranged from friendly NPC to playable character to antagonist in a boss battle. The first *Final Fantasy* was retroactively changed to include Cid so he could appear in every game of the series. http://finalfantasy.wikia.com/wiki/Cid. Accessed 28 December 2018.

24 Director Kitase Yoshinori cites the need for 'higher-capacity CD media' as a major reason for Square abandoning the Nintendo cartridge system for Sony's new hardware. See *Retro Gamer* Staff (2011: 26). Ryan (2011: 179–183) discusses Square's shift away from Nintendo.

25 The kanji characters used are 'magic' and 'clarity', while 'clarity' is made up of the characters for 'sun' and 'light/radiance' (魔晄). While the transliteration Makō is more accurate, I will follow the conventions of the localized game and peripherals and omit the macron.

26 Although the Planet has no name in the game text, just called 星 (*hoshi*), the word 'Gaia' was used to refer to the 'spirit of the planet' in the films *The Spirits Within* (2001) and *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* (2005). Promotional materials for *Advent Children* and the official game website for *Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII* (2006) also named the planet 'Gaia.' Some scholars interpret the original *FFVII* game in terms of Gaia theory and environmentalism (J. Foster 2009; Blahuta 2009).

27 The debate over this character's name has fuelled many discussion boards. Developers originally wrote the name as 'Aerith,' evoking both 'air' and 'earth,' emphasizing her closeness to the Planet and Lifestream. A transliteration of *aerisu*, 'Aerith' appears in game peripherals like the strategy guide and in the later game *Kingdom Hearts*. 'Aeris' is seen by some as a gross error of mistranslation, while others continue to use the name because that is what they grew up with. Since I am specifically talking about the PlayStation release, I will use 'Aeris.' This is consistent with my use of 'Magitek,' 'Mako' and other words that appeared in the first US release of these games. Daniel Burke has released a full re-translation of *FFVII* into new and improved English (DLPB and Lusky, 2011). While much of the game is now clearer in meaning, the re-translation has itself come under attack (Yin-Poole 2015).

28 Quoted dialogue comes from the localized US version of the game script (Little Chiba 1998).

29 President Shinra, Reno, Aeris, her mother Elmyra, one of the Honeybee girls in Wall Market, and residents of Medeel all comment on the 'glow' in Cloud's eyes or their intense 'weird' blue colour. The strangeness of Cloud's eyes is also the first character feature described on his page in the official strategy guide (Noda 2000: 8).

30 Professor Hojo's experiment is called 'Mako Radiation Therapy' in Escape Report no. 2, a document hidden in the Shinra Mansion and only accessible as an optional quest on Disc 3.

31 Little Chiba (1998).

32 Little Chiba (1998). Each statement is randomly assigned to different villagers, so the speakers will change on different playthroughs of the game.

33 I find it significant that the head of the Shinra Weapons Program is a woman, considering the gendered nature of nuclear science and also the anti-nuclear movement in Japan (Wöhr 2014). Scarlet is the stereotypical femme fatale, with red dress, blonde hair and high heels, engaging in a slap fight with Tifa, cackling with evil laughter and showing antagonism towards her male colleagues. But she is the one who successfully hunts down the Huge Materia in the quest to make an ultimate weapon, making her one of the most important figures in *FFVII*'s nuclear discussion.

34 The hopeful ending prompted character designer Nomura Tetsuya to see the healed Midgar as the 'Promised Land' of the story, although he admits that scenario writer Nojima may have had a completely different idea (Noda 2000: 33).

35 Early Japanese environmental protest in the 1950s and 60s focused more on specific, local chemical accidents with recognizable victims, hence the term *kōgai* (pollution) to describe the issue. A concern for a broader *kankyō* (environment) came in the 1980s (see Kada *et al.*, 2006: 110). Anti-nuclear protest in the 1990s involved both terms, as specific nuclear accidents and site protests joined more ecological concerns. On changes in Japanese environmentalism and links to anti-nuclear protest see Broadbent (2006: 103–107), Karan and Suganuma (2008: 8–9), McKean (1981: 260–261), Kada *et al.* (2006). Hasegawa (2004: 82) sees anti-nuclear protest as one part of the anti-pollution movement advocating green energy, one of many grassroots environmental movements in Japan.

36 Avenell (2017: 148–176) discusses the colonial aspects of Japan's nuclear energy program.

37 Games^tm staff (2014: 142).

38 *Retro Gamer* magazine describes the death as a 'defining moment' in 'the RPG that changed the genre,' a 'shocking, sad, and brilliant' move that made *FFVII* 'enormously influential,' and for many players 'the first videogame narrative to leave a mark on them' (2011: 25, 28).

39 *Retro Gamer* 96: 4. Thanks to its massive sales and impact on the genre, *FFVII* was added to the World Video Game Hall of Fame at the Strong Museum of Play in Rochester, New York in 2018.

40 Grodal (2003); Gregersen and Grodal (2009).

41 Most music for *Final Fantasy X* was composed by Uematsu Nobuo, and this was the first *Final Fantasy* game for which he received assistance from other composers. According to Inoue (2004), Uematsu contributed 51 tracks to the score; 20 tracks were written by Hamauzu Masashi and 18 by Nakano Junya.

42 See Auronlu (2008) for the full game script.

43 The non-renewable nature of Mako has led some scholars to see it as a fossil fuel equivalent (J. Foster 2009: 48), but it is clear from the script that Mako has replaced coal and fossil fuels as a more efficient power source.

44 See Hutchinson (2017a) on the importance of game completion to grasp the meaning of specific representations in the text.

45 Hahn (2009: 155–156) analyzes the sacrifice of the Summoners in *FFX* as Christian allegory.

46 On Christian iconography and allegory in anime see Barkman (2010).

47 Kan gives an overview and timeline in his memoir, advocating a complete end to nuclear power (2017: xii-xiii).

48 Aoki (2016). Two of the largest anti-nuclear protests in Japan following the Fukushima Daiichi incident were on 19 September 2011, with 60,000 people marching through central Tokyo, and 16 July 2012, when 75,000 people marched from Yoyogi Park in Tokyo to protest the mishandling of the aftermath of the incident. Brown (2018) discusses anti-nuclear protests in Tokyo and their significance.

49 See Aldrich (2017), Reiher (2017).

50 Proceeds from the sale of the anthology, edited and translated by Luke and Karashima (2012), were donated to help the recovery effort.

51 New aspects of citizenship have included radiation testing and environmental monitoring (Kera, Rod and Peterova 2013).

52 The MMORPG *Final Fantasy XIV* (2010) focuses on 'a world reborn,' as civilization has been wiped out by a meteor strike and must rebuild, although some would argue this was more a function of the online game system crashing and having to be replaced than any 'apocalyptic' narrative significance.

53 'Nibelheim' from *FFVII* has been updated to more closely reflect the spelling of Norse legend, as has the famed 'Midgar Zolom' serpent, which reappears as Midgardsormr.
54 Although, like Oshii Mamoru's film *Ghost in the Shell* and Tezuka Osamu's *Phoenix* series, *FFXV* also questions the 'soulless' nature of engineered cyborgs based on human organic material.

6   Bioethics meets nuclear crisis

The advances of genetic engineering tend to blur the deeply rooted categorical distinctions between the subjective and the objective, the grown and the made.

Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*[1]

Three generations of Emmerich men…. We must have the curse of nuclear weapons written into our DNA.

Hal Emmerich, *Metal Gear Solid*[2]

The energy of nuclear power plants and the destructive capability of nuclear weapons stem from the incredible amount of power held within the nucleus of an atom, containing unimaginable potential and explosive force. It is understandable that much of the Japanese nuclear discourse focuses on the responsible and ethical use of such technology. A closely related problem in the Japanese discourse on technology is the ethics of manipulating the nucleus of a living cell, in genetic experimentation and bioengineering. In this chapter, I will examine the idea of the nucleus from the perspective of bioethics, analysing the conjunction of bioethics with nuclear fears in Japanese videogames. As global concerns about genetic engineering and biotechnology were rising in the early 1990s, the cloning of Dolly the sheep in 1996 combined with a rash of nuclear accidents in Japan to create much anxiety about scientific use of the nucleus. As with the use of nuclear energy, the bioethics discourse centred on the hubris of genetic manipulation and what happens when human beings tamper with natural processes – often creating something 'unnatural' and dangerous.

The anxiety surrounding bioengineering is clearly visible in Japanese videogames of the mid-1990s, featuring engineered viruses and the mutated results of the infected, both animal and human. Many games also explore the idea of cloning humans, specifically for military purposes. The figure of the super-soldier is not a Japanese creation – Captain America and the Clone Troopers of *Star Wars* are good examples from American popular culture to show that fears of genetic tampering are universal. The merging of human material with machinery is also common in global pop culture, seen in Tezuka Osamu's *Astro Boy*, the *Six Million Dollar Man*, *Robocop* and the eerie villain Davros from

Doctor Who. Fusing together parts of bodies, living and dead, can be seen from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* through to the *Universal Soldier* films and Taka-hashi Rumiko's manga *Inuyasha.* Science fiction around the world has explored all kinds of possibilities for the enhancement and transmutation of the human body, pushing the limits of what may and may not be possible or desirable. More recently the addition of AI capabilities to the human brain and body has appeared in such disparate texts as *Terminator, The Matrix*, and *Ghost in the Shell*. The Japanese discourse on bioethics and genetic engineering thus fits into a global artistic tradition.

Even so, the local experience of Japan's legal and social context has placed greater significance on certain aspects of bioethics, specifically assisted repro-duction, organ transplantation, brain death and human cloning, all of which deal with the ownership of genetic material and the rights of the individual. Cloning and assisted reproduction manipulate the nucleus of a cell, and are perceived as technologies with the power to unleash something truly fearsome on the world. This anxiety appears in Tezuka Osamu's *Phoenix* series (1967–1988), which explores human cloning in the volume *Life*, as well as the creation of humans and animals in the glass tanks of Dr. Saruta in *Future*, set in AD 3404.[3] Trained as a medical doctor, Tezuka portrayed surgical procedures, grafting and even cloning in a very realistic way. Tezuka's clones in the *Phoenix* series do not fare well, melting on contact with air or forced to run for their lives on the 'Clone Hunt' television show. In more recent visions, Japanese literature and television series have explored human embryo transfer, in vitro fertilization and surrogacy. Vera Mackie (2014) has analyzed the contemporary fiction of Kaidō Takeru (another artist with medical training) and its TV adaptations to show how popular culture has negotiated the challenges of using new technologies in assisted human reproduction. Just as Mackie places Kaidō's work in its context to consider 'the interaction between popular cultural texts and the circulation of medical and legal discourses on family, reproduction and population' (2014: 443), I will also situate Japanese videogames in their social, medical and legal context in this chapter.

Japanese videogames exhibit many narratives of cloning and transplantation, failed genetic experiments and suffering on the part of the experiment subjects themselves. I will start by reconsidering *Final Fantasy VI* and *VII* from the per-spective of genetic engineering, followed by the *Metal Gear Solid* series. To demonstrate the breadth of the discourse, I will also consider the fighting game series *Tekken* and survival horror series *Resident Evil*. While the *Final Fantasy* and *Metal Gear Solid* games stand out for their double-edged narratives of the nucleus, inhabiting a site where bioethics meets nuclear crisis, *Tekken* and *Resident Evil* are less focused on the nuclear threat. All these games feature bio-engineering and its ethical implications for society and the individual, set against corporate and government interests. Different games could also be useful for this analysis, but these series are highly popular around the world and well known through transmedia adaptations, particularly the *Resident Evil* films, now in their seventh Hollywood iteration.[4] It is perhaps because of the success of Japanese

games like *Resident Evil* (1996) and *Metal Gear Solid* (1998) that bioethics appeared rather later in Western videogame development – these titles fulfilled the need for narratives about bioengineering directly following Dolly's cloning. *Deus Ex* (2000), *Halo* (2001) and *BioShock* (2007) built on the success of these games, taking issues of human augmentation even further.[5] But the Japanese game industry was ready to provide games about cloning and genetic mutation at an earlier stage, as Japanese society had experienced intense bioethics debates through the decade of the 1990s.

Bioengineering and *Final Fantasy VI*

In the last chapter I analyzed *Final Fantasy VI* as a nuclear allegory, with the unbridled unleashing of Magic creating a nuclear-style holocaust 1,000 years in the past. But the Magitek Armour in this game may also be understood in terms of the duality of the nucleus in Japanese discourse, with genetic material and light-energy both needed for its successful deployment. The unstable powers of Magic and Magitek can only be wielded by certain individuals, with the mental and physical melding of the wearer to Magitek Armour providing the key to its destructive force. This biological aspect of Magitek is most clearly illustrated through the character of Terra, the product of a union between a human and an Esper. We first meet Terra as two soldiers high on a snow-blown clifftop argue over her presence. One is frightened of the 'sorceress' who reportedly destroyed 50 soldiers in Magitek Armour in under three minutes. The other assures him that Terra cannot harm them, as the 'Slave Crown' on her head controls her every thought and action. We later discover the crown was installed by the villain Kefka, to subdue Terra and use her magical abilities as a weapon of war. Notably, Terra is under the control of the player in this scene, and she will not move until the player picks up the controller. The player's first act in this game is thus complicit with the will of the villain, taking Terra to the town of Narshe to investigate a buried Esper and retrieve it for the Gestahlian Empire.

The significance of Magitek Armour to the game narrative may be seen in the high degree of artistic attention paid to it in the game production. Amano Yoshitaka's beautiful art renderings of characters wearing Magitek Armour show them not in a mechanoid suit, but riding on the back of a giant robotic creature, dragon-like in appearance and stride.[6] The logo for *FFVI* is in fact Terra astride a Magitek conveyance such as this. Magitek Armour in this incarnation looks more alive than mechanical, highlighting the biological nature of the weapon. However, the meaning of Amano's design is not understood by the player until they have played through more than half the game narrative. When Terra and her party visit the Imperial city of Vector and see the interior of Kefka's Magitek Research Facility, they discover the truth: Kefka hunts and collects Espers in order to extract the Magic from these living beings and process it into weapons in the form of Magitek Armour. The ruler Emperor Gestahl is thus able to create an 'invincible army' of Magitek soldiers through bioengineering and genocide. Until this point, the player has been left to ponder the dual representation of

Magitek weaponry as both biological and mechanical. This wondering aspect on the part of the player lends even more impact to the meaning of the Magitek Armour once the truth is revealed.

Elite users of Magitek Armour are known as Magitek Knights, but Terra had this status forced upon her, kidnapped as a child and raised in the Gestahlian Empire. Once free, Terra experiences an identity crisis, wondering how to reconcile her Esper powers with her humanity. Terra's dual identity is emphasized through gameplay, as one of her battle mechanics is 'Morph' (Trance or トランス in Japanese). Hitting this button during any fight scene will make Terra switch between her human and Esper form, which glows a bright purple.[7] One of the few characters to sympathize with Terra is General Celes Chere, a member of the Gestahlian Imperial Army who has herself undergone genetic manipulation, being 'artificially infused with Magic' when she was young (Skinner 2003). Kathryn Hemmann (2016) sees Terra and Celes as protagonists for the game, their enhanced 'otherness' a negotiation of the posthuman. These characters certainly embody the bioethical concerns of genetic engineering, and both have significant screen time in the FMV opening cinematic created for the PlayStation port. The ending to the sequence particularly focuses on Terra, enslaved by Kefka who grins as she is inserted into the Magitek Armour and sent off to fight for the Empire. Terra's importance to the narrative is thus borne out by her presence in the logo and the overriding thematic concerns of the story. But it is hard to name Terra and Celes as definitive 'protagonists' for the game due to the character structure of *FFVI*. There are 14 playable characters, and the player can choose members of their questing party at will. Although certain parts of the game narrative require particular characters to be present in the party (and chosen characters can disappear when the player least wants them to), it is possible to play through large parts of the story with neither Terra nor Celes in the party. For this reason, the main themes are also conveyed through the backstory and experiences of other characters.

Game characters who suffer from bioengineering include Terra's father and the Espers, and surprisingly, the villain Kefka. It is revealed during an optional conversation in Vector that Kefka himself was a failed Magitek experiment – the effort of trying to meld Kefka's personality with the Magitek Armour snapped his mind.[8] The mastermind behind these experiments was Cid, the recurring scientist-engineer figure of *Final Fantasy* who in this title is presented as immoral, if not malevolent. Cid Del Norte Marquez controls the power of Magic extracted from the Espers, and uses it not only to create Magitek Armour but also to experiment on children in the various villages of the continent. Children encountered in the game spontaneously exhibit Magic powers (such as fire spells), and Terra's turning point comes when she feels a deep responsibility to care for the children of Mobliz village. No matter which characters the player chooses to include in their party, Kefka and the children of the villages are constant and unchanging. Indicating the significance of the overall theme to the gameplay, this thematic content is delivered independently of player action. Overall, the game explores how living beings are used as experimental subjects, soldiers and biological weapons, with awful results.

Hemmann (2016) draws strong connections between the status of the female body as the site of successful genetic engineering in *FFVI* and the female body occupying the centre of social anxiety regarding Japanese visual media in the 1990s, all set within the larger discourse of bioethics debates in the 1990s. Much of the heated discussion on population, birth control, reproduction and eugenics in the 1990s came from the '1.57 shock' of 1990, when Japanese women's fertility rate dropped below replacement level (Htun 2014: 202). Historically, there has been a great deal of debate about women's reproductive rights and responsibilities in Japan, by male and female commentators alike.[9] Although abortion in Japan is technically illegal, there have been many exceptions to the law applied quite liberally since the Eugenics Protection Law of 1948, citing eugenics (ensuring a healthy baby), economic factors, and the mother's social responsibilities.[10] In 1996 the laws on abortion were rewritten in the Maternal Protection Act, indicating a shift away from eugenics and towards protection of the mother's health (Kano 2016: 67). Japanese debates on abortion have traditionally revolved around economic issues, health and disability, the idea of 'nature' and the complexity of women's lives, rather than the binary 'pro-choice' versus 'pro-life' debates in America (ibid.: 66). Kano writes that religious arguments about reproduction and abortion have also been 'muted' in Japan (ibid.: 90), although Morioka expresses more surprise that 'the language of religion remains silent' on the status of the embryo in this discussion.[11]

The mid-1990s also saw changing perspectives on the human embryo, related to Japan's growing reputation in cloning and stem-cell research. The birth of Dolly the sheep in 1996 'attracted wide public attention in Japan' (Morioka 2006: 1) while a Japanese researcher, Wakayama Teruhiko, created the first cloned mice in 1998. That year the Council for Science and Technology established a Bioethics Committee to examine human cloning. Debate turned on the personhood of the embryo, which was eventually designated 'the sprout of human life' (*seimei no hyōga*) – not a person in its current state, but deserving of dignity and respect in its potentiality for human life.[12] The idea of cloning a human embryo for any purpose was anathema to many in Japan (Uemura 2003), and the regulation of human embryonic stem cell research was widely discussed through the late 1990s. The Japanese government was caught in a bind, wanting to promote the life sciences and capitalize on Japanese innovations in biotechnology, yet also wanting to reassure a public convinced that cloning was 'morally wrong.'[13] Although the Cloning Restriction Law was passed in 2001, Japanese scientists developed the idea of a 'specified embryo' (*toku-teihai*) to be used for stem cell research, approved by the Koizumi government. Japan became one of the few places in the world where human embryonic stem-cell research was both legal and governmentally approved, and in 2004 the Bioethics Expert Committee ruled in favour of embryo cloning for regenerative medicine.[14] The use of human embryos for research remains highly contentious, turning on the utility versus the intrinsic worth and dignity of human material.[15] Japan provides an interesting case study that reminds us that bioethics discourse is by no means global, but very local in its application.

Feminist critics of bioengineering research have pointed out that the women donating the oocytes (eggs) for such research are nearly always left out of the discussion.[16] On either side of this argument, we can see that women's bodies and their genetic material have occupied the centre of the national bioethics debate. Ehara Yumiko (1992) and Ueno Chizuko (1994, 1998) have emphasized the links between nationalism, gender and sex to show the extent of state patriarchal control over women's bodies, for the purposes of labour, reproduction, and social care. To this list we can also add the purpose of scientific advancement. The place of the woman's body in the Japanese national discourse on bioethics has been analyzed by Ayako Kano (2016: 64–65) in regards to literature, Vera Mackie (2014) in regards to literature and television, and Kathryn Hemmann (2016) in regards to visual media like anime, manga and videogames. These scholars argue persuasively that the artistic works both reflect and contribute to the wider discourse on bioethics. However, since the works they discuss centre on women's bodies and reproduction, this leaves men's bodies out of the equation.

Embodying the patriarchy, male bodies in Japan are generally seen as an extension of the state polity, naturalized as part of the state itself. The male body is controlled by its labour, producing economic or military power. The reproductive capability of men has been taken for granted, and only recently has the Japanese 'herbivore man' (*sōshoku danshi*) come under scrutiny for his unwillingness to procreate and contribute properly to society.[17] Real-world discussion of bioethics regarding the male body has usually focused on artificial insemination (as part of the wider debate on reproductive technologies), or on aspects of medical technology which affect all humans regardless of gender – prosthetics versus muscular or skeletal enhancement, human growth hormone for athletic prowess, organ donation after death, DNA testing, euthanasia, and the rights of a brain-dead patient. In this respect, discourses of bioengineering specifically regarding the male body have a far greater range in fiction than in reality. Much of the fictional discourse has to do with cloning, medical experimentation, and the figure of the super-soldier. The male experience of genetic engineering appears in *Final Fantasy VII* and *Metal Gear Solid*, narratives that revolve around the male body, cloning, and human identity.

Bioengineering and identity in *Final Fantasy VII*

FFVII deals with similar themes of bioengineering as *FFVI*, this time manifested in the male body. The Shinra laboratory in Nibelheim produces super-soldiers by infusing them with Mako, giving SOLDIERS a bright blue glow to the eyes. Cloud exhibits this symptom, but is confused as to whether or not he is a member of the elite fighting squad. The player eventually understands that Cloud is a test subject for the Jenova Project, headed by the evil scientist Professor Hojo. Many characters in the game suffer military and medical experimentation at Hojo's hands, much of which involves breeding programs to produce genetically superior offspring. When Aeris is captured by Shinra we discover she is the

last of an ancient race known as the Cetra – much like the half-Esper Terra, an embodiment of pre-industrial, natural power and affinity with the Planet.[18] Like Terra, Aeris becomes a test subject, encased in glass so Professor Hojo can breed her with another 'endangered species' to bring both back from 'the brink of extinction.'[19] Held in captivity with Aeris is a lion-like creature called Red XIII. As his name suggests, this is the thirteenth specimen Hojo has captured. The player can change the name of this creature, but leaving it in the default gives a constant reminder of Red XIII's status as an experimental subject. It is significant that the witnesses to the healed world 500 years after the main events of the narrative are members of the same race as Red XIII, reinforcing their freedom from scientific experimentation and a reversion to natural processes.

As the narrative unfolds, we discover that Cloud was not only infused with Mako while in captivity, but also injected with genetic material from Sephiroth, offspring of Professor Hojo and the scientist Lucrecia. Using his own family as test subjects, Hojo had injected his son's foetus with cells from an alien being called Jenova. The 'Jenova Project' aimed to create an alien-human hybrid with special powers, including super-strength. Perhaps because his transformation began in the womb, Sephiroth was the strongest and most successful of the test subjects. Later subjects were human males deemed mentally and physically qualified to undergo infusion with Mako and injection with Jenova cells. These SOLDIERS were called 'Sephiroth clones' in the English translation, but 'Sephiroth copies' in the Japanese (*Sefirosu copii*).[20] An element of the supernatural pertains to these copies, as Professor Hojo believes that their Jenova cells will lead them to a great 'reunion' where the original physical form of Jenova can be restored. Sephiroth draws power from the copies as they assemble, using them as his puppets. Cloud is not immune to Sephiroth's power, losing control and suffering a mental breakdown.

At this point the screen flashes white, the controller in the player's hands vibrates, and the character is no longer responsive to the player's input. At moments like this, Cloud is under the control of Sephiroth, not the player, doing things like handing over special Black Materia that the player has gone to great lengths to find. At a key point in the narrative, the opposite is true – Cloud is frozen in a terrible position, sword poised to strike his friend Aeris. The player is terrified that pressing any button will make Cloud swing the sword and kill his friend. In this manipulation of gameplay controls, the developers linked player action directly to character action. At the time this was highly innovative, and is a method still employed by games as diverse as *God of War III* (2010) and *Grand Theft Auto V* (2013).[21] That Cloud is subject to these fits is due to his status as a subject of scientific experimentation. That he is unaware of his background makes him an innocent, worthy of our sympathy. These ideas are explored effectively in *FFVII* through its novel dynamics of player-character identification. As we saw in Chapter 5, Cloud spends part of the game in a vegetative state, propped up in a wheelchair and connected to various tubes and medical equipment. The player's concern for Cloud heightens the narrative tension and intensifies player-character identification. But this intense experience

is brought about by the compound physical effect of Shinra's medical experiments on Cloud and the mental stress of finding out his status as a 'Sephiroth clone.' In this way the question of bioengineering is closely entwined with character formation and player-character identification, important aspects of the gameplay experience.

Where *FFVI* used its NPCs to convey thematic content, then, *FFVII* uses the playability of the main character to reflect on the effects of genetic experimentation. The two games certainly have much in common. Terra and Cloud are both subjected to technological and medical enhancements to emerge as superfighters. Both are used as soldiers in a new genetically superior army. Both are unwilling victims, experiencing memory loss and identity crisis. Where *FFVI* uses genetic engineering for military purposes, with the Gestahlian Empire pulling the strings, *FFVII* introduces corporate interests as controlling both political and military power behind the scenes. Shinra Corporation may be seen as a thinly-veiled allegory for the military and industrial ties of postwar Japanese *zaibatsu*, or major corporations, with a far reach into science and technology as well as colonial expansion. *Metal Gear Solid, Tekken* and *Resident Evil* are even more direct in their depiction of corporate interests in bioengineering.

Writing DNA in *Metal Gear Solid*

Like *FFVI* and *FFVII*, Kojima Hideo's *Metal Gear Solid* series (Konami, 1987–2016) explores both aspects of the 'nucleus' in Japanese postwar discourse, as nuclear power and bioethics are equally important to the narrative.[22] The *Metal Gear Solid* series encompasses 19 games at the time of writing, with an extremely convoluted and complex narrative. The threat of nuclear war provides much of the tension of the series, joined by fears of bioterrorism, chemical warfare and genetic experimentation.[23] The significance of nuclear weapons to the series – and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in particular – deserves its own chapter, so we will return to this topic in Chapter 8. But there is one comment in *Metal Gear Solid* which sums up the duality of the nucleus, uttered by the scientist Dr. Hal Emmerich: 'Three generations of Emmerich men…. We must have the curse of nuclear weapons written into our DNA!' Hal is bemoaning the fate of his grandfather, who worked on the Manhattan project, his father, born on the day of the Hiroshima bomb, and himself, a scientist whose invention has been co-opted and turned into a mobile nuclear weapon. Hal's comment joins nuclear weaponry to the fundamental codes of genetic material. The idea that fate, or the universe, has somehow conspired to 'write' the curse of nuclear weapons into his DNA is ironic, as a large part of the *Metal Gear* narrative involves deliberate genetic manipulation, turning men into super-soldiers and bioweapons. Hal's ignorance of his own 'fate' reflects the innocent subjects of medical experimentation throughout the series, the most important of whom is the main player-character, Solid Snake – a clone whose fate seems determined by his genetic origin.

Metal Gear Solid was released in 1998, the same year that the Bioethics Committee was established to investigate the ethics of human cloning, and two years

after Dolly the sheep was cloned using somatic cell nuclear transfer. In the game narrative, the genetic researcher Dr. Clark performed somatic cell cloning for the government in 1972. The 'Twin Snakes' project that created Liquid and Solid Snake used an egg from Dr. Clark's young Japanese female assistant and genetic material from the 'legendary soldier' Big Boss. In somatic cell nuclear transfer, the nucleus is taken from a body cell and implanted directly into the egg, rather than using sperm from the male donor. The technique places so much stress on both egg and nucleus that failure rates are extremely high: in cloning Dolly, scientists used 277 eggs, producing only 29 viable embryos. Of these, three embryos survived until birth, and only one (Dolly) survived into adulthood (Campbell *et al*. 1996). Similarly, Dr. Clark also encountered dozens of failures in the attempt to clone Big Boss. Finally, eight successful embryos were created and implanted into EVA's womb, although six were aborted to make the remaining two embryos stronger. Liquid explains the process to his brother in a climactic conversation in *Metal Gear Solid*, revealing Dr. Clark's methods to both the player and to Snake himself. The scene occurs towards the end of the game, incurring a sense of shock in the player that their character is not only a clone but also the twin of the antagonist Liquid. The player's realization of their ignorance mirrors Snake's own realization of his origins, effectively creating a sense of empathy. Through narrative and player-character identification, Kojima explored similar ideas to the Bioethics Committee, asking what effects this kind of genetic manipulation would have on its subjects.

Kojima also questions the ethics of creating super-soldiers with DNA technology, through the characters known as the Genome Army (also called Genome Soldiers or Next-Generation Special Forces). Throughout the game, the Genome Soldiers are the NPCs responsible for guarding the military base, constantly attempting to shoot Snake on sight. Discovering their backstory changes our perspective, deepening the narrative. Like the Magitek Knights or the SOLDIER elite in *Final Fantasy*, the Genome Army were regular soldiers who were experimented on as adults. According to Liquid Snake, Gulf War Syndrome was a side effect of early Genome Soldier experiments by the Pentagon, injecting Big Boss's genes into their bodies or otherwise realigning their nucleotides to mimic Big Boss's genes.[24] Liquid calls the Genome Soldiers 'our brothers, with the same genes as ours,' directly linking Snake and the player to their opponents in gameplay. Liquid next enlists our sympathy, saying that 'They too are the product of numerous sacrifices,' meaning scientific experiments on human subjects during the Gulf War. The Genome Soldiers, recruited to Liquid's rebel army, suffer from various 'genetic maladies' which Liquid hopes to cure by gaining access to Big Boss's body and biometric data (Itoh 2012: 126). When Solid Snake mentions the 'Gulf War Babies,' children born with birth defects to parents who served in the Gulf War, Liquid replies 'Yes…. They too are our brothers and sisters.' In this way, the effects of the Genome Soldier experiment apply to the next generation.

Negative effects of cloning are seen throughout the narrative, affecting Liquid and Solid Snake, the Genome Army and also their genetic brother Solidus Snake,

created in the 'Les Enfants Terribles' project. None of the clones are able to reproduce, thanks to their 'terminator gene.' As Solidus laments in *MGS2: Sons of Liberty*: 'Cloned from our father with the ability to reproduce conveniently engineered out. What is our legacy if we cannot pass the torch?' (El Greco 2005). To make things worse, all three clones suffer from accelerated aging. Although Liquid is able to merge his body with that of another agent known as Ocelot, Solid Snake is subject to a rapid aging process, at one point in the series known as Old Snake with grey hair, wrinkles and a marked inability to move quickly when needed. In *MGS2: Sons of Liberty* (2001), Liquid mocks Snake and points to his future: 'Few more years and you'll be another dead clone of the old man. Our raw materials are vintage, brother. Big Boss was in his late fifties when they created his copies.'[25] This reference to the age of the somatic cell at the time of cloning is a sharp reminder of Dolly the sheep, whose early death may have been caused by accelerated aging.[26] Kojima has not specifically mentioned Dolly in interviews, but the high level of public interest in her health and the idea of accelerated aging may have served as an inspiration.

The most negative effect of cloning, however, is tied up with the idea of fate. The clones' lack of choice and free will is one of the main themes of the *Metal Gear Solid* series. Solid Snake, as befitting the main character, is able to come to terms with his identity and live his own life, but the antagonists Liquid and Solidus remain consumed by the desire for freedom from their genetic fate. In Solidus's case, 'He wanted to prove he was more than a simple carbon copy of Big Boss's DNA. He wanted to prove he was free. He wanted the world to hear his silent cries – *I am free. I am me*' (Itoh 2012: 70). Liquid achieves a sense of freedom by discovering technical details of the cloning process later in the series. Dr. Naomi Hunter reveals that the twins' DNA is not a perfect 100 per cent match for that of Big Boss: 'There's the markers implanted during the cloning process, the mixing of mitochondrial DNA within the egg cell, the deliberately altered terminator genes' (Itoh 2012: 127). This knowledge would give Liquid a great sense of liberation, shouting to his brother 'We're not copies of our father after all!' (ibid.) But the genetic differences also allow Liquid to fall victim to the FOXDIE virus where Solid is spared. The science and technology behind the creation of these characters is not, therefore, a one-off event, an interesting origin story, but an integral part of the overall narrative.

Dr. Naomi Hunter thanks Snake at the end of *Metal Gear Solid* for helping her realize that genes are not sole determinants of our lives:

> I thought that if I analyzed my DNA I could find out who I was, who my parents were. And I thought that if I knew that, then I'd know what path I should take in life. But I was wrong. I didn't find anything. I didn't learn anything. Just like with the Genome Soldiers … you can input all the genetic information, but that doesn't make them into the strongest soldiers. The most we can say about DNA is that it governs a person's potential strengths … potential destiny. You mustn't allow yourself to be chained to fate…to be ruled by your genes. Humans can choose the type of life they want to live.[27]

This triumph of human life over determinism may be seen as the main theme of the first three games of the *Metal Gear Solid* saga. In *Metal Gear Solid*, characters seem trapped by their genes. *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (2001) explores determinism through 'memes' – in the 'nature versus nurture' argument, here the government sets up behavioural experiments to see if a soldier can be programmed to act in certain ways. In *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* (2004) the determinant is 'scene' – the complete environment and situation surrounding a person which affects their choices, to the extent that perhaps there is no choice at all. In this way the problem of 'fate' for the cloned individual reverberates through the series, affecting all the main characters in different ways.[28] Kojima Hideo thus contextualizes genetic determinism as a basic philosophical problem, humanizing the clone and engaging the player's empathy.

Writing in the same time period, philosopher Jürgen Habermas (2003) contemplated the fate of augmented or cloned individuals in relation to their fundamental rights of subjectivity as human beings. Our society has deeply-held ontological beliefs regarding naturally produced or 'grown' embryo-subjects resulting from sexual intercourse, and the 'made' embryo-object resulting from technological interventions. Habermas argued that genetic engineering blurs the 'deeply rooted categorical distinctions between the subjective and the objective, the grown and the made' (2003: 71). Considering the feelings of the cloned individual, Habermas stated: 'the person whose genetic composition has been prenatally altered may, upon learning of the design for her genetic makeup, experience difficulties in understanding herself as an autonomous and equal member of an association of free and equal persons' (2003: 78). Genetic experimentation has serious moral and ethical implications for how we live in society, as individuals and together:

> Insofar as the genetically altered person feels that the scope for a possible use of her ethical freedom has been intentionally changed by a prenatal design, she may suffer from the consciousness of sharing the authorship of her own life and her own destiny with someone else. This sort of *alienating* dilution or fracturing of one's own identity is a sign that an important boundary has become permeable – the deontological shell which assures the inviolability of the person, the uniqueness of the individual, and the irreplaceability of one's own subjectivity.
>
> (Habermas 2003: 82, original italics)

This crisis of identity is felt by the three characters at the centre of the *Metal Gear Solid* story, undergoing a psychological struggle to come to terms with their status as 'made' objects. While some Japanese critics have argued that Western bioethics are fundamentally at odds with Japanese culture,[29] the concerns raised by Habermas are echoed by bioethics professor Komatsu Yoshihiko, who sees the present age as one of a 'corporeal revolution' in which humans are not only the subject of technological advancement, but also the object of it (2007: 180).

These concerns are also seen in wider public opinion in Japan. In a 1998 government survey of the Japanese public, more than 93.5 per cent of respondents saw human cloning as 'ethically questionable,' an attitude shared by the Japanese government (Morioka 2006: 9–10). The biggest concerns were that human cloning went against human dignity (67.7%) and that cloned individuals would not be 'free individuals' but merely a means for attaining some kind of goal (43.6%). Other perceived problems were the intentional design of particular characteristics (29.8%) or producing some kind of 'excellent characteristics' (26.1%) in the cloned individuals. Some worried that clones would face social discrimination (14.9%) or be unable to grow up in safety (10%) (ibid.). These concerns are consistent with Japanese science fiction of the 1960s, with Tezuka Osamu's cloned characters suffering identity crisis, social discrimination, exploitation by third parties and lack of personal safety.

Ten years later, *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* (2008) was released on the PS3 console. *MGS4* shows an increase in technical scientific details, with more flashbacks and conversations relating to the Twin Snakes project and other government experiments. This fits the growing sophistication in the Japanese public, who had become more educated about cloning technology, largely due to events of 2006 when Japanese scientists Yamanaka Shinya and Takahashi Kazutoshi published their research on iPS cells derived from mice. These 'induced pluripotent stem cells' were regular body cells, turned into stem cells by scientific processes in the lab. Yamanaka received the Nobel Prize for his efforts, so this was very big news in Japan. Public surveys from 2006 show that most laypeople had not heard of stem cells, but similar surveys and interviews of 2008 showed that 'more than 80% of Japanese people had an opinion on regenerative medicine.'[30] One reason why people were excited about somatic cell cloning was that it would avoid the use of human embryos in research, conveniently sidestepping all the moral debates from a decade earlier. 'IPS in Japan was received with great enthusiasm. It was front-page news for weeks, and was discussed in all newspapers, on TV and on the Internet' (Sleeboom-Faulkner 2014: 153). This excitement underscores the deep reservations that people had felt about using human embryos. In other words, public discourse from 2008 shows a continuing attitude of unease regarding both the use of human embryos and the idea of a cloned individual emerging in society.

This deep-seated discomfort with human cloning is clear in *MGS4*. The ethical and moral basis of cloning is described in negative terms, both in the game script and even more strongly in Project Itoh's 2010 novelization of the game, translated into English in 2012. Through the book, both surrogacy and cloning are described as 'unnatural,' 'monstrous' and 'cruel,' as 'The Snakes were warped, artificial creatures developed for one purpose – war' (Itoh 2012: 94). Liquid describes himself and Solid as 'freaks who never should have existed' (p. 169), and their own surrogate mother likens their existence to a 'monster' (p. 179). The genetic manipulation of cloning is seen as a 'curse' for Solid Snake, 'one not of his choice but rather placed upon him before he had been granted life in this world' (p. 22). Project Itoh's vision of the game

narrative was highly praised by Kojima Hideo, who speaks of the 'messages' that he 'put into' the game text, and how Itoh was able to bring these to life.[31] Project Itoh's deep understanding of the game and its themes of bioethics may have stemmed from his own status as a cancer patient, a 'Project' (*keikaku*) in himself, undergoing rigorous treatment while striving as a writer.[32] With a keen sense of medical intervention in the human body, Project Itoh gives a particularly nuanced vision of fate, nature and free will in *Metal Gear Solid.*

While many elements of *Metal Gear Solid* give a negative view of cloning and bioengineering, it is significant that both positive and negative effects of cloning are shown through actual gameplay. Gameplay mechanics emphasize Snake's ability to sneak quietly through enemy territory and effortlessly battle opponents by silent physical means – throttling them from behind or employing knife attacks, for example. His enhanced physical abilities set him apart from regular soldiers, and the player comes to understand that this is a result of Snake's genetic modification. The player learns Snake's backstory at the same time as Snake, as details of his origins are revealed to him by others. When Snake's body is less responsive in *MGS4*, we wonder at his elderly appearance and modify our tactics to accommodate his slower response times.[33] The player-character identification process in *Metal Gear Solid* is thus very much focused on the physicality of the character, and the abilities of his body. In many ways the series is a meditation on the capabilities and limitations of the male body in particular. This extended focus on the male body may be seen as part of the war genre, an inheritor of the realistic style of Japanese novels like Hino Ashihei's *Wheat and Soldiers* or Ōoka Shōhei's *Fires on the Plain*, which bring the physical pain and endurance of the common soldier to life.[34]

Extremes of the body

In *Metal Gear Solid*, the adult male body is subject to extremes of torture and experimentation, including modification by genetic and mechanical means. We see this first when Snake is restrained on a 'torture machine,' arms raised and legs apart. His notable abdominal musculature is on display, emphasizing masculinity and strength. Sniper Wolf – a voluptuous blonde assassin whose jumpsuit is unzipped in a deep V to accentuate her breasts – approaches Snake and touches his body, running her hand down his chest. As she walks away the camera focuses on her buttocks, and the villain Ocelot comments that Sniper Wolf sometimes falls in love with her targets. This sexually charged scene shows Snake as a virile object of desire, followed immediately by a torture scene where Snake's body is shot through with high-voltage electricity. The player must resist the torture with perfectly-timed button-pushing to maintain the life gauge, after which Ocelot comments 'You're a strong man, Snake.' When Snake later stands at the door of his cell to greet Hal Emmerich, we see his back is also heavily muscled. Kojima uses the 3D polygon graphics to good effect, achieving physical definition and laying the groundwork for increasingly photo-realistic depiction in the series.

As the series progresses, different characters are augmented in various ways, testing the limits of human physicality. Solidus Snake receives mechanical augmentation, with a detachable exoskeleton providing strength, speed and protection from bullets and bladed weapons. Later uses of the exoskeleton technology were much more extreme. A subject of Dr. Clark's Genome Solider experiments, Frank Jaeger was severely wounded by landmines but rejuvenated by 'intensive gene therapy' and a powered permanent exoskeleton, grafted directly into his own skeletal structure through cybernetics.[35] Codenamed Gray Fox, Jaeger benefits from enhanced strength, stealth and agility (to the extent that he was also known as 'Cyborg Ninja'), but needs extreme doses of drugs to combat the physical and mental stresses of the process (El Greco 2004; Itoh 2012: 247). Nanomachines suppress his emotions, proving so successful that the method inspired the 'Sons of the Patriots' system, suppressing the emotions of all soldiers on the modern battlefield.

Of all the test subjects in the *Metal Gear Solid* universe, the most pitiable is Raiden, raised as a child killer in the armies of Liberia. Rescued and brought to the US, Raiden's cerebral cortex is implanted with nanomachines to repress his emotions and to utilize his brain as an AI back-up system. As an adult, Raiden undergoes the ultimate 'nature versus nurture' experiment as a full-scale tactical mission is set up so he can replicate the prior actions of Solid Snake. The player of *Metal Gear Solid 2* essentially replays the missions of *Metal Gear Solid*, this time as Raiden, so the Patriots can see whether identical experiences will produce identical soldiers. Players were forced to play the game as Raiden even though the protagonist at the start of the game (and in advertising materials) was Solid Snake. The replacement of such a popular icon with a new unknown character led to negative fan reception. Even when the true nature of the mission was revealed at the end of the game, players did not feel pity or empathy for Raiden so much as anger at the developers.[36] The break in player-character identification served to reinforce the broader themes of the series: Raiden is 'not as good as Snake' not only in the player's perception, but also in Raiden's own experience, striving to be 'as good as Snake' and in that striving, carrying out his commanders' social experiment. Later in the series, Raiden's head and spine are grafted onto an entirely synthetic body with multiple enhancements. Although he eventually rids his body of nanomachines, it is only after his physical destruction in *MGS4* that Raiden is provided a new cybernetic exoskeleton with artificial skin, giving him a more human appearance. Amazingly, Kojima and Itoh give Raiden a happy ending, able to settle down with Rosemary and their child in a semblance of normal life.

Reflecting on the experiences of Liquid, Solid, Solidus, the Genome Soldiers, Gray Fox, and Raiden, the player is forced to imagine the most extreme physical situations of the human body that can come from genetic, mechanical and cybernetic technology. These characters suffer unimaginable pain and torment, with Liquid and Raiden thinking the most deeply about what it means to be human. Like Astro Boy and Black Jack in Tezuka Osamu's manga, the source of their body parts is ultimately deemed less important than the essence of the human

soul within. What is different in Kojima's vision is the intrusion of the government into the bodies of the soldiers it creates. The ultimate resilience of humanity in *Metal Gear Solid* is the strength of the individual will to live, the sense of 'myself,' that continues despite almost complete loss of the original physical body. Similarly, through the clones of Les Enfants Terribles, we see that even clones of the 'perfect soldier' will exhibit distinct individual personalities, motivations and desires. Copies of neither genetic material nor lived experience can create a perfect copy of the original Big Boss.

A shadowy figure throughout the early games, Big Boss is the main playable character of *Metal Gear Solid 3*. Finally embodying the source of the Twin Snakes' genetic material, the player experiences for themselves the capabilities and desires of the legendary soldier. Becoming Big Boss, the player realizes that the legend is also human, and subject to failure and incompetence like anyone else. Kojima's changes in main character from game to game underscore the basic underlying message of humanity that run through the series as a whole. This message is also brought home to the player through the convoluted narrative structure. Not only does the story unfold by jumping back and forward in time, but information from flashbacks and previous events is not always given in first-person perspective. Most often, the player experiences all this narrative in the form of startling revelations in character's backstories and retellings of other character's experiences. The passive positioning of the player-character as listener and receiver of information makes the impact of that information all the sharper, felt keenly by the player as they discover new facts and try to sort out the truth from deceptions. Just as in the diffuse narrative structures of the fighting game genre, the player must maintain an active role, sorting and piecing together the overall story in their minds. The sprawling story of the *Tekken* series is similarly segmented into discrete yet interconnected narrative units, seen through the eyes of not one main player-character but many separate characters, all selectable from the roster at any time to provide a piece of the overarching narrative puzzle.

Genetics and corporations in *Tekken*

Unlike *Final Fantasy* and *Metal Gear Solid*, the *Tekken* series is not as focused on nuclear imagery, but is very much a narrative of bioengineering. *Tekken* follows the rise and fall of the Mishima Corporation, run by the patriarch and famed martial artist Heihachi Mishima. Determined to train his son Kazuya as a strong fighter, Heihachi throws him off a cliff at the age of five and later organizes the Iron Fist (*tekken)* Tournament to test his strength. The intense near-death cliff experience causes a recessive gene in Kazuya to activate, known as the 'Devil Gene.' In Japanese the gene is variously referred to as Devil's Blood (*debiru no chi*), Devil Factor (*debiru no inshi*) or Devil's Power (*debiru no chikara*). It is never clearly explained exactly what the Devil Gene is, or where it originally came from, occasioning much speculation and theorizing on the *Tekken Wiki* and other online forums. It is generally agreed that only Heihachi knows the truth about the Devil Gene, its origins shrouded in mystery.

As we saw in Chapter 3, Kazuya Mishima dominates the early games, and his son Jin Kazama comes to the fore after *Tekken 3*, his first game as a playable character. *Tekken 4* is the most interesting in terms of the relationship between father and son, as well as the importance of the Devil Gene. Jin appears on the cover as a robed, hooded figure, enveloped in darkness. Playing through the story mode as Kazuya (the default, privileged character on the select screen), the tournament proceeds normally until Round 7. Kazuya's opponent is the hooded figure 'Jin Kazama,' but instead of leading to the usual fight scene, a text screen appears saying that Jin is nowhere to be found, and we must fight Heihachi instead. Jin's disappearance heightens the narrative tension, and after we defeat Heihachi, he leads us to a temple in the grounds of the Mishima Corporation. Here we find that Heihachi has kidnapped Jin and restrained him, and the player-character Kazuya gloats over his son. Jin's body holds the missing element of the Devil Gene that Kazuya needs to fulfil his destiny and become all-powerful. Kazuya's fearsome appearance, with heavily scarred torso and an eye glowing bright red, is now matched by an equally fearsome disposition. Jin is released and they fight (the player fights against Jin, feeling very much the 'bad guy'). Defeating Jin, Kazuya absorbs his son's life energy. In a terrifying transformation, Kazuya's skin glows purple as he sprouts large bat-like wings and horns, laughing in his final victory. But because this is a fighting game, the player knows that this is only one possible ending to the fourth 'Iron Fist Tournament.'

After this scenario, Jin is unlocked as a playable character. Always hooded, Jin also fights normally through six rounds of the Iron Fist tournament, and then Round 7 is heralded as a 'story battle' with Kazuya his father. Just as Round 7 for Kazuya revealed Jin to be missing from the tournament, now we see Jin's perspective of the same event. Expecting to fight, Jin is instead ambushed by Heihachi's 'Tekken Force' soldiers and taken to the temple at the Mishima compound. When Jin comes to his senses he (and the player) must fight his father Kazuya. On winning, the cut-scene shows Jin sprouting black wings, although these are feathered rather than leathery, and he displays no horns or changes to his eyes. Jin holds Kazuya by the neck, but instead of finishing him, Jin pants as if struggling with some inner turmoil. He looks up and sees one of the temple statues, replaced in his vision by an image of his mother Jun. He smiles and drops Kazuya on the ground. 'Thank my mother Jun Kazama,' he says. Jin turns his back, looks upwards, and takes flight. A shower of black feathers rains down in a pool of light – joined at the last by one single white feather, hinting at Jin's underlying good nature.

Once the player proceeds to *Tekken 5*, we find that Jin's ending is the one that has been taken as canon. Each successive *Tekken* game takes one of the previous game's endings as its starting point. Thereupon, all other endings are regarded as mere possibilities, which nonetheless give insight into the characters and their motives.[37] By *Tekken 5* Jin's centrality to the series was cemented, and 'Devil Jin' would appear for the first time as an unlockable, playable character. Jin's dual playability gives insight into his state of mind and burden of his genetic inheritance. Like Terra, Cloud and Snake, Jin Kazama also suffers identity crisis

and pain with each transformation, and struggles to gain ownership and control of his body. Jin is augmented by genetic material, inherited from his family much like Terra's power came from her Esper heritage. Like Terra, Jin is able to transform at will, but also suddenly transforms in moments of rage or heightened emotion.

Perhaps because of its mysterious nature, the Devil Gene is the object of pursuit for those who want to exploit it for scientific and commercial purposes. The Mishima Corporation and G-Corporation both want access to its power. The former company is both rich and powerful, and its ownership is the prize in each successive Iron Fist tournament. As Heihachi, Kazuya and Jin battle over the family inheritance, we see the ruthlessness inherent in the Japanese corporate *zaibatsu* system – monopolies of power, tightly controlled by the elite few. The Mishima Corporation, with its forested compounds, temples and research laboratories, symbolizes the enormous power held by certain Japanese corporations following the Asia-Pacific War. Mitsubishi, Mitsui and Sumitomo are all Japanese *zaibatsu* criticized for profiting from WWII and flourishing in the shady markets of postwar Japan (much as Mercedes has been criticized for furnishing the Luftwaffe with superior aircraft engines in Germany).[38] The Mishima Corporation often appears in text as 'Mishima Zaibatsu' onscreen, indicating to the foreign and domestic audience that Heihachi is involved in shady deals and possible collusion with the military and government. The ambiguous nature of Heihachi's character is thus established very early in the game series, and his actions throughout the game narrative – throwing his son Kazuya off a cliff to activate his Devil Gene, for one – do nothing to dispel his negative image.

On the other side of the corporate equation, the Devil Gene is manipulated by G-Corporation in cellular experiments, trying to create stronger human hybrids. Part of this mission is known as the 'Genocell program,' developed by American student Julia Chang to aid in forest rejuvenation. G-Corporation has bioengineering facilities in Nepal and Nebraska, where various characters are taken through the game narrative to serve as subjects for genetic experimentation. After Heihachi throws Kazuya into a volcano to destroy him at the end of *Tekken 2*, we discover that G-Corporation retrieves Kazuya's body to serve as the source of cells for further experiments. When Heihachi sends his 'Tekken Forces' to recover his son's body for his own devil-human hybrid experiments, the soldiers are destroyed by Kazuya himself, unexpectedly resurrected by G-Corporation. It is unclear from the narrative twists and turns whether Kazuya actually died and was revived from death, or whether he was merely in stasis during this time. Either way, the fate of Kazuya's body points to a deep unease in Japanese culture with the treatment of a human body in the liminal states of coma or near-death.

Official criteria for brain death were established in Japan in 1974, with organ transplantation declared legal in 1992, but the general Japanese public is highly averse to the procedure, and an individual's wishes for organ donation are not usually recognized by family members. The very idea of 'brain death' is seen as unnatural, un-Japanese and morally wrong.[39] In *Metal Gear Solid*, the body of

Big Boss suffers the ultimate indignity, as he is kept in suspended animation – his body alive but his brain defunct – for the harvesting of cells and other body parts. Liquid and his surrogate mother EVA fight over access to Big Boss's body, to exploit or protect it, and the status of Big Boss's body and soul are pondered philosophically in the novel. EVA says 'His body is alive, but his consciousness is locked away by nanomachines. So technically speaking, he's not really brain dead' (Itoh 2012: 154). The narrator Otacon relates Snake's reaction: 'Perhaps committing suicide would be a better end to his life than the eternal quasi-death Big Boss suffered' (ibid). Brain death is perhaps the most contentious issue in Japanese bioethics today, a real issue affecting organ transplantation, death rituals and family responsibilities to the deceased.[40]

Scholars have ascribed the Japanese aversion to 'brain death' in various ways. Bioethicist Alistair Campbell explains that a Japanese family will consider a brain-dead relative as 'not really dead,' and the use of dead bodies for dissection and medical education is opposed, possibly due to Shinto beliefs. Prominent Japanese bioethicist Kazumasa Hoshino explains that the deceased person is still regarded as part of a singular family unit, an 'insider group' with extremely close ties, in opposition to 'outsiders' such as medical people or wider society. Other scholars emphasize Buddhist ritual and the need for a body to be whole and untampered with for successful transition to 'personhood' after death.[41] Public intellectual Yamaori Tetsuo (2007) draws a strong distinction between Western culture, which uses brain death and organ transplantation as an unnatural 'struggle for survival,' versus a Japanese 'etiquette of dying' which accepts the impermanence of human life. Taking all this into account, we can understand that the idea of keeping Big Boss and Kazuya in stasis is particularly abhorrent to a Japanese audience. A similar anxiety may inform the Japanese player's reaction to Cloud's vegetative state in *Final Fantasy VII*. In this sense, the zombies of *Resident Evil* also have specific resonance in Japan, which they do not necessarily carry for a Western audience.

The original biohazard: *Resident Evil* and cross-species infection

Resident Evil (1996), created by Fujiwara Tokuro and Mikami Shinji at Capcom and released on the PlayStation console, is one of the earliest survival horror games from Japan. The Japanese title *Biohazard* indicates the biological concerns of the game narrative. In this game, the Umbrella Corporation is a pharmaceutical company, but also a secret genetic engineering enterprise seeking to develop the ultimate bio-weapon, an undead humanoid called Tyrant. Naturally there is a huge disaster resulting in the release of biological mutagens, known as the T-virus. When mutated cells arise in a living organism this is called an 'infection,' the biohazard of the title. The player-character, which changes from game to game in the series, must move through a dangerous environment and shoot enemies at every turn, finding documents and other clues to solve the puzzle of what happened to former colleagues who have disappeared, or secrets

behind experiments discovered in the research lab. Different endings to the narrative depend on player skill and choices made in gameplay, so different characters will live to the end of the game, although the central story itself does not change.

Resident Evil takes a broad look at genetics, considering the infection of both humans and animals and how pathogens pass between species. A wide range of organisms are affected by the T-virus, from crows and dogs to insects and spiders. This provides a variety of small enemies to swarm the protagonist and create a claustrophobic feeling in the confined spaces of the 3D environment. The setting itself is extremely important, creating a pathetic fallacy which mirrors and amplifies the feelings of the player-character from moment to moment. Grau de Pablos (2014) has argued that *Resident Evil* and other survival horror games of this era created the look and feel that we associate with a 'Japanese game' through specific methods of 3D rendering. The importance of the setting is borne out by its destruction at the end of each game in the series, with the mansion of *Resident Evil* collapsing, the train of *Resident Evil 2* self-destructing, and the whole town of Raccoon City being obliterated with a thermonuclear blast at the end of *Resident Evil 3*. The nuclear strike brings us full circle to the intertwined anxieties regarding the nucleus in Japanese discourse. Perhaps befitting the survival horror genre, genetic mutation and nuclear weapons demonstrate the limits of our hold on technology and science.[42]

Much has been made of the racial dynamics of later *Resident Evil* games, but Mejia and Komaki (2013) observe that the first three games focused more on biological weapons developed by the Umbrella Corporation.[43] This bioengineering narrative is developed in the second game to focus more on the female body. Scientist William Birkin injects himself with the G-virus and becomes horribly mutated, losing his human mental faculties and trying to reproduce in order to pass on the virus into the next generation. This involves impregnating his own daughter Sherry with an embryo, a procedure known to his wife Annette Birkin:

ANNETTE: As a result of his transformation, William should have lost any prior memories he had as a human by now. He'll try to create offspring.
CLAIRE: What?
ANNETTE: Every G-Virus bio weapon including William has the ability to impregnate embryos into other life forms. That's why he's after Sherry.
CLAIRE: What are you trying to say?
ANNETTE: A body with non-related genetic coding is likely to reject the embryos.[44]

Sherry is heard screaming off-camera at this point, and with good reason – not only is she the victim of incestuous embryo implantation, but she is only 12 years old. Dressed in a sailor suit, with a blond pageboy haircut and cute striped socks, Sherry has to this point been constructed as a young, innocent girl. In the victimization of Sherry, *Resident Evil 2* breaks many cultural taboos. This is appropriate for the horror genre, which examines our deepest fears as a society – in this case

the dangers of assisted reproduction, with the foetus acting as the site of infection and possible destruction of the community once born. This raises the spectre of abortion, although Sherry is 'cured' by a vaccine at the end of the game. Mejia and Komaki (2013) argue that the *Resident Evil* series, taken as a whole, offers insightful commentary on capitalism, biotechnology, race, and counter-terrorism. Joining the discourse of the late 1990s, *RE2* also echoes contemporary anxieties over assisted reproduction, abortion, and the status of the unborn child. The fact that the evil scientists in this case are the victim's parents emphasizes the evil nature of genetic experiments, and Annette's apology for 'not being a good mother' is an understatement to say the least.

Videogames as discourse and discursive practice

In terms of bioengineering, *Resident Evil* has much in common with the other games described in this chapter. All the games analyzed above feature the creation of a super-soldier and/or bio-weapons. The dead are used for their cells and genetic material, and scientific experiments are run on live subjects, often against their will. All include corporate bioengineering, with government collusion: scientific experiments are performed by corrupt corporations with government backing and foreign ties. While the two *Final Fantasy* games are discrete narratives, *Metal Gear Solid, Tekken*, and *Resident Evil* are vastly sprawling series with many titles contributing to a continuous story, enabling a much deeper 'shadow narrative' of underground collaborations between corporations, science and government. The question of who profits from genetic manipulation has been seen as the 'very heart' of bioethics, as research labs and government sponsors turn to regenerative medicine for financial gain (Komatsu 2007: 181). The anxiety is all-encompassing, including not only bioethics but nuclear energy, terrorism, capital monopolies and corruption at all levels of society, industry and the military.

The Umbrella Corporation of *Resident Evil* and G-Corporation from *Tekken* have much in common with the Patriots, the shadowy US entity connected to medical, military and government structures in *Metal Gear Solid*. The linkage of genetic experimentation with American interests in these games may stem from similar connections made in Japan's public consciousness in the mid-1990s. Historian Fred Dickinson (2007) has shown that secretive US military experiments and biological warfare were very much in the public eye at this time, when information about Japan's Unit 731 was brought to light and discussed at length in Japanese newspapers, documentary films and television specials.[45] The fact that human medical experimentation was carried out by the Japanese military was well known (giving the lie to the idea of 'amnesia' regarding this part of the war experience), as was the fact that Japanese research on biological warfare was confiscated by the American authorities in 1945. According to Dickinson (2007) and William LaFleur (2007), the idea of bioethics in Japanese public discourse was deeply interconnected with ideas of US military intervention in Japan at this time. It is perhaps not surprising that American medical

corporations play such a large role in the bioengineering discourse of *Tekken, Resident Evil* and *Metal Gear Solid.*

It is also apparent that most of these games feature mad scientists, such as William Birkin in *Resident Evil 2*. With gigantic musculature bending his body out of shape and a massive eyeball protruding from one shoulder, he is horrifically mutated by his own genetic experiments – an outcome easily understood as a fitting end. Professor Hojo from *Final Fantasy VII* mutates into several different forms in his final battle, while the experimental subjects Kefka and Sephiroth similarly mutate into awe-inspiring gigantic forms with religious iconography emphasizing their Otherness to the known. The 'mutating boss' game dynamic was a feature of *Final Fantasy* and other games like *Dragon Quest* from the very early days of the series, but here the game dynamic serves a clear narrative purpose: we see a judgement and bias against the scientist as well as the unnatural creation. Of all the scientists in these games, nuclear physicist Hal Emmerich and geneticist Naomi Hunter from *Metal Gear Solid* are portrayed in a more sympathetic light.[46] Overall, the games carry a moral message, criticizing the scientific field of bioengineering and especially its military applications.

Examining the release dates of the games discussed in this chapter, they all converge around the year 1996. This was the year Dolly the sheep was cloned, sparking a great deal of discussion over bioengineering and cloning worldwide. The Human Genome Project was completed in 2000, adding to the debate and discussion. In Japan, new laws on cloning, genetic research, stem cell technology, assisted reproduction and GMO crops were passed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, resulting from this period of intense discussion on bioethics and bioengineering.[47] The videogames discussed in this chapter are part of the same public discourse, exploring common ideas and anxieties through art. I have analyzed a number of different game genres and narrative modes here to show a diffuse consideration of bioethics in Japanese videogames. Taking the analysis of Chapters 5 and 6 together, we see that two discourses of anxiety are intertwined in the idea of a 'nucleus': genetic manipulation in the human body, and the unleashing of nuclear power. Both discourses involve ethics, morality and responsibility, acting as warning and social critique. Scientists are coded as negative, while bodily or nuclear mutation is seen as a dangerous outcome. These ideas are not just conveyed through narrative – in many games the benefits granted by technological enhancement are experienced directly through gameplay, highlighting the moral implications of mutation for military use.

A number of different game mechanics serve to embed the player in the ideology of the games discussed above, with mechanics regarding character abilities being the most directly effective. The player benefits greatly from characters' enhanced biological features, as Snake's increased stealth and fighting abilities allow smooth progress through the gameworld. Similarly, Terra in *Final Fantasy VI* destroys enemies easily when battle scenes are activated, with higher HP (hit points or health points) than the rest of her party. 'Devil Jin' has flashy laser attacks compared to his normal counterpart, with exciting combo moves inflicting heavy damage. While all these characters bear mental scars from their

physical enhancement, they can perform at higher levels than other characters in the gameworld. Cloud alone is severely damaged by his experience in the Mako tanks, spending much of his time as physically and mentally weak. Cloud is only able to accept and understand his past at the end of the game, at a point where player progression has levelled him up to a high HP and powerful abilities. In this example, player skill, narrative progression and character abilities develop in sync, creating a strong impact when Cloud is finally able to overcome his fears, take charge of the party, and defeat his enemy.

Resident Evil stands apart for the unusual strength and resilience of its main characters – either Chris Redfield or Jill Valentine, who remain untouched by genetic manipulation. All the other series discussed in this chapter feature main characters who are themselves subjected to genetic changes, increasing their strength to superhuman capabilities but bringing adverse effects. The heroes of *Resident Evil* remain purely human, facing off against terrifying zombies, mutated creatures, mad scientists and artificial intelligence systems. Part of this is due to the survival horror genre, in which the player must feel surrounded and trapped by terrifying opponents, and fundamentally different to them (Freedman 2012). The binary 'me versus them' or 'us versus them' in team efforts like *The House of the Dead* is a function of game design with an extremely fast pace, shooting quickly and accurately at hordes of enemies to emerge unscathed with a feeling of catharsis at the end of the level. In this way gameplay and 'affect' (the manipulation of player emotion) underscore the fundamental idea that genetic research is dangerous and undesirable, strengthening the critical discourse on bioethics.

In these ways, the player is not only embodied in the gameworld through identifying with an avatar or character, but also enacts the game ideology through their physical actions in the game environment. This method is perhaps most effective outside the RPG genre, in action, survival horror or fighting games. In these genres direct action input mirrors the player's own battle actions in the movement of the character. David Surman (2007: 211) describes player-character identification in the fighting game as 'embodiment' and a 'peak state' of gameplay. While the player's objective to win against all enemies will always be the same as the character's objective, the skill level may well be different. Solid Snake, Jill Valentine and Kazuya Mishima cannot defeat their enemies and access the narrative unless the player is actually a good fighter in physical terms, with quick reflexes, manual dexterity, and complete mastery of the character's moveset. In these genres, the ideology and narrative are more directly conveyed by the physical mechanics of play.

In this chapter I have demonstrated how ideology in games is conveyed not only through visual representation and narrative theme, but also through deep player-character identification and the physical mechanics of gameplay. As such, the games discussed in this chapter may not only be seen as discursive objects, texts that contribute to and reflect a specific historical discourse, but also as examples of discursive practice, where the player playing the game is both exposed to and enacting the discursive statements embedded in the text. Through

gameplay – coded, regulated and designed by the developers – the player enacts and lives out the ideology of the original utterance. By doing so, their own gameplay becomes a discursive act, reverberating in their own individual lived experience as well as in further dissemination, via online text walkthroughs, video playthroughs, commentary and fan forum discussion. In this way the original game is mediated by experience to take form in the 'real' or disseminated/ visible world, open to interpretation by later players in a kind of codex for each game title.

Ideology and critique in Japanese videogames

In Part II of this book I have analyzed a number of game titles, series and genres to examine their underlying ideologies and methods by which these have been conveyed to players. From the absentee parents of the JRPG to anti-nuclear discourse in the *Final Fantasy* series, to deep-seated unease over matters of genetic modification in a range of different game genres, Japanese videogames have reflected and problematized major concerns of the Japanese people. Thematically, the games analyzed in Part II are interrelated – just as anxiety over nuclear power intersected with bioethics debates over the scientific use of the nucleus, concerns over assisted reproduction and the fate of the embryo intersected with anxieties about changing family structures and parent-child relationships. Joining the national debate, videogames acted as both commentary and critique, casting a harsh light on social breakdown, corporate greed and scientific hubris. Players of videogames encountered many of the same themes that were being explored in other media, from literature and film to manga, anime and television.

At the same time, videogames are able to involve the player deeply in the characters' ethical dilemmas, placing them directly into a story where their own decision-making and actions feel significant for the outcome. Gameplay and narrative work together in the medium to convey ideology and critique, as exciting storylines give the player strong impetus to defeat evil and finish the game. Ideology is also conveyed through the narrative structure itself, as the player must piece together plot points in different genres: whether solving the riddles of amnesia in the JRPG, unravelling the mysteries of the Devil Gene and the T-virus, or suffering the identity crises of Terra, Cloud, and Solid Snake, the mental work done by the player to decode the story becomes part of a very active learning process, making the ideology more likely to 'stick,' as Gee (2003) famously argued. Another tactic on the part of the designer is to manipulate the dissemination of knowledge to both player and character – when the player discovers the truth at the same time as their character, the double impact of realization and empathy enhances their immersion in the ethical worldview of the text.

Part II of this book has examined relations and interconnections between videogames and the real world through the context of social change, legal regulations, political discourse, and scientific advancement. Part III turns to the subjects of Japanese history, war and colonialism, connecting in-game history to real-world consequences. Games about war and former colonial sites raise

many considerations for the game designer, trying to appeal to the national pride of their own country while avoiding offense overseas. Like the games analyzed in this section of the book, war games also have a high degree of ideological content, generally divided along pro-war or anti-war lines. I will examine both kinds of games in Part III, and consider the legacy of Japanese colonialism and imperialism in different game genres, visible in the surface representations and underlying assumptions about former subjects of the Japanese Empire.

Notes

1 Habermas (2003: 71).
2 El Greco (2004). Checked against gameplay this script is accurate, although spelling errors occur that do not appear onscreen in the localized English-language game. I have corrected these for quotes in this volume.
3 The *Phoenix* series is available in English: Tezuka (2004, 2006).
4 *Parasite Eve* (Square, 1998) is a good example of a genetic engineering tale, synchronous with those analyzed here. Based on Sena Hideaki's 1995 novel, it features the intelligent life-form 'Eve' comprised of mitochondria in human bodies. As mitochondria pass through the female line, and Eve exercises great control over her dispersed host, the text is ripe for a feminist study.
5 *Deus Ex* (Eidos Interactive) explored the gradual replacement of human body parts with mechanical ones. Master Chief in *Halo* (Bungie) is enhanced with both biochemistry and cybernetics, raised from childhood for military prowess. *BioShock* (2K Games) featured an underwater utopia thrown into chaos by genetic material that bestows superhuman powers.
6 See Amano (2013 vol. 2: 130, 132–133, 137).
7 Hemmann (2016) notes that this form-switching ability associates Terra with the magical girls (*mahō shōjo*) of Japanese popular culture.
8 Neither Skinner's game script for IGN nor the Advance script for IOS by ZFS mention this conversation, but it is accessible by talking to each NPC in the Vector fortress.
9 Ayako Kano (2016) comprehensively analyzes these debates, from the Meiji period to the present day. Shimazono (2007: 207–210) examines earlier attitudes to infanticide and abortion, from the Edo period (1600–1868) onwards.
10 Kano (2016: 64–103). Shimazono (2007: 201–202) briefly compares the 1948 and 1996 abortion laws; also see Ogino (2007: 224–228).
11 Morioka (2006: 14). Horres *et al*. (2006: 38–42) agree that religion was not a great factor in the public or government discussion on the embryo, which emphasized rather what is 'natural' (*shizen*). The Buddhist Jōdo Shinshu sect holds a negative view of abortion, based on the 'importance of life' (*inochi no taisetsusa*) (Sleeboom-Faulkner 2014: 124). Shimazono (2007: 203–204) compares Japanese and European religious views on the issue, while LaFleur (1992) examines Buddhist views on abortion more generally.
12 See Morioka (2006). Ontologically, the embryo is neither *hito* (person) nor *mono* (thing/object) so it is 'accorded an intermediate status' (Horres *et al*. 2006: 33). For the ethical implications of this transitional terminology see Shimazono's discussion (2007).
13 Sleeboom-Faulkner (2014: 121–122).
14 For a detailed discussion see Sleeboom-Faulkner (2014: 122–123).
15 Shimazono (2007: 211–216) overviews the arguments against the use of human embryos in research and regenerative medicine.

16 Concern for the oocyte donors was well founded: see Dickenson (2012: 9–11) on pressures placed on women in Hwang Woo Suk's stem cell research. Sherwin (1993) provides a good feminist critique of bioengineering practice. Shimazono (2007: 215) warns against 'utilizing women's bodies like instruments and material resources'; Ogino (2007) overviews Japanese feminist arguments on eugenics and prenatal screening, assisted reproduction and infertility.

17 Morioka (2013) discusses 'herbivore' men. Whaley (2016: 59–87) analyzes the video-game *Catherine* (Atlus 2011), where protagonist Vincent is reluctant to mature and have children.

18 Aeris's name was discussed in Chapter 5, but some players also prefer the spelling 'Aerith' for continuity with the earthly aspects of the name 'Terra' in *FFVI*.

19 See Little Chiba (1998) game script for Disc One.

20 Fans on the *Final Fantasy Wiki* note the difference between these 'Sephiroth copies' and genetic copies of Sephiroth – they are not real clones since they were not created with Sephiroth's own genetic material.

21 In *God of War III*, the player-character Kratos attacks his father Zeus, but the player wonders how many times they should push the attack button. As stopping too soon could mean failure, players can easily overcompensate. When the player stops it becomes clear that Zeus was defeated early in the battle, prompting player guilt at 'overkill' and challenging notions of their own violence. Rockstar Games similarly manipulates players in *Grand Theft Auto V* with an unskippable torture scene, in which the player must push buttons enacting electrocution or waterboarding. Not pushing buttons results in the end of gameplay, so the player feels coerced into torture, reflecting on their capacity for violence. The level of self-reflection in such scenes depends on the player (Hutchinson 2017a), but the impact in *Final Fantasy VII* is very strong.

22 Kojima Hideo is often described as an 'auteur' because he holds an inordinate amount of control over the writing, directing, editing and overall look and feel of his games (Kwan 2016). I refer to Kojima as 'the designer' of the *Metal Gear Solid* games, much as I would talk about Kurosawa Akira as 'the director' of his films even though he is helped by a large team of people. A 'Kojima Hideo game,' a useful brand in the industry, is also a useful term of art, just as a 'Kurosawa Akira film' denotes a certain film style. Discussing 'the artist as a game studio,' Bogost (2015: 11–12) mentions Kojima as an artist with a distinctive style that evolved over decades, made possible by 'financial success and corporate underwriting' from Konami. Consalvo (2013) provides a counter-argument, focusing on corporate collaborative creation.

23 *Metal Gear* (MSX2 console, 1987) is mainly about mobile nuclear weapons and does not mention bioengineering, but the sequel *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* (MSX2 console, 1990) features technological and medical enhancements through drugs and stealth suit camouflage, as well as the bioengineered algae OILIX, invented to ease the oil crisis.

24 This is revealed in the same conversation between Liquid and Solid Snake mentioned above (El Greco 2004).

25 Game script, El Greco (2005). In the novel, Naomi explains that Solidus's accelerated aging is due to the age of Big Boss's cells at the time of cloning, but states that Liquid and Solid age because of alterations to their own genetic code (Itoh 2012: 127–128). In either case, accelerated aging was thought to help ensure secrecy for the clone project.

26 Dolly lived to 6.5 years, around half the expected lifespan for a sheep, provoking much discussion on the possible harmful effects of cloning on the aging process. The somatic cell nuclear transfer used cells from a sheep 6 years old. However, Dolly also lived indoors her whole life, which contributes to disease in sheep (Shiels *et al.* 1999).

27 Naomi's words appear in voiceover after Snake and Meryl have escaped the base. Wording varies depending on player activity and experiences, but in all the versions I

have seen the basic message remains the same: Naomi reflects on her own motivations for studying genetics, comes to appreciate the uses and limitations of DNA information, and resolves to make the most of her life, thanking Snake and urging him to live life to the full.

28 *MGS3* was the last game made by the original creative team (Konami Computer Entertainment Japan) before development moved to Konami Productions, so is often seen as the last 'canonical' game in the series.

29 See for example Hoshino (1995, 1997). On the other hand, Japan is also seen as the closest to Western bioethics among Asian countries (Wertz and Fletcher 2004: 20).

30 Sleeboom-Faulkner (2014: 152–153).

31 See Kojima's Afterword to the book (Itoh 2012: 357–358).

32 Itoh's previous work *Genocidal Organ* (2007) explored themes of genocide and surveillance states in the wake of a nuclear holocaust.

33 James Paul Gee (2009) relates his experience identifying with Old Snake.

34 In this, *Metal Gear Solid* may be understood as a post-post-war processing of wartime trauma, along the lines of David Stahl's (2016) analysis of Japanese literature of the 1980s and 90s.

35 The game script (El Greco 2004) states that the soldier died, but was 'revived'.

36 James Newman (2008: 39–40) discusses fan reaction and Konami's response; blogger Gamephilosophe (2014) calls the introduction of Raiden Kojima's 'finest moment' for its immersion-breaking tactics and ludo-narrative experimentation.

37 One problem arising from this mode of narrative progression is 'retcon madness' – the contortions of retroactive continuity whereby certain details of previous narratives are ignored or elided in order to match the now-canon arc of specific scenarios.

38 Reischauer (1981: 160–163, 232–234) discusses the strength of *zaibatsu* and their relationship to politics, militarism and imperialist expansion. See also Beasley (1999: 252–253).

39 Takeuchi (2003: 129–132), Hoshino (1997: 13–20). See Sleeboom-Faulkner (2014: 155) on the idea of brain death as 'un-Japanese.'

40 In the 1998 Japanese government survey on bioethics, organ transplantation and brain death were seen as more important concerns than cloning (Horres *et al*. 2006: 19–20). Komatsu (1996) uses the term 'reverberating death' (*kyōmei suru shi*) to show how death is not a matter merely for the individual, but also for family members and wider society.

41 See Campbell (2017: 114–115); Hoshino (1997: 13–19). Namihara (1997) details Buddhist notions of the body and the importance of death rituals in Japan. However, there is not 'one' Buddhist view in Japanese bioethics, and Buddhism itself is pluralistic (Campbell 2017: 65).

42 The arcade light gun game *The House of the Dead* (Sega, 1996) has similar themes of genetic experimentation and living death, although it lacks the nuclear connection.

43 On race in *Resident Evil* games see Freedman (2012), Brock (2011) and Martin (2018).

44 For the full game script see MillersC (2004).

45 For more on Unit 731 see Tsuneishi (2007).

46 It is interesting that the genetic researchers in Kojima's universe are female, since genetics is a male-dominated field in Japan. Globally, Japan is an exception to the rule (Wertz and Fletcher 2004: 9). Dr. Clark was originally conceived as male, referred to as 'he' in *Metal Gear Solid*, but switched to a female in later games. This was explained by a retcon in *MGS4* and *MGSV: The Phantom Pain* in which Dr. Clark is described as a secretive individual who left little data behind after their death, causing confusion over their identity.

47 The 2003 Cartagena Act restricted the production of genetically modified organisms (or GMOs) to research, and no GMO crops or seeds are grown for commercial purposes in Japan. The ban does not affect imports, so Japan is a great importer of GMO products. Fukuyama (2002: 196–202) discusses connections between biotechnology in agriculture and human medicine, and regulations around the world.

Part III

History, memory, and re-imagining war

7 An uncomfortable genre: the Japanese war game

Creating a truly accurate historical videogame would not only touch on areas we'd rather not deal with, in the end it just wouldn't be any fun.

Bruce Shelley, designer of *Age of Empires*[1]

Videogames are now widely recognized as an artistic medium by which people can experience history and make sense of the past. Zach Whalen and Laurie Taylor maintain that 'videogames help us think about history and nostalgia in profound and important ways' (2008: vii), while Ed Halter sees war-themed videogames as primarily 'ways to think about war' (2006: xxvii). We have seen how *Ōkami* depicts a historical Japan in artistic terms – a gentle game where even the fiercest battles are experienced like a painting come to life. But the majority of Japanese videogames set in the past tend to focus more directly on war itself. In Part III of this book, I will examine the cultural meaning of Japanese videogames in terms of history, memory and the colonial legacy of the Japanese Empire. This chapter will focus on videogames depicting war, and the problems and logistics of creating a successful war game in a market very different to that of North America. I will also set Japanese war games in their social and political context, considering how heroic ideology is connected to political rhetoric.

War games take many forms, including tabletop strategy, live reenacts, and boardgames like *Battleship*, as well as videogames like *Call of Duty* or *Metal Gear Solid*. War games can be set in the present, the future or the distant past, and take place in any country, real or imagined. In today's global videogame market, the biggest-selling war game is undoubtedly the *Call of Duty* series, where players complete missions to help the Allies win World War II.[2] The player controls a main character (usually a member of the US armed forces) from a first-person perspective, where the character's hands and weapon appear on the screen but move with the camera, giving the impression that the player's own hands and weapon are doing the shooting. This first-person shooter (FPS) genre is one of the most popular modes for war games in the North American market. The vast number of historical battles available for digital reenactment means that developers will never run out of material, and a brief look at the *Call*

of Duty series finds players thrust into battles from WWII (including both European and Pacific Theatres), civil war in Russia, various scenarios from the Cold War, a South American conflict, and battle between North and South Korea. Although the FPS war game is extremely popular in the West, there are fewer war-themed shooting games developed in Japan. I will begin this chapter by looking at the disparity between Western and Japanese markets, and then examine ways in which Japanese developers have taken on the challenge of creating a viable war game for the Japanese and foreign audience.

War games in the American and Japanese markets

According to industry reports, the best-selling videogame genres played on consoles in America have historically been Action, Shooter, and Sports, while the best-selling game genres on the PC have been Strategy, Casual, and Role-playing.[3] In 2016, Shooters were the largest 'super-genre' overall (27.5%) followed by Action (22.5%), Role-playing (12.9%), and Sports (11.7%). The genres of Action and Shooter together thus make up half of the American market, with 50 per cent of sales in 2016. 'Action' is a very broad category, referring to games like *Grand Theft Auto* or *Tomb Raider* as well as games with a wartime setting. Some of the most popular action titles include games about World War II, and although many take a first-person perspective and can be classed as 'shooters,' they are often listed as 'action' games in media outlets like IGN, Kotaku, *PC Gamer*, and *Retro Gamer*. FPS series like *Medal of Honor, Wolfenstein, Deadly Dozen, Battlefield, Brothers in Arms, Red Orchestra* and *Battlestrike* position the player inside the action of the war, playing the role of a soldier in battle. While *Battlestrike* was developed in Poland and *Battlefield* in Sweden, the majority of titles in this genre are produced in the US. Some WWII shooters are played in third-person perspective, like the British game *Sniper Elite*.

Some of these series have seven or eight installments, and to give an idea of their selling power, we just need to look at the way that *Call of Duty Black Ops II* smashed sales records in 2012, with sales of $500 million in the first 24 hours and $1 billion in 15 days. This game is set in the Cold War, but shows the popularity of the series itself.[4] The sales records of *Black Ops II* held strong until *Grand Theft Auto V* was released in September 2013 – the sales of that game reached 1 billion dollars in just three days. In other words, in America, first-person shooter console games based on modern war themes sell just as well, if not better, than other games in different genres. In 2016, the top 20 best-selling games of any genre included the war-themed shooters *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* (no. 1), *Battlefield 1* (no. 2), *Call of Duty: Black Ops III* (no. 9) as well as the Tom Clancy shooters *The Division* and *Rainbow Six Siege*, among such other games as *Madden NFL 17, Grand Theft Auto V, Minecraft* and *Final Fantasy XV*.[5]

World War II is also a popular theme for Strategy games, which in 2015 held a market share of 36.4 per cent on the PC.[6] Both real-time strategy (RTS) and turn-based strategy (TBS) genres involve reenactments of historical battles, as

well as alternate history and 'what-if' scenarios. Some of the series in the real-time strategy genre include *Close Combat, Sudden Strike, Blitzkrieg, Company of Heroes* and *Commandos*, while turn-based games include *Panzer General, Allied General*, and *Panzer Corps*, where players can control either the Allies or the Axis powers as they battle for command of Europe, North Africa or even the USA itself. It must be said that these games are not as popular as FPS titles such as *Call Of Duty*, and much of the strategy market is dominated by 'grand strategy' games like *Age of Empires* and *Civilization*, or the science fiction of *Starcraft*.[7] However, it is easy to see that WWII titles proliferate in this genre, as players act out their war fantasies as a commander of troops and resources with an eagle-eye perspective on the battlefield.

Looking at the Wikipedia 'List of World War II video games,' which runs to 14 pages, we find that most of the titles are made by American game developers.[8] WWII videogames bring to life a prevalent American narrative of the war experience, where America entered the war to 'save' Europe from the Axis powers. It is notable that far fewer games reenact the Vietnam war, which was unpopular at home and had no clear decisive 'win' for America.[9] By contrast, the American gamer can play through a WWII narrative as the saviour, hero and ultimately the winner of the war. This is important for game sales, as the player needs to feel a sense of achievement and winning at the end of the game. Since many of these games also have role-playing elements, the player really feels as though they are the person involved in the battle or commanding the troops. As we saw earlier in Part II, with the embodied narratives of social critique, the player of war games can embody the soldier or commander and feel the victory for themselves, emphasizing the importance of victory as an aim and reinforcing the winning narrative of the Allies through history.

Chris Kempshall argues that WWII dominates the market as a topic for war games since it is an easily understood war with a clear heroic narrative, a 'just war' with a moral imperative for the Allies to defeat the Axis powers (2015: 18). By contrast, World War I was more complicated, with no clear ending, and a static fighting scenario where soldiers were stuck in the trenches for long periods of time, interspersed with heavy casualties when an advance was attempted. As Kempshall states, 'Nobody is going to want to play a game where your character is immediately killed on going over the top' (2015: 26). Playing as a general also incurred a moral conundrum, as the generals in WWI were widely regarded as incompetent or immoral in sending hundreds of men to their needless, pointless deaths (ibid: 60). For these reasons World War II is a much 'easier' war to dramatize in many ways. However, it too has its risks, as a controversial setting for entertainment. Certain aspects of WWII in Western games are 'heavily edited or invisible,' for example Nazi symbols, historical figures like Adolf Hitler, or any mention of the Holocaust.[10]

Some gamers also like to play as the opposing side, the 'baddies' in any scenario, whether it be the robbers in 'cops and robbers,' the Indians in 'cowboys and Indians,' or the Germans and Axis powers in war games. North American players can safely play as the Axis powers in games like *Panzer Corps*, safe in

the knowledge that the Allies eventually won. In this scenario, the player is only temporarily embodying the identity of the losing side in the war. Outside the digital realm, war reenactors doing impressions of German soldiers have reported enjoying the feeling of rebellion provided by playing as the 'other side,' but also a sense of unease and ambivalence with the fact that the Axis powers are seen as wrongdoers in the war, with impressions of Nazi soldiers in particular being encountered with feelings of hatred by real veterans or distrust by 'regular' members of society.[11] There is therefore some ambivalence involved in playing as the 'other side' or the 'losing side' in a war game, which supports the idea that heroic winning narratives are more attractive and less threatening for players.

Another reason why WWII narratives are dominated by US developers is that these games are seen of a much broader 'militainment' culture in America, where entertainment media are linked to the military-industrial complex – the classic example is the football game where American fighter jets do a fly-by and military officers take the field for pregame honours (R. Stahl 2010: 49–51). Scholars have made the link between war games and actual war more concrete, examining games used as training for soldiers in the military, and by extension, videogames that directly or indirectly teach players how to shoot and how to be soldiers.[12] Another approach is to look at war games in terms of 'dark play,' where gamers experience controversial issues and experiment with moral or ethical situations to test the limits of their own thinking on difficult topics.[13]

Various theoretical frameworks may thus be employed to position games as texts which deal with war. While approaches are varied, scholars agree that gameplay dynamics and genre are essential parts of the player's experience. Playing as the soldier and shooting the weapons at other human and military targets, the player experiences a high degree of immersion in the war environment. This has lead to much criticism of the hyper-realistic experience of *Call of Duty* and other games which media and political discourse represent as dangerous and addictive for young minds. Some see the popularity of *Call of Duty* and other first-person shooters as indicative of the gun culture of contemporary America, which can be shocking to people in other cultures. The FPS genre is certainly not as popular in places like Denmark or Japan, where the sight of a character holding a gun would be much more alarming than scenes of nudity or even sexual activity.[14] The Japanese market for war games is thus very different.

Like the American market, the Japanese market has been historically dominated by Action, with a market share of 42 per cent.[15] However, the first-person shooter is not a popular mode of play in Japan, where there is a cultural resistance to guns in daily life.[16] The genre of 'Shooter' (usually denoted STG), when made in Japan, usually means arcade games like *Space Invaders* or *Galaga* with the player's avatar being a spaceship of some kind and shooting down alien invaders.[17] As the STG genre has developed, players can now experience the games known as 'bullet hell' or 'maniac shooters' with thousands of bullets creating mesmerizing patterns on the screen. Players must learn and anticipate the patterns in order to dodge the bullets and hit their target. Many of these games

are still played in the arcades, with real experts or 'scorers' attracting great crowds of viewers eager to see how the player manages to complete each screen.[18] These games are more about the act of shooting than the target of the shot, however, so they are not generally classed as 'war games.' In the genre of Action, perhaps the greatest Japanese export has been the subgenre of survival horror, including games like *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill*, and *Fatal Frame*. Many of these involve main characters who hold weapons and have to move through a fearful environment shooting zombies or other monsters. These have influenced Western shooters but are not considered to be classic FPS shooters themselves.[19]

As in the American market, the genre of Action is broadly defined, with popular games including monster-hunting games like *Monster Hunter X*, *Yōkai Sangokushi* and *Dragon Quest Monsters Joker 3* (the top three sellers of 2016) as well as the *Splatoon* series. But in contrast to the American market, there are very few war-themed games in this genre. The exception is Kojima Hideo's *Metal Gear Solid* series, which we examined in terms of bioethics and the nucleus in the previous chapter. The depiction of war in this series is complex and thoughtful, and in terms of genre it also stands apart as a 'tactical espionage' action-adventure series, with many role-playing elements that make it hard to classify into one category. This chapter places *Metal Gear Solid* in its context, by sketching out the different approaches to war games in the Japanese video-game industry. Chapter 8 will then return to Kojima and *Metal Gear* in order to examine specific treatments of nuclear war and violence in the series.

In terms of narrative arcs and thoughtful storylines, the role-playing genre also offers interesting case studies of games dealing with war. As we saw in Chapter 5, the *Final Fantasy* series has some specific scenes that refer to WWII and nuclear weaponry, and RPG games like *Final Fantasy IV* or *Valkyria Chronicles* also offer much thoughtful commentary on war as a sphere of human activity, as we shall see. However, there are very few games or series in the RPG genre that could be classified as 'war games' in terms of battlefield tactics or historical simulations. Although the RPG attracts 24.3 per cent of the market in Japan, with games from the *Final Fantasy, Dragon Quest* and *Dark Souls* series consistently selling well, war games are just not as significant in this genre. The area where we find the most war games is in Strategy – both real-time and turn-based – attracting less than a quarter of the Japanese market.[20]

Warlords and samurai: war games set in feudal Japan

Strategy games involving feudal wars abound in Japan, with titles like *Nobunaga's Ambition* (*Nobunaga no yabō*) dominating the PC market. First released by Kōei in 1983, *Nobunaga's Ambition* is now a classic of the style, a turn-based grand strategy game with sweeping, epic battles on the way to achieving the final victory – Oda Nobunaga's unification of Japan. The real Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) did not achieve his ambition, which was accomplished by Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) in 1603. Many Japanese see Nobunaga as the visionary who was unjustly betrayed by his vassal Akechi Mitsuhide (1528–1582)

before he could realize his ambition. This series may thus be seen as wish-fulfillment on Nobunaga's behalf, in a great vision of alternative history where the general lived to complete his goals. Interestingly, the player does not have to play as the character Oda Nobunaga, but may select from a number of different *daimyo* (feudal lords) instead. The overall aim remains the same: to defeat all opposing forces and unify the warring states into one nation-state. The player must allocate resources to the troops, expand both military and civilian life with a productive economy, and even make sure that the peasants are satisfied with their lot in life so they will remain loyal to their leaders.

Nobunaga's Ambition has sold consistently well for decades, and is now in its fifteenth incarnation, with *Nobunaga's Ambition: Taishi* released on PS4, Windows and Nintendo Switch in late 2017. The series is so popular it has been adapted for mobile and internet gaming, with an internet-based battle simulator for Windows *Nobunaga's Ambition Internet* (1998), the MMORPG *Nobunaga's Ambition Online* (2003) as well as the social network game *Million-man Nobunaga's Ambition* developed by Mobaga in 2010. There is also a cat-themed battle simulation game, *Nobunyaga's Ambition* (2011), which incorporates the Japanese miaowing sound 'nya' in the title. The series is undoubtedly the king, or the shōgun, of the Japanese strategy games set in the warring states period. Its influence has been enormous, and the studio Kōei is well known for its war-themed strategy titles.

We can see how important these war-themed strategy games have been for the Japanese market by the fact that Kōei's real-time strategy game *Kessen* (meaning 'Decisive Battle') was a launch title for the PlayStation 2 in Japan in 2000. *Kessen* dramatizes the battles between Tokugawa Ieyasu and the Toyotomi clan, represented by the Toyotomi guardian Ishida Mitsunari (1559–1600). The game begins with the great Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. Historically, Tokugawa Ieyasu won this battle, and it is as famous in Japan as the Battle of Waterloo in England or the Battle of Gettysburg in the US. The player is immediately cast in the role of Ieyasu, and thrust into a war council to choose the most loyal generals to lead the troops. If the player is unable to win this battle (as was my experience!), they encounter a 'what-if' scenario where Ieyasu must gather the remnants of his forces and meet reinforcements at the Battle of Fuji. Battles are fought in real time, keeping the pressure on the player, who can zoom in on hand-to-hand fighting or switch to an aerial view of the battlefield to best position the troops.

Other games set in the *sengoku* era, or Warring States period of feudal Japan, include *Samurai Warriors* from Kōei and *Sengoku Basara* from Capcom. *Samurai Warriors*, a hack-and-slash action game developed by Omega Force, was published by Kōei for the PS2 in 2004, based on the earlier title *Dynasty Warriors*, set in the Three Kingdoms era of Chinese history.[21] These games see the player cast as one heroic character who must fight their way through crowds of enemies, with special 'crowd-clearing' moves known as *musō* attacks. Building on the success of the Kōei titles, Capcom released *Sengoku Basara* in 2005, described as a 'crowd-fighting' action game where the hero must fight off hordes

of monsters and attackers who all converge at once. Martin Picard (2016) has analyzed *musō* attacks in terms of their effect on the player, who certainly feels *musō* (matchless, peerless, without parallel) in their powers against the enemies. I find it interesting that a homonym for *musō* means 'dream-state' or 'reverie,' as the immersive adrenalin-fuelled battle scenarios place the player in a dreamlike state where no enemies can touch them.[22] A different homonym can also indicate the 'blank mind' needed for successful action in the martial arts, based on the tenets of Zen Buddhism.

Another successful game series set in the *sengoku* era is *Onimusha*, first released by Capcom in 2001. The original idea for the game may be seen in the proposed title, *Sengoku Biohazard*, which would put a *Resident Evil* style narrative into the feudal era, with players battling their way out of a booby-trapped ninja fortress.[23] This scenario did not eventuate, but the emphasis of the *Onimusha* series remains firmly on the fighting, with players controlling one main character from a third-person perspective as they battle their way through the historical environment. *Onimusha* is only loosely connected to historical war themes, but the significance of Oda Nobunaga as a non-playable character in the series demands discussion in the context of war-themed games.

The main character of the first game, *Onimusha: Warlords* is the samurai Akechi Samanosuke, aided by the female ninja Kaede in the quest to rescue his cousin Princess Yuki. The protagonist's name immediately hints at the significance of Oda Nobunaga to the plot, since Akechi Mitsuhide was the one who betrayed Nobunaga and attacked him at Honnō-ji temple, where Nobunaga died. Sure enough, the 'bad guys' in the game include Oda Nobunaga, who has been raised from the dead by the Demon hordes, and the Demons themselves, many of whom have Western names such as the king Fortinbras and his allies Hecuba and Guildenstern. Nobunaga's vassal Kinoshita Tokichirō tries to recruit Samanosuke (and thereby the player) into fighting for the resurrected Nobunaga. For his part, Samanosuke is protected by a magical Gauntlet given to him by the Ogres, a benevolent race of beings who live below the earth and wish to save the human world.[24] By the second game, *Onimusha: Samurai's Destiny*, Nobunaga has defeated Fortinbras to lead the Demons himself. The main character of the sequel is named Yagyū Jūbei, again invoking the historical figure Akechi Mitsuhide, first called 'Jūbei' by his clan before acquiring his formal title. This Jūbei has much in common with Samanosuke, and the hero of each game in the series would continue to be a young master swordsman determined to rid the world of evil forces.

Between the *Onimusha* games and *Nobunaga's Ambition*, a young gamer from the West may be forgiven for assuming that Oda Nobunaga rather than Tokugawa Ieyasu was the real 'national hero' of feudal Japan. In some ways they would be right – although Tokugawa Ieyasu defeated the Toyotomi clan to become the first shōgun of the new unified Japan, it is Nobunaga who is more cherished among Japanese people. The idea of the noble underdog has great appeal in Japanese culture, seen in the beloved figures of Yamato Takeru, Minamoto no Yoshitsune, Saigō Takamori and others who lost significant battles

but remain idolized for their strength of character in the face of defeat (Morris 1975). The player is able to feel great respect for the historical figure of Nobunaga as well as a yearning for his lost opportunity, which further immerses them in the game narrative. Fighting the battle and winning – where the historical figure could not – grants the player an immense feeling of achievement, contributing to the ongoing success and marketability of these history-based narratives.

Much as we gauge contemporary perceptions of historical figures from popular books or films, we can also get a feel for which historical figures are most respected or derided in Japan from their depiction in videogames. These portrayals do not tend to break new ground – rather than deconstructing or re-imagining famous figures as radically different from their popular image, these games repeat and reinforce images from literature, film, ballads and kabuki drama. In other words, the aim is to polish the pedestal rather than tear it down. Japanese war-themed strategy games tend to glorify history and create an exciting atmosphere, with many background details about the major figures in historical wars. Attentive players can learn much about Japanese history and culture from these games, as developers pride themselves on their attention to detail. In much the same way that Kurosawa Akira insisted on historical accuracy in costume, props and setting for his *jidai-geki* period films, game creators like *Kessen*'s Shibusawa Kou have prided themselves on providing a realistic and historically believable environment for their battles.[25] Important historical events may change depending on the player's level of skill in battle, but the setting remains consistent, with the geographical layouts as well as the arms and armour depicted faithfully. Just as Adam Chapman (2016) has theorized about Western war games as 'digital history,' we can also see these Japanese war games as a similar kind of history at work, immersing the player in tales of the past and showing them, with varying degrees of simulation and abstraction, how pre-modern Japan waged war.

One element that stands out in the narrative of these games is the importance of Christianity in sixteenth-century Japan. The persecution of the Jesuit missionaries is often mentioned when establishing the character of certain leaders, while Christianity is also used as an important device for character development. In *Kessen*, for example, the Lord Akashi says things like 'In the name of the Lord!' when charging into battle. The Christian cross on his armour allows the player to instantly identify him in the heat of the action. This is very useful in a game where you may have nine or ten generals commanding different units around the battlefield, and the camera switches quickly to show cutscenes of particular attacks.[26] The 'flying fusilliers' of Lord Akashi's troops, however, are most likely a fantasy – whole squadrons of women recruited and trained together for deployment on the battlefield are something that historians agree would be out of place in the *sengoku* era. While women did successfully fight in Japanese wars, they were most usually in a siege situation or defending the castle in the lord's absence. Some women did achieve great fame by riding out into war, wielding swords or *naginata*, but these were outliers rather than the norm.[27]

Some historical details are also changed to be more romantic for the purposes of the game narrative. The Christian convert Lady Hosokawa Gracia is a

much-loved figure from Japanese history, and the tale of her death is romantically recounted in literature, drama and film. *Kessen* takes up the romanticized version of the story in a moving cut-scene, with Gracia asking her family retainer to kill her to avoid capture by the enemy (since suicide is forbidden in the Catholic faith). Her large cross sparkling in the firelight, Gracia speaks clearly with a firm will. This scene is shown as a flashback from Lord Hosokawa's memory, when he states his wish for revenge in the war council before the Battle of Sekigahara. *Kessen* was notable for the large number of cinematic cut-scenes, which occur during battle as well as in the war council and other important moments. Flashbacks show the motivation of various characters, and we see many of the castles from various parts of the country in the backdrops to these scenes.

A note from Shibusawa in the opening screen of *Kessen* states that he aimed for a cinematic feel in the game, as 'I have always dreamed of creating a movie that I could control.'[28] The game certainly has much in common with Kurosawa Akira's great war epics, *Kagemusha* (1980) and *Ran* (1985). Darrell William Davis (1995) has analyzed these films as examples of 'monumental style,' a mode of filmmaking where slow camera movements and deliberate staging set the scene for heroic and epic tales of national glory. The monumental style was a holdover from Japanese filmmaking in the Imperial period, when many films were made with propaganda purposes in mind, and films deemed not nationalistic enough would soon be on the censor's floor. That *Kessen* has so much in common with these films points to the nationalistic feel of the game, revelling in the great decisive battles of history. The game abounds in references to honour, shame and glory; the importance of loyalty and respect for authority; and the impact of individual bravery and creative thinking. These values echo through *Nobunaga's Ambition, Onimusha, Samurai Warriors* and the other games mentioned above. There is much to celebrate in the 'Japanese spirit' here, the *Yamato-damashii* so prized by Tokugawa-period thinkers and twentieth-century idealists alike. The feudal era has thus provided rich territory for game developers, with many successful war-themed games in the genres of action, strategy, and even fighting games. However, the majority of these Japanese war games are set in the distant past rather than the modern world. Compared with the American market, there is a noticeable lack of historically accurate war games set in modern times. Put bluntly, this is because the theme of modern war with respect to Japan is extremely problematic.

The problem of modern war in Japanese games

A large part of the appeal in Western games about modern warfare is the feeling of winning the war – playing as the Allies and recreating a feeling of victory, or perhaps playing as the Axis powers, secure in the knowledge that the Allies did eventually win the war and secure world freedom. However, from the Japanese perspective, games about WWII would hold much less appeal. Not only did Japan lose the war, but many issues involved in the war itself remain controversial, and

largely absent from school history textbooks.[29] The brutality of Japanese soldiers in Asia, the infamous POW camps and work sites like the Burma Railroad, the massacre in Nanjing, and the sexual exploitation of women by the army (euphemistically called 'comfort women'), are all elements of the Imperial Japanese Army's advance into China and Southeast Asia. When we think about war games needing some kind of winning narrative, possible scenarios are very limited for Japan in the twentieth century, and WWII in particular. Thinking in terms of military success, Japan's 'winning' narratives would be limited to the very early expansion of the empire, down through Micronesia in the 1920s and Manchuria in the 1930s. However, these scenarios are problematic because they evoke the shameful past of Japanese aggression in China and other Asian countries.[30]

On the other hand, if developers were to take a scenario from later in the war, when Japan was on the defensive, then the result may be a more realistic yet rather depressing narrative. While Saotome Katsumoto's literary memoirs and narratives of the firebombing of Tokyo in 1945 have attracted a wide audience as a powerful tale of survival in the ashes of a defeated nation, it would be very hard to make a game about the same topic.[31] Looking at the war as a whole, the fact that Japan lost in the end is a problem for developers because 'losing' narratives simply don't make good games. The elements of competition, pride, and the joy of winning for the player are all absent. Overall, Japan did not win the war, so there is no historical victory for the player to re-enact. Alternative histories may also create cognitive dissonance for the Japanese player, who knows at heart that Japan was defeated. In short, there are many reasons for Japanese developers to avoid WWII altogether.

We can also talk about the problem in terms of self-censorship, ideological conservatism, or possible compliance with governmental directives. Any scenario set in wartime Japan or the immediate postwar rebuilding period could not help but be political. How would a game designer depict the Kempeitai – the Special Police responsible for much thought control and punishment in wartime Japan? What about the occupying forces? Would the Emperor be mentioned or portrayed in such a game? Japanese films about WWII have become increasingly polarized in recent years, with leftist, anti-war narratives competing at the box office with more nationalistic and revisionist titles.[32] The production costs involved in creating a videogame mean that any political stance or controversial content can affect marketability and sales, with the result that pre-production self-censorship becomes the easiest option.[33] Not only would there be no heroic victory for the player in such a game, but the games could prove difficult to sell.

Similar problems can also be encountered by game designers outside Japan, dealing with controversial issues of colonialism or racial representation in historical games, for example. As designer Bruce Shelley said with regard to *Age of Empires*, 'Creating a truly accurate historical videogame would not only touch on areas we'd rather not deal with, in the end it just wouldn't be any fun' (Rausch 2005). Games like *Age of Empires* and *Civilization* have attracted post-colonial scholarly readings for this reason.[34] But we can see that Japan has its own country-specific reasons for avoiding the depiction of realistic modern war

and Empire, facing a two-edged history of defeat at home and aggression abroad. Although Shelley and other Western game designers struggle with depicting Western empires while remaining sensitive to native populations, they do so from a position of historical dominance and power, not defeat and the ensuing crisis of identity experienced by postwar Japan.

Overall, the factors of historicity, marketability and gameplay make it difficult for Japanese developers to create a popular war game set in the twentieth century. In contrast, a focus on the more distant past allows players to enjoy war games as part of a national heroic narrative. By avoiding the modern world, Japan may be portrayed as a world of daimyo and samurai, when *bushidō* ruled and society both military and civil was full of gallantry and valour. The feudal era is rich with heroic winning narratives – the (imagined) unification of Japan by Oda Nobunaga, the Tokugawa victory at Sekigahara, and a long list of victorious battles by historical figures in *Onimusha*. The games reflect the pride in Japanese historical figures by including the name of the person in the title (*Nobunaga's Ambition*), as well as pride in key terms from the Japanese language, seen in the titles *Kessen* or *Samurai Warriors*. The fact that titles like *Kessen* and *Onimusha* are kept in their Japanese form for the international release exoticize the content, cementing the game as 'Japanese' in the foreign player's mind. Some dialogue terms are also kept in Japanese in the localized game, such as General Honda's battlecry 'they shall fear my tombogiri!' in *Kessen*.[35] As we saw in Part I of this book with games like *Ōkami* and *Katamari Damacy*, using the Japanese language without translating terms into English has the effect of simultaneously highlighting the Japanese origin of the game and distancing it from the Western player's reality. The introduction of supernatural demons and magical powers into the narrative, as in *Onimusha*, makes the heroic past even more mythic in stature, achieving a further distancing effect. This phenomenon has attracted scholarly attention, with academics examining the Japanese game industry in terms of the (mis)representation of Japanese history.

Problematizing the heroic past

The main thrust of this scholarly argument is that Japanese developers have an ideological agenda in developing games that show Japan in a better light than historical reality. Martin Picard (2016) argues that games participate in the construction of historical narratives in Japan as part of the widely circulating 'media mix,' with significant cultural, social and political impact. Games like *Nobunaga's Ambition, Sengoku Basara* and *Onimusha* create a heroic and attractive past, ideologically in sync with the conservative leanings of Japan's government. Games such as *Kantai Collection* also reinforce this rhetoric with respect to the Pacific War (Picard 2016), as we shall see below. Similarly, Ryan Scheiding (2019) compares American and Japanese game representations of World War II and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as 'discourses of the past.' American hegemonic visions of the war show America as fighting a 'just war,' while Japanese discourse shows Japan as a victim rather than an aggressor.

Drawing on Igarashi (2000), Scheiding argues that these two visions have dominated artistic interpretations of the war, including videogames. He analyzes the American game *Fallout* and Japanese game *Resident Evil* to show how the two visions of atomic weaponry are not only at odds with each other, but also serve to marginalize other discourses of the past, originating in Australia, Korea or the Philippines.

This work by Picard and Scheiding meshes well with existing arguments on the representation of Japanese history in manga and anime.[36] These artistic forms have presented differing Japanese perspectives of the war – for example, Susan Napier analyzes the anime *Barefoot Gen* and *Grave of the Fireflies* as part of the broader discourse of 'victim's history' in Japan, but notes that Nakazawa Keiji's *Barefoot Gen* is much more complex, 'and in many aspects is a more powerful antiwar film with a strongly activist subtext' (2005: 221). Tezuka Osamu's dark manga *MW* explores the impact of biochemical weapons deployed on an unnamed Pacific island, through the experiences of a Japanese soldier abandoned by his platoon. Matthew Penney (2008) names Tezuka Osamu and Nakazawa Keiji, as well as Mizuki Shigeru and Ishinomori Shōtarō, as writing 'honest and challenging war stories,' presenting a realistic view of Japan's experience of the Asia-Pacific war, with Mizuki 'seeking to reconcile images of Japanese as victims of their own elites and victimizers of others.' Penney names the more recent *Full Metal Alchemist* by Arakawa Hiromu as an anti-war manga and anime series which 'uses a science fiction setting to interrogate organized violence and atrocities.'[37] In contrast, videogames have not – as yet – managed to deal with similar themes. As Scheiding (2019) points out, 'counter-discourses of history' are certainly found in art and academe, but a counter-discursive retelling of WWII has yet to appear in a Japanese videogame.

In sum, there are several reasons why Japanese developers would either avoid war games altogether, or create a mythologized or exoticized vision of war that distances players from the ugly reality of actual battles fought by the Imperial Japanese army. Among those developers who do deal with war in their games, many romanticize war in an escapist dream of the feudal past. The remainder of this chapter will examine strategies that Japanese developers have used to create videogames with a modern war theme while simultaneously attempting to avoid alienating the domestic or foreign audience. Since the war continues to be a taboo topic in Japan, game designers have not generally discussed these ideas directly in interviews, although some public statements have been made about limitations on content imposed by studio executives. The following analysis focuses not on the designers' words but on their finished products, examining what is and what is not included in the historical representation, and the perspective taken towards the war overall.[38] The most surprising strategy is to develop a game from the perspective of the opposite side – play as the Allies, and fight to defeat the Japanese forces. Capcom found great success with this strategy in the great arcade games from the 1980s, *1942* and its sequel, *1943: The Battle of Midway*. Other strategies are to set the war in a fantasy world without naming the sides as 'Axis' or 'Allied' powers, or to set the action at sea

rather than on land. The most extreme form of this strategy is the highly sexualized world of *Kantai Collection*, distancing the player from reality while exploring an alternate history of WWII. Finally, the developer can reject the traditional heroic narrative of war and create a 'non-heroic' or critical tale of modern war, with a more meditative approach to war overall.

Heroic modern war strategy #1: Take the opposite side!

1942 is a shooting game from Capcom, released for arcades in 1984 (Figure 7.1). The player's 'Super Ace' plane is a thinly disguised Lockheed P-38 Lightning, one of the most efficient Allied warplanes in WWII. The setting is the Pacific Theatre, and the player's goal is to destroy the Japanese air fleet in order to reach Tokyo. The game is a vertical scroller, where enemy planes move quickly around the screen to shoot at the player's P-38, while the player can move their aircraft freely to shoot targets or avoid fire. The map unfolds below the player, a constantly scrolling background of bright blue ocean and green islands. *1942* is an exciting, adrenalin-fuelled shooter or STG in the classic arcade style, designed by Okamoto Yoshiki. It had a long shelf-life, reissued for play on Nintendo systems and part of the *Classic Capcom Collection* released for PS2 and Xbox in 2005.[39] An interesting feature of this game is the use of real historical planes and ships to represent the player and their enemies. The P-38 has a distinct silhouette, while enemy planes are also recognizable as Kawasaki Ki-61s, Mitsubishi A6M Zeros and Kawasaki Ki-48s. The main boss at the end is the 'Ayako,' clearly a Nakajima G8N, a formidable bomber with four engines that appears massively outsized on the screen. Pictures of the airplanes appear on the arcade cabinet, while the player's 'Top Secret' mission is also displayed to the

Figure 7.1 Cabinet art for *1942*.

Photograph by the author, courtesy of ReplayFX.

side of the screen, to enhance the player's feeling of participating in the war while also explaining the game's objectives.

   The use of historical aircraft in *1942* was made even more significant in the sequel, *1943: Battle of Midway*, released for arcades in 1987. This vertical scroller amped up the excitement by setting the action right in the middle of the greatest turning point of the Pacific War. The Battle of Midway is well known as a decisive victory for the Allies, which turned back the tide of Japanese expansion into the Pacific and marked the beginning of the end of the Japanese Imperial Navy. In this game, the player controls the same P-38 but now the enemies are planes, battleships and aircraft carriers. The main boss at the end is none other than the great Battleship Yamato, leader of the Japanese Imperial fleet.[40] Named for the ancient nation-state of Yamato, the ship signified the Japanese spirit and national pride as an icon of Japanese identity. The sinking of the Yamato in 1945 has inspired hundreds of novels, poems, films, anime, manga and TV series in postwar Japan, and symbolizes more than anything else the defeat of Japan in WWII as well as the indomitable Japanese spirit – in many artworks the Yamato is raised to fight again, and even to save the world from invaders in outer space.[41] Destroying the Battleship Yamato in Capcom's game is tantamount to replaying the destruction of the Japanese Empire and assuring Japan's defeat in WWII. Although *1942* and *1943: Battle of Midway* are Japanese games, it is at once apparent that the player is playing on the winning side of history. It is easy to see why this game and its sequels would be a great hit in arcades around the world, but why in Japan? It is worth examining the series in more detail, as a 'heroic narrative' created by the losing side in a major war.

   Nishikado Tomohiro has often said that when he created *Space Invaders* in 1978, he tried out a few different ideas for the enemy avatars, but arrived at the idea of aliens because shooting at planes and human enemies was seen as 'immoral' by Taito executives.[42] On the other side of the Pacific, the American company Atari had a 1970s policy of avoiding 'recognizably human characters,' reluctant to depict realistic violence (Halter 2006: 163), but by 1980 found success with the WWI flight simulation *Red Baron*. Coming from a nation victorious in WWII, Atari may have been less concerned with the impact of historical realism on players, but they set a precedent for arcade shooters using realistic planes and a historical war setting. Two years later, game designers were still divided on the issue. Creating the scrolling arcade shooter *Xevious* in 1982, Endoh Masanobu avoided the use of realistic helicopters as he was concerned it would remind players of the Vietnam War, opting for UFOs instead.[43] But in the same year, Okamoto Yoshiki made his name with *Time Pilot* (Konami, 1982), a scrolling shooter that uses a plane as the player's avatar. *Time Pilot* featured a time-travelling narrative where the player fights off enemy aircraft in order to rescue pilots who have been trapped in five different time periods. Aircraft vary appropriately to the setting, so in 1910 the enemies are biplanes, while in 2001 they are UFOs (see Figure 7.2). In this game, the avatar is not designated as an aircraft from any particular nationality, and the fictional setting distances the shooting from reality. Okamoto's
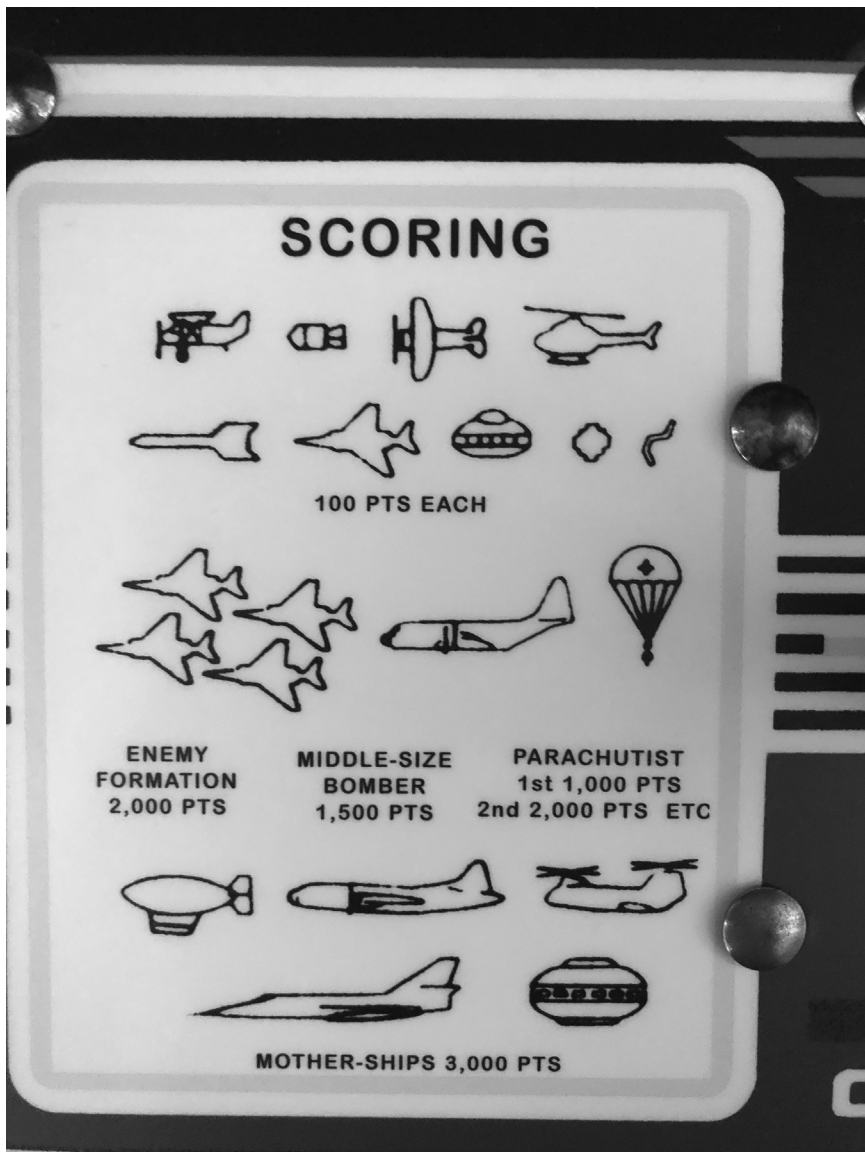
Figure 7.2 Aircraft depicted in *Time Pilot*
Photograph by the author, courtesy of ReplayFX.

later game *1942*, by contrast, was very definitely set in a historical war with a suggestion of reenacting real battles.

One rationalization for shooting down planes in a wartime setting could be that the enemy itself was seen as 'immoral.' But in *1942* and *1943: Battle of Midway* the enemy planes are Japanese, implying an internalization of guilt and war complicity for Japanese players. Such cognitive dissonance is similar to the 'uncomfortable' feeling that Chris Kempshall noted of players taking the role of general in World War I games, and that Jenny Thompson observed in American war re-enactors playing as members of the opposing Axis forces.[44] Kempshall argues that the 'moral conundrum' may exist whether the player realizes it or not – a dilemma that 'on closer examination, proves to be very uncomfortable indeed' (2015: 60). Another way to look at the game is that playing as a P-38, the player creates an American/Allied narrative of the war. The game does not represent a true 'Japanese narrative' because the player's avatar belongs to the opposing side. The player can embody the winning side and enjoy the taste of victory when the Battleship Yamato and other Japanese craft are defeated. However, for this rationalization to work, a Japanese player of the game must internalize the identity of Japan=enemy, Japan=defeated, accepting this con-dition in order to play on the winning side. Playing as a US aircraft, the player disavows their own nation and rejects their Japanese identity. The alternative is to play as a Japanese person willingly shooting Japanese aircraft and ships, which could sit uncomfortably on many.

One way to deal with this problem is to argue that there is no real narrative in the game since it is just a shooter, an STG in the arcade, built for fun and excite-ment. Talking about FPS war games, James Campbell states that genre (simula-tion) is more important than setting (representation), with the games modelling the genre of 'war game' itself more than WWII reality: 'These games are not actually trying to simulate combat. Rather, they are trying to use history to produce playable games' (2008: 198). Ed Halter argues that players will often disregard the setting of a war game as an entertaining backdrop to what really counts – the thrilling experience of 'trigger-happy gameplay' (2006: 206). As evidence, he cites a study of Japanese game reviews for *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, in which the player embodies an American Marine fighting against the Jap-anese in the Pacific: 'Japanese game reviews … had barely anything to say about the potentially disturbing fact that Japanese players would be slaughtering char-acters representing their own countrymen' (2006: 267). Eric Freedman (2012) gives a similar argument regarding the survival horror genre, in which the need to kill zombies to stay alive is far more important than any charges of racism levelled at the representation of those zombies outside the gameplay experience.

Strong support for this genre-based view is found in the nature of early arcade games, which were notoriously difficult to play. One game could last only seconds or perhaps minutes if the player were skilful. Each game would cost money, so only players with a lot of disposable income and time would be able to achieve success and see the whole battle play out. Even though game centres in Japan are open until late, a typical salaryman would not have a great deal of

time after work to spend in the arcade. College students would be the most likely candidates, a scene we see lovingly depicted in Murakami Haruki's book *Pinball 1973*. High school students of the 1980s would only be able to play until curfew, wearing their distinctive school uniforms and making easy targets for truancy inspectors. In short, the restrictions on narrative created by skill, time, money and social obligations meant that few people would be able to experience the whole narrative of the game, and even fewer people would do so in a thoughtful way.

Further, the fact that the player plays not as a human soldier but as a metal aircraft means that there is no character development or relational affinity between player and character, as might be found in a role-playing or action arcade game like Konami's *Castlevania* series. The player would not need to imagine themselves as an American aviator but just as a plane, a piece of neutral technology that could be manipulated by any player. However, this argument only goes so far, as commands from war headquarters appear on the screen in Japanese language and the targets are very clearly Mitsubishi Zeros and other well-known Japanese craft.[45] The plane is clearly flying over islands in the Pacific, sites of terrible pitched battles and morale-destroying losses for the Japanese. Trying to play as merely a piece of machinery is a false narrative that cannot be easily sustained in the face of all the historical content. For the Japanese player, these kinds of rationalizations could be ultimately unsatisfying, and perhaps even damaging for the psyche as Kempshall suggests.

Thinking more about the context of the games, the era of the 1980s was a time when Japan was regaining confidence as a nation, exporting consumer products around the world as evidence of the 'Japanese miracle,' a nation which had rebounded back from the war in an impressive display of economic success. 'Japan-bashing' became common in American discourse, where people were fearful of Japan as an economic competitor. The Japan–US relationship was still contentious after the war and Occupation, and many Japanese were still dealing with the pain from the 1968 Anpo security treaty and the legacy of unequal Japan–US relations (Miyoshi 1991). In this context, creating a game where foreign players could actually enact their 'Japan-bashing' dreams by annihilating the Japanese navy would be a surefire moneymaker. If Capcom were only looking for export sales, they certainly hit the jackpot with *1942*. Mia Consalvo and others have shown that Capcom has at times been more oriented towards the Western market than the domestic audience, and the dilemmas posed by *1942* and its sequels certainly seem to bear this out.[46]

Other strategies for heroic modern war

Designers at the Japanese studio General Support got around these problems by avoiding the Pacific Theatre with its Japanese and American forces, creating the *Steel Knight (Kōtetsu no Kishi)* series in 1991. This strategy game sets the action in Europe, and the player controls German battalions in the role of an SS officer. Although distance is achieved by setting the action in Europe, *Steel Knight* is

somewhat problematic as the player takes the side of the Axis powers, defending Germany and the Third Reich. The Japanese player may enact war against the American army, but no Japanese forces appear in the game. A contrast to this series is the *Daisenryaku* (*Great Strategy*) series from Japanese studio System-Soft, with more than 50 titles across various platforms. The player is often cast as the German forces, but may also choose to play as the Allied opponents, usually fighting to defend or occupy Berlin. The popular 1995 title *Iron Storm* for the Sega Saturn was set in both Europe and the Pacific, and players could choose to control Japanese, German or US forces, reenacting famous battles from history to experience what-if scenarios (for example, if Japan had won the Battle of Midway). In these games, playing as Japan is presented as one choice among many options. We have seen that taking the opposing side was one way to create a heroic winning narrative for a modern war game in Japan. Another way was to set the game in Europe, with non-Japanese forces, or allow play in the Pacific Theatre under certain what-if conditions. The question remained: was it possible to be heroic and take a purely Japanese perspective?

In response to these problems, some developers like Kōei shifted the focus to the Imperial Navy, avoiding the contentious issues inherent in representations of land battles. The perceptions of the Japanese army and navy following the Asia-Pacific War were quite different. As Brackman (1987: 382) points out, not one naval commander tried at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal was sentenced to death, in contrast to the army officers. Regarding the bombing of Pearl Harbor, it appears from the tribunal record that civilian and navy leaders were opposed to opening a war with the US on the Pacific front, while the army saw no hope in pursuing diplomatic negotiations.[47] The opposing forces of army and navy during the war have made for differing popular perceptions of each, with nation-alistic films glorifying the naval war in the Pacific, and a lack of heroic films about land battles in Asia. Since naval battles consist of large ships and planes fighting at a distance from one another, not hand-to-hand fighting with bayonets, this also serves to depersonalize the battle. The gameplay focus then shifts to technology and strategy, as seen in Kōei's popular *P.T.O.* series, standing for 'Pacific Theater of Operations' (Japanese title *Teitoku no ketsudan*, or 'Admiral's Decision'). In this naval strategy game, the player may choose to fight as either the US or Japanese forces in the Pacific, building and deploying ships in various historical battles. The difference between this and *Iron Storm* is that the European land theatre is absent, with all the action taking place at sea.

Another interesting example is Kōei's *Naval Ops* (*Kurogane no hōkō*) series, in which the player controls a single warship. Players may choose to embody the Japanese, American, British or German navy, with ship types and capabilities consistent with the technology of each nation. The player can choose to play in World War II mode, with historical battleships, or Normal mode, in which a more science fiction-oriented narrative unfolds. In the default 'Normal' nar-rative, the WWII destroyer falls through a dimension warp into another universe, where a generically-named 'Empire' is at war with the 'Freedom Forces.' The player joins the Freedom Forces to fight against the Empire, aided by futuristic

weapons such as laser guns. Both these game series display remarkable facilities to reenact the Pacific War while maintaining distance from it, with *PTO* showing an even-handed approach to the forces available and *Naval Ops* employing a level of unreality with science fiction. Perhaps the strongest distancing effect here is the use of a default narrative mode: to play a non-generic, specifically WWII narrative in *Naval Ops*, the player must actively choose to do so.

Another tactic to gain distance from the harsh realities of WWII – on land or at sea – is to change the names of the fighting forces or place them in an alternate or imagined universe. One successful title in this vein is the tactical RPG *Valkyria Chronicles* (Sega, 2008). Johannes Koski analyzes the game as set in the pseudohistorical continent of Europa, with the central setting of Gallia inspired by the geographical environment of Holland (2017: 402). Rather than replicating an actual place, Gallia is constructed as a 'generic space,' 'reminiscent of a sort of anywhere-and-nowhere Europe' which evokes a certain feel of WWII Europe without being specific (2017: 402). Koski notes that the Pacific Theatre is written out of the game by omission, with no mention of the Japanese military, navy or even the Japanese nationality. This produces 'a comfortably foreign setting for the war from a Japanese perspective, void of references to Japanese involvement in any conflicts' (2017: 403). The self-avowed aim of designers Hamamura Hirokazu and Aoyagi Masayuki was more to join the American cultural discourse on WWII represented by *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) or *Band of Brothers* (2001) – even depicting the Holocaust and oppression of ethnic minorities – than to avoid problematic portrayals of Japan, but this was certainly one outcome of their design choice.[48]

There are clearly many ways to achieve a heroic narrative without taking the opposite side, although all involve some measure of distancing the player from historical reality. The most successful war game of recent years combines all these strategies together – renaming the forces, setting the action at sea, focusing on naval technology, and shifting the setting to an alternate universe. The game is *Kantai Collection*, which adopts one further strategy in its distancing arsenal: the introduction of highly sexualized female figures into the gameplay.

Sexualized war in *Kantai Collection*

Take a trip to Japan today and you will be assaulted with *Kantai Collection* imagery at every turn. From the manga and magazines populating the front shelves of bookstores and convenience stores, to the claw games filled with figurines of characters from the series, a fan can easily plaster their living area with posters, reading material, toys, anime DVDs, keychains, phone covers and all manner of other items related to the game. These days any discussion of Japanese war games will inevitably lead to *Kantai Collection*, or *KanColle* as it is affectionately known by fans. In English, the game is subtitled 'Combined Fleet Girls Collection,' indicating the naval focus of the narrative, the female characters, and the card-collecting nature of gameplay. Developed by Kadokawa Games and released by DMM Games in 2013, the free-to-play online card game

currently has 4.8 million registered users.[49] The PS Vita release in February 2016, *Kantai Collection Kai*, sold out in the first week. At the time of writing, the game itself is only available in Japanese, but the manga are being translated and released online while a fully dubbed DVD of the anime series came out in June 2017.

Although set in a fictional universe, with Japan's naval forces fighting against giant 'Abyssal' monsters of the deep ocean, the game features specific warships from history such as the aircraft carrier Zuikaku, the destroyer Akizuki and even the great Battleship Yamato. However, the battleships themselves are anthropomorphized as beautiful young women, known as 'ship girls' (*kanmusume*). Herein lies the attraction of the game for many players, as the women are highly sexualized figures, usually holding a weapon and often depicted with a large bust and exposed midriff and thighs. Each character is presented as a collectible card, with distinct battle statistics and abilities suitable for war. The player assembles a squadron of cards and sends that squadron out to complete a mission in the Pacific. In terms of gameplay dynamics and accomplishing a victory, the game has much in common with other war-themed strategy games. Anthropomorphic representations of technology had also been used in previous games, such as *Moe Moe 2-ji Daisenryaku* in 2007, featuring 'mecha musume.'[50] However, the particular depiction of women in *Kantai Collection* is notable for the sexualized focus on the female body, as well as the conventions of Japanese visual culture that it deploys to great effect.

Although sexualized figures are not uncommon in videogames – see characters like Ivy in the *SoulCalibur* series, for example – the particular focus on the female body in *Kantai Collection* is distinctive. Put simply, the attributes of the Japanese warships are directly reflected in the physical characteristics of the women on the cards. For example, a large warship with high tonnage, such as the Yamato, will be represented by a mature, full-bodied woman, while a smaller ship will be represented by a younger, girlish figure. The body of the woman is thus analogous to the body of the ship. The fact that the body is highly sexualized means that the ship's tonnage is most directly reflected in the size of the breasts. Sexuality and fertility are thus made synonymous with a ship's destructive force. During battle, there is much visual emphasis on the size of munitions, with '36-cm,' '42-cm' and so forth in text accompanying the moment of firing the torpedo from the ship. The phallic imagery and emphasis on measurements represent the sexual power of the player, who is firing the artillery in the role of Admiral.[51]

The sexualized visual depiction of women in *Kantai Collection* is similar to that found in Western card-based fantasy games such as *Magic: The Gathering* or *Hearthstone*. The cards in these games are highly prized for their beautiful artwork, which nonetheless have been criticized for their overly sexualized representation of women. While Western games have responded by toning down the physical form and creating more realistic characters, this Japanese card game, placed in the context of Japanese visual culture, would not receive the same kind of pressure from Japanese consumers. This reflects the position of

women in Japanese society, and cultural attitudes towards depictions of the body more generally.[52] Unlike other online card games such as *Magic: The Gathering* or *Hearthstone*, however, the characters are also animated and appear in short 2D cinematics, winking and speaking to the player. The dialogue is limited, but they speak more often and with a wider range of script lines than a character in *Hearthstone*, for example. Dialogue is also sexualized, with ship girls asking the Admiral to 'hold' them, not in the sense of holding a hand of cards but in the sense of a romantic embrace. Like fighting games, the vocalizations of ship girls in battle sound more sexual than aggressive, and words of greeting aimed at the player are flirtatious and enticing. The dialogue enhances the player's emotional involvement, and each girl has a distinct personality, paving the way for a vast number of manga, anime and fan adaptations.

In terms of Japanese war-themed videogames, the sexualization of women in *Kantai Collection* may be seen as an exoticization of war as distant and unreal, in the context of controversial war memories in Japan. Although *Kantai Collection* is based in the Pacific arena and features actual battleships from history, the game simultaneously eroticizes and trivializes war through the use of hyper-sexualized female figures. It is telling that the more recent, gender-swapped version of the game, *Touken Ranbu* (DMM, 2015) is not set in the modern era but follows a sword-based, fantasy theme. While *Touken Ranbu* showcases masculinity, it is a sexualized and objectified machismo that has once again reverted to the distance of the feudal aesthetic. Both games tap into Japanese nationalism by combining heroic feats of military prowess to the attractive and beautiful surface image of the fighting characters. Martin Picard (2016) sees *Kantai Collection* as an uncomfortable intersection of *kawaii* aesthetics and the military, also shown in the use of cute women characters in recruitment advertising for Japan's Self Defense Forces (SDF, or *Jieitai*). Receiving international criticism for its 'offensively cute' marketing campaign, the SDF claimed it was merely targeting female recruits (Gad 2015). DMM Games was also criticized for its overly nationalistic depiction of the Japanese navy in *Kantai Collection*, to which it responded by broadening the character base to include warships from France, Germany, Russia and the USA, united in their battle against Abyssals of the deep ocean.

More disturbingly, *Kantai Collection* echoes right-wing Japanese rhetoric on WWII and the Asia-Pacific War, taking the view that Japan did not wage an aggressive war but were defending their homeland from hostile foreign forces, ultimately paying the price as innocent civilians were killed with the experimental battle technology of atomic weapons. Many right-wing activists in Japan deny the factuality of the Nanjing massacre, and see the Emperor as the true leader of present-day Japan.[53] Prime Minister Abe Shinzō has backed away from apologies made to Asian countries by previous Prime Ministers, and has resumed visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, where Japanese war criminals are revered as national heroes.[54] Given this context, it is unsurprising that fantasy developments in manga and light novels see a rich vein of alternate history where Japan is imagined as having won WWII. Notably, in the anime version of *Kantai Collection*,

the Japanese fleet is victorious at the end. The mere fact that the enemy in *Kantai Collection* is not the real Allied fleet of WWII but an imaginary sea-creature does not take away from the ultimate impact of the Japanese Imperial Navy overcoming their adversary at sea. This game is a fantasy of Japan with a victorious navy, a world in which the Battle of Midway, the atomic bombs, the sinking of the Yamato and the firestorms of Okinawa never happened. The seamless blending of historical detail in the Navy accoutrements, sexual appeal in the ship girls, and fantasy ending of alternate reality creates a heady mix indeed. Here we have perhaps the most ominous strategy for creating a popular modern war game – keeping the outward spectacle of war while changing its motivations and outcome.

Another solution: the anti-heroic critique

In this chapter we have seen that heroic narratives of modern war are possible in Japanese videogames, although they distance the player from reality by taking the opposite side, setting the action in parallel universes, or sexualizing the content. It is therefore much easier for developers to continue creating heroic narratives of war by setting them in the past, although this comes with its own problems of nationalistic ideology. There is one tactic which turns the problem on its head, by focusing on the negative aspects of war. An anti-heroic narrative with a complicit main character allows the developer to create an exciting story and tense, immersive gameplay. While videogames in the Action, Strategy and Shooter genres may not lend themselves well to a critique of war, the long narrative arcs and deep character development of the RPG are more suited to a meditation on war itself. We saw in Chapter 5 how *Final Fantasy VI, VII* and *X* critiqued the use of nuclear weaponry and energy, while *Final Fantasy VI* incorporated references to WWII, with mention of war crimes and a distinction drawn between Emperor and military generals with respect to war responsibility. Of all the games in the series, I would argue that *Final Fantasy IV* has the most serious approach to war and complicity, with the hero Cecil – commander of the fearsome Red Wings air force – torn between his loyalty to a power-mad King and his own inner moral compass.

   Player-character Cecil begins the game as a Dark Knight, with awesome powers amplified by his armour and weapons. The first mission involves stealing a Water Crystal, killing innocent mages in the process. Soon afterwards, Cecil unwittingly delivers a Bomb Ring to another village, destroying it in a shocking firestorm. Taking responsibility for an orphaned girl, Cecil begins his moral journey from dark to light, but is unable to forgive himself, questioning his very essence as a human being. The force of the Red Wings is demonstrated in another surprise scene about ten hours into the game – cheerfully emerging from a cave on their way to the town of Damcyan, the party sees the Red Wings appear out of nowhere and bomb the town to rubble. The wholesale destruction of towns full of innocent civilians is a recurring motif in this game, along with the guilt and feelings of complicity experienced by someone once aligned with

the evil empire. The impact of *FFIV* is rooted in the emotions and experiences of a complicit hero, who strives to overcome his dark past and achieve a heroic narrative for himself and his kingdom. Although war in *FFIV* is waged with conventional weapons – bombs, airplanes, and firestorms – it is in the end a fantasy tale, and does not reflect on real-time historical events. It is not a 'war game,' and remains firmly rooted in the mode of heroic narrative. However, it is also a tale deeply concerned with the effects of war on the psyche of those who fight. As a critique of war itself, the game is very successful.

This level of emotional involvement and psychological development demands a long narrative, played out over many hours. The RPG is therefore a good genre in which to explore these issues, and more titles could be included in this discussion. Koski (2017: 407–409) points to *Valkyria Chronicles* as a highly self-reflexive and thoughtful game which complicates the very idea of a 'good war' and problematizes the writing of history, most notably through the meta-narrative of command menus appearing in a grand book – empty at the start of the game, but filling as the player 'writes the story' of gameplay and the war. Where *Final Fantasy IV* questions war primarily through the main character, *Valkyria Chronicles* achieves its critique more through the innovative interface. Both feature long narratives which unfold to reveal a decidedly anti-war feel throughout. The master of the non-heroic war narrative in Japanese games is Kojima Hideo, and it is to this developer and his anti-war stance that we now turn.

Notes

1 Quoted in Kempshall (2015: 7). Shelley has discussed the inclusion of Native Americans in *Age of Empires III* and how the team arrived at solutions to problems of historical representation: Rausch (2005).
2 The first three *Call of Duty* titles focused on WWII; later titles branched out to other theatres and imagined scenarios. This follows observations made by Esther MacCallum-Stewart and Chris Kempshall that franchises often begin with WWII as the 'just war' affording a simple moral binary system, before tackling more complex scenarios in later instalments (Kempshall 2015: xii, 18).
3 These figures have changed over time – in 2012 Role-Playing was most popular (28%), followed by Casual (26.7%) and Strategy (24.9%). See ESA *Essential Facts* reports 2013, 2016.
4 *Call of Duty: Ghosts* boasted an exciting ad campaign that filled cinema and TV screens for weeks prior to its release in November 2013. The trailer for *Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare*, set in outer space, holds the record for the most disliked game trailer on YouTube with 3.5 million dislikes at the end of 2016 (even though the game is second only in sales to *CoD: Modern Warfare* in the series overall).
5 ESA *Essential Facts* (2017).
6 *ESA Essential Facts* (2016). Up to 2016 this report distinguished between game sales on PC and console, but from 2017 sales were classified between 'super-genres' (all devices) and 'multiplayer.' The most played multiplayer games of 2016 were Shooter (29%), Casual (28%) and Action (27%).
7 'Grand strategy' (also known as high strategy) looks beyond the battlefield to consider other elements in the historical context that can affect the war, such as economics, political developments, and diplomacy, including efforts for peace.

8 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_World_War_II_video_games.
9 Ed Halter lists Vietnam War titles from 2003–2004 but notes that 'Vietnam games still seemed to unnerve some players,' seen as disrespectful and in poor taste (2006: 248–250).
10 Kempshall (2015: 4). For more on the representations of these topics in WWII games see Chapman and Linderoth (2015).
11 Thompson (2004: 53–58, 112–114).
12 See R. Stahl (2010: 91–112), Payne (2016) and the various essays in Huntemann and Payne's edited volume (2010).
13 See Mortensen, Linderoth and Brown (2015) on the 'dark side' of gameplay.
14 Konzack (2015: 462) discusses perceptions of gun violence versus nudity in Scandinavia; Japan demonstrates similar acceptance of nudity and sexual activity in its popular media.
15 Figures by genre are most readily available for 2012 (GMO Cloud); also see the Famitsū white papers (2014–2017). Like the ESA reports, Japanese industry reports have shifted from a genre-based analysis to device-based emphasis, possibly due to the sharp decline in console-based gaming (Handrahan 2016) and exciting boom in mobile gaming.
16 Fisher (2012) discusses legal and popular attitudes towards gun ownership and use in Japan and America.
17 On early shooters see Ashcraft (2008a: 72–76).
18 Ashcraft (2008a: 66–72, 77–88).
19 Alexander (2008) argues this was largely due to the difficulty of developing an effective and complex combat system on top of the interactive 3D environment of traditional survival horror games, as opposed to the FPS where combat was prioritized.
20 Action, Adventure, Action-Adventure and RPG account for 75.3 per cent, with all other game genres together making up 24.7 per cent (GMO Cloud 2012). Since this includes social gaming and sports, both popular genres worldwide, the Strategy market in Japan is much smaller than in North America.
21 This connection is interesting, because the first *Dynasty Warriors* game from 1997 was a fighting game very similar to *SoulCalibur*, with various warriors representing different kingdoms in the past facing off against one another onscreen. Kōei changed the format to an action game dynamic from the second game in the series, which also formed the basis of *Samurai Warriors*. Kwon (2013) discusses the relative popularity of *Nobunaga's Ambition* and *Three Kingdoms* games in the Asian market.
22 Roth (2016) provides the counter-argument that *musō* attacks require such complex sequences of button input on the controller that the player becomes overwhelmed and confused, replicating the 'messiness' of battlefield experience.
23 *Onimusha*'s designer Okamoto Yoshiki worked on the original *Resident Evil*, and produced the film adaptation of the game (IGN staff 1997).
24 De Govia, Berthelsen and Smith (2001: 4–6).
25 Shibusawa Kou, real name Erikawa Yōichi, co-founded Kōei with his wife Erikawa Keiko in 1978. Yoshimoto (2000: 242–35) discusses Kurosawa's attention to historical accuracy and 'realism' on set. On *jidai-geki* as a genre and its relation to historical depiction see Yoshimoto (2000: 212–245), with particular reference to *Seven Samurai*.
26 The exuberant depiction of the generals' military helmets in *Kessen* prompted uber-wolf420 to title their YouTube playthrough as 'Kessen: A Game of Hats' (2012).
27 Examples are the fearsome court ladies Tomoe Gozen, Shizuka Gozen and Hangaku Gozen ('gozen' being an honorific), featured in the *Tales of the Heike* and also Kuniyoshi's series of ukiyo-e prints on women warriors of Japan.
28 This 'note from the creator' appears as a full-screen simulacrum of a letter typed on textured Japanese paper, directly after the player presses the Start button to begin gameplay.

29 Nozaki (2008) remains the most useful reading on Japan's history textbook controversy. Nozaki, Openshaw and Luke (2005) place Japanese textbook policy in a comparative international perspective; Hicks (1997a) and Lucken (2017) place it in context of the wider problem of war memory in Japanese society. For more on Japanese war memory see Seaton (2007), Igarashi (2000), Hashimoto (2015).

30 The early incursions into Micronesia and Manchuria, specifically the Mukden Incident of 1931, were used as evidence for Japan's premeditated and brutal 'war of aggression' in violation of international treaties and the 'laws and customs of war' at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunals (Brackman 1987: 25–26, 108).

31 See Aukema (2016); also see Rosenbaum and Claremont (2015) for depictions of these times in literature.

32 Michael Lynch (2015) has noted the increasing prevalence of WWII-themed films, with nationalistic revisionist films like *Yamato* (2005), *The Eternal Zero* (2013), *Admiral Yamamoto* (2011) and *The Emperor in August* (2015) set against films that reject the Emperor myth and critique the military, focusing on the suffering of innocent people, for example *The Little House* (2013), *Postcard* (2010), *Caterpillar* (2010) and *A Woman and the War* (2013). For more discussion see Gerow (2016).

33 This is consistent with censorship practice in other media through Japan's modern history (Hutchinson 2013).

34 For example, see Mukherjee (2017).

35 The Tombogiri was the name of the spear wielded by the daimyo Honda Tadakatsu, and said to be one of three legendary spears (*tengasansō*) created by Japan's greatest blacksmiths.

36 See for example Rosenbaum (2012) and Napier (2005).

37 See also Penney (2007). For more on Japanese manga about the Asia-Pacific War see Kim (2016).

38 This is a common methodology in censorship studies – examples regarding a range of Japanese arts may be seen in Hutchinson (2013).

39 Ported first to the Famicom, *1942* was also available for the MSX, NEC PC-8801, Amstrad CPC, ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64, Windows Mobile Professional and Game Boy Color systems. More recently, the game was released on the Wii Virtual Console in 2010. A remake, *1942: Joint Strike* appeared on the Xbox 360 Live Arcade and PS3 PlayStation Network in 2008, followed by the spin-off game *1942: First Strike* on iOS in 2010.

40 The *Yamato* and sister ship the *Musashi* were the heaviest battleships ever made, with the largest displacement and tonnage as well as the largest guns mounted on a warship, 46-cm (18.1 inch) Type 94 Naval guns.

41 The most well-known of these is the TV series (1974–75) and film (1977) of *Space Battleship Yamato*, directed by Matsumoto Leiji. See Ashbaugh (2010) and Mizuno (2007: 104–112) on the importance of the Yamato's iconography in Japanese pop culture.

42 See Ashcraft (2008a: 73). Nishikado's keynote address at the conference 'Replaying Japan' (2014) recounted his many different ideas for enemies and how he arrived at the shapes for the aliens, based on underwater creatures. The original sketches and pixel maps have been archived by Geoffrey Rockwell: https://philosophi.ca/pmwiki. php/Main/ReplayingJapan2014 Accessed 18 October 2017.

43 Endoh (2016). The shape of the UFOs was inspired partly by the Millennium Falcon from *Star Wars*.

44 Kempshall (2015: 60); Thompson (2004: 53–58, 112–114).

45 Onscreen commands appear in a mixture of kanji characters and katakana, closely resembling the look of actual military commands in documents from the Asia-Pacific War.

46 Consalvo examines Capcom's approach to Western and Japanese audiences and the need to grow a strong global audience more generally (2016: 159–170).

47 Brackman (1987: 233–234).
48 See Koski (2017: 406–407) on Hamamura and Aoyagi's use of 'selective authenticity' to join this American WWII discourse.
49 User data is constantly updated on the game's official website, http://games.dmm.com/detail/kancolle/. This number is the estimate as of December 2018.
50 This title may be rendered as 'cute-cute WWII grand strategy,' a *Daisenryaku* series spin-off.
51 While the Japanese navy uses metric measurements, the Abyssals use inches, leading some players to assume the enemy represents the Allies. The exact nature of the Abyssal fleet has inspired much online discussion – see for example NZRedBaron (2015).
52 Readers interested in the social position of women in modern and contemporary Japan will find much useful work in Kano (2016) and Ueno (2009 [1994]). A more historical overview is found in Mackie (2003), Molony and Uno (2005), Germer, Mackie and Wöhr (2014). On Japanese women's liberation and activism see Buckley (1997) and Shigematsu (2012).
53 This is not a new trend – Hicks (1997a: 121–132) detailed right-wing revisionist counter-attacks on Japanese war narratives 20 years ago. Rumi Sakamoto (2008) describes the impact of Kobayashi Yoshinori's best-selling manga *Sensōron* (On War, 1998), as 'instrumental in popularizing the ideas of new-generation rightists and historical revisionists over the last decade.'
54 On the religious and political significance of the Yasukuni Shrine as opposed to other military shrines or the secular cemetery for Japan's war dead at Chidorigafuchi, see Lucken's chapter 'Memory and Religion' (2017: 205–228).

8 Hiroshima and violence in *Metal Gear Solid*

> This isn't glorious. It's just plain killing. Violence isn't a sport!
>
> Snake, *Metal Gear Solid*[1]

In the previous chapter, we saw that heroic, realistic, modern war narratives are problematic for Japanese developers. A critique of war, however, can be deeply engaging and psychologically compelling for the player. Kojima Hideo's *Metal Gear Solid* series (1987–2016) is well known for its anti-war stance, achieving an interesting balance of heroism and critique.[2] Kojima does this by placing the player in a position of individual heroism through the exploits of Solid Snake, but setting the action within a broader national narrative of non-heroic defeat in World War II. Kojima relies heavily on imagery depicting the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, incorporating the bomb and its development into the overall narrative of the characters. Where the *Final Fantasy* series put forward a nuclear discourse of duality, focusing on nuclear power in the form of both energy and weapons, *Metal Gear Solid* concentrates more narrowly on nuclear weapons, conveying fears of nuclear proliferation and the ever-present threat of annihilation. Where *Final Fantasy* is allegorical, *Metal Gear Solid* is extremely direct, creating realistic depictions of nuclear arms and materials through the representational media of photography and film footage mixed with 3D polygon rendering.

Kojima Hideo is also well known for breaking the 'fourth wall' in his games, manipulating player emotion and expectation through innovative use of in-game media techniques as well as console hardware capabilities. The self-reflexive nature of the *Metal Gear Solid* series makes the player hyper-aware of the fact they are situated in reality, playing a game created by Kojima Hideo.[3] This self-reflexivity confronts the player with the reality of history, deepening engagement with the central message and anti-war ideology. In addition, the idea of 'heroism' is simultaneously evoked and undercut through the representation of Solid Snake and Big Boss, and violence in itself is questioned through the series, most notably in *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* (2004). Later *MGS* titles are even more direct in their anti-war stance, set in locales corresponding to contemporary war zones in the Middle East and Afghanistan, and utilizing PTSD and war

trauma as important elements of character development. Towards the end of the series, atomic weapons become increasingly available for player use, with surprising and thought-provoking results.

Hiroshima and media: ideology through reflexivity

Where heroic tales of WWII are problematic for Japanese artists, narratives of nuclear attack position Japan as the eternal victim to external aggression.[4] In *Metal Gear Solid* (1998) Kojima combines 3D character modelling and voice acting with photographic footage of nuclear waste facilities, missiles and energy production to give a realistic, 'historical' effect to this narrative. The context of the Cold War, nuclear proliferation and the arms race provides the fundamental underpinnings of the plot, in which realistic depictions of nuclear weapons, nuclear waste, and nuclear strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not merely symbolic, but necessary and integral to the story.[5] Kojima utilizes a wide range of different art media in presenting his critique of nuclear weapons, including still black-and-white photography, black-and-white newsreel footage of the bombings, colour documentary video of missiles and waste facilities, and full-motion video (FMV) scenes of in-game characters confronting each other in the 3D polygon environment.[6]

A good example of Kojima's mixed-media method comes when Snake has just saved Kenneth Baker, the head of Arms Tech Corporation, and is interrogating him to discover the whereabouts of the weapon Metal Gear.[7] The scene opens with the player controlling the main character Snake, directing the character's actions through the battle to rescue Kenneth Baker. Once rescue is achieved, the player views a scripted video cut-scene of Snake talking to Baker. While Baker is speaking, the player views realistic scenes of nuclear material, described in the script as 'scenes of missile launches, storage buildings, and missile silos.' Baker talks about the black market for nuclear materials, known as 'MUF' (material unaccounted for), as well as the problem of nuclear waste seeping from corroded drums. The scene then switches back to Baker and Snake conversing. Baker sums up the issue as follows:

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.

(El Greco 2004)

Kojima's use of film segments within cut-scenes were extremely effective in *Metal Gear Solid*, partly because the technology for full-motion video in games

was still fairly new in 1998. It was unusual to include film footage rather than video animations of characters from the game (one of the selling points for *Final Fantasy VII* in the previous year).[8] The fact that *Metal Gear Solid* included video footage of real events was highly innovative. The colour footage in this scene, showing nuclear waste facilities and weapons manufacturing, has the feel of journalistic reportage, giving the player an inside view of a largely hidden industry. The rapid switching back and forth between real-world video footage and 3D modelled scenes of characters speaking and acting in the game narrative was more like film than videogames of the period. In terms of the effect on the player, the sudden juxtaposition of in-game diegesis and real-world footage is jarring, disrupting the player's experience of what they thought would be a seamless narrative and forcing a confrontation with reality. The famed FOX game engine was largely responsible for the smooth rendering of the 3D environment in *Metal Gear Solid*, creating a feeling of verisimilitude that makes the gameworld itself very realistic for the player.[9] To be suddenly confronted with filmed scenes of actual reality shakes the player out of this sense of belonging to the fictional environment.

Further, *Metal Gear Solid* also incorporates a highly self-reflexive mode of play, making the player even more aware of the gap between game space and the real world. Kojima connects gameworld and real world in interesting ways, using peripherals such as CD cases, controllers and memory cards as important aspects of gameplay. At one point in the game, Snake must contact Meryl Silverburgh by Codec communication. The Colonel gives the player a hint, saying her frequency can be found 'on the back of the CD case,' meaning it was printed on the physical case in which the game was packaged for the PlayStation 2. Any player who had borrowed the CD itself without the packaging, copied or pirated the game, or merely lost the original case, could not progress. Most famously, the boss battle with Psycho Mantis breaks the fourth wall to enhance the in-game idea that the villain has psychic powers. During this battle the player's own videogame preferences in real life are revealed, as the game code accesses data logs on the PlayStation console. Depending on the player's number of saves, Psycho Mantis might declare that Snake is 'reckless' or 'prudent.' If the player has other Konami games in the PlayStation's memory, Psycho Mantis declares 'You enjoy role-playing games!' or 'I see that you enjoy Konami games.'[10] Psycho Mantis also demonstrates his mental powers by having the player place the DualShock controller on the floor, so he can make it vibrate through force of will alone. To win the fight, the player must physically unhook the controller from one port and insert it into another. While the Psycho Mantis fight is the most well-known instance of Kojima's self-reflexive playing with diegetic and non-diegetic space, the innovative mixed-media techniques of *Metal Gear Solid* may be seen as part of the same overall effort to bring the real world into the 3D modelled game environment.[11]

As we have seen throughout this book, ideological messages in games may be conveyed through 'procedural rhetoric' – the coded regulations of gameplay dynamics – as well as through narrative-based devices such as dialogue and characterization.[12] In Part II of the book I argued that the player's embodiment

of the main character also carries great ideological impact as player-character identification is manipulated by game developers to achieve emotional effects, thought processes and learning on the part of the player. In the case of *Metal Gear Solid*, James Paul Gee has examined how the player's embodiment of Snake leads to learning in the game environment.[13] Role-playing as the character Snake, the player learns new information about nuclear materials and must act on that information, in order to (ludically) progress through the game missions and (ideologically) save the world from nuclear destruction. Cultural models of winning that prioritize speed, efficiency and a linear route to the goal are undercut by behavioural rules that reward exploration, sneaking and taking one's time (Gee 2003: 162–165). Ideology presented through script and cut-scene content merely serves to underscore the overall message that is delivered through many different techniques.

In *Metal Gear Solid* the ideology of Kojima Hideo is clear, as he presents specific attitudes towards nuclear weapons and their use in the modern world. Noon and Dyer-Witheford have shown that Kojima is equally clear in interviews as to his 'messages' purposefully embedded in the *Metal Gear Solid* games.[14] In a recent example, Kojima says:

> 'Anti-war' and 'Anti-nuclear weapons' were the consistent messages through the series. My parents' generation was born during WWII. My generation grew up listening to their firsthand accounts of war, and we also learned of the wretchedness and absurdity of war and nuclear weapons from the movies and books around us. Video games are a natural fit for 'fighting' and 'competition,' but even so I felt that they should be able to promote an anti-war, anti-nuclear weapons message, and more so, that it was necessary.
>
> (Kojima 2017)

In the scene with Snake and Kenneth Baker, we experience Kojima's fear that the 'Nuclear Age' did not end at the turn of the millennium, but instead has become more of a global threat. In an age where 'any small country can have a nuclear weapons program,' we see a frightening vision of the future. Kojima builds on the impact of this scene later in the game, when Snake is talking to the scientist Dr. Hal Emmerich (also known as Otacon). As director of the weapons program under construction at the base, Emmerich has made a weapon called 'Metal Gear Rex.' As he speaks, describing Metal Gear's weapons as 'a vulcan cannon, laser, and a rail gun,' we are shown scenes of Metal Gear Rex on the screen. With the camera still on Metal Gear, Snake reveals that it is actually a mobile nuclear weapon. During this conversation, Kojima inserts even more powerful footage, showing the bombing of Hiroshima itself. The script for this scene shows the build-up of narrative tension, as well as the intercutting of footage throughout:

SNAKE: Metal Gear's main function is to launch nuclear missiles. You're sure you're not forgetting something?

EMMERICH: It's true that Metal Gear has a missile module on his back that can carry up to eight missiles. But are you saying it was originally meant to carry nuclear missiles?

(We are now back in the lab where Otacon and Snake are talking.)

SNAKE: Yeah, but that's not all I think. If Metal Gear fired only standard nuclear missiles, then they should already have all the practical data they need.

EMMERICH: No … could it be?

(Scenes of nuclear weapons exploding are shown.)

EMMERICH: Metal Gear's co-developer, Rivermore National Labs, was working on a new type of nuclear weapon. They were using NOVA and NIF laser nuclear fusion testing equipment and supercomputers.

SNAKE: So they developed a new type of nuclear weapon in a VR testing lab, huh?

EMMERICH: Yes, but, you can't use virtual data on a battlefield. They would need actual launch data.

(We are back in the lab. Emmerich shows Snake some of the supercomputers used to do the testing.)

EMMERICH: These are some of the supercomputers. If you link these you can test everything in a virtual environment. But it's all just theoretical.

SNAKE: So this exercise was designed to test the real thing?

EMMERICH: What did our president do? If the terrorists launch that thing.… Damn!!… Damn!!

(Emmerich is on the ground now banging his fist against it.)

EMMERICH: I'm such a fool! It's all my fault.…

(Scenes from the Hiroshima bomb are shown.)

EMMERICH: The truth is … my grandfather was part of the Manhattan Project. He suffered with the guilt for the rest of his life. And my father…he was born on August 6, 1945.…

SNAKE: The day of the Hiroshima bomb … God's got a sense of humour all right.

EMMERICH: Three generations of Emmerich men.… We must have the curse of nuclear weapons written into our DNA.

(Back in the lab.)

EMMERICH: I used to think I could use science to help mankind. But the one that
   wound up getting used was me. Using science to help mankind. That's just
   in the movies.…
SNAKE: That's enough crying. Pull yourself together! Where is Metal Gear?
   Where on this base are they keeping it?[15]

This scene from *Metal Gear Solid* is very well known, due to the melodramatic
reactions of Emmerich and Snake's insensitive manner to his plight, as well as
the dramatic unveiling of Emmerich's family past, in which the Hiroshima bomb
becomes an integral part of the narrative. Kojima switches quickly between the
game environment, 3D modelled cut-scenes, and video footage, using colour
film to show nuclear missiles exploding, and black-and-white film to show the
detonation of the atomic weapon. In this scene, the rapid switching back and
forth between media forms culminates in the historical footage of Hiroshima,
which has the greatest impact on the player at the end of the sequence. The inser-
tion of black-and-white film brings home the enormity of what happened to
Japan in 1945, and the fact that only Japan has to date experienced the horrific
consequences of an atomic blast. The player is forced to confront the reality of
nuclear bombing – the fact that *this has already actually happened* – and process
their own understanding of the Hiroshima bombing and how it relates to their
lived experience.

   At the end of the game, Kojima returns to his central message of nuclear pro-
liferation and the threat of a future nuclear war. As Snake and Meryl drive off
across the snowfields into the beautiful Alaskan sunrise, looking for 'a new path
in life,' the player is filled with hope for their romantic future together. The
screen fades to black and fills with the following words in white typescript:

   In the 1980s, there were more than 60,000 nuclear warheads in the world at
   all times. The total destructive power amounted to 1 million times that of
   the Hiroshima A-bomb.

After another fade to black, the following words appear:

   In January 1993, START2 was signed and the United States and Russia
   agreed to reduce the number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads to
   3,000 to 3,500 in each nation by December 31, 2000.

A final screen shows Kojima's final statement:

   However, as of 1998, there still exist 26,000 nuclear warheads in the world.

Kojima follows cinematic convention with these end screens, immediately fol-
lowing the action of the main characters and preceding the cast list. The purpose
of such postscripts is to make the viewer reflect on the content of the narrative
and relate it back to events in the real world.

A closer look at Kojima's choice of words here is instructive. First, he evokes the feeling of the 1980s, when the Cold War was at its height and many people were afraid of immediate nuclear war, as reflected in popular culture. The global scale of the problem is recognized, with the large round number 'more than 60,000' giving an impression of piles of stocks at the ready. Kojima links this back to the Japanese experience with the 'Hiroshima A-bomb,' referring to the event in its American parlance (in the localized version of the text). The fact that weapons of the 1980s could have been '1 million times' more powerful than the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima is frightening, given the scenes of Hiroshima we have just witnessed. The next screen offers some relief, referring to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, and focuses more closely on the two main opponents in the Cold War, the USA and Russia. Kojima omits the fact that START2 never went into effect, due to various complications. But he does not need to – the player's hopes for peaceful solutions to the nuclear problem are effectively dashed by the final screen. This screen also concretely attaches the game text to the then-present moment, 1998, positioning the game itself as an historical artefact. The player's disappointment, cynicism, and perhaps disgust at their own naïveté are all activated by this last screen, giving the lie to their in-game efforts and reminding them that real-world efforts also remain difficult and often fruitless. Coming right after the romantic getaway scene of David and Meryl, the strong contrast provides the final instance of the game's confrontation between diegetic narrative and non-diegetic reality.

Kojima, Japan and the USA

The positioning of Hiroshima in Japan's national memory has changed over time, as Donald Richie (1996) and others have argued. In *Metal Gear Solid* Kojima positions Japan as a victim, and Hiroshima appears as a symbolic shorthand for the American abuse of technology and power. Hiroshima is used to point an accusing finger at the US as well as the global military-industrial complex. But at the same time, Japan is strangely absent from the visible sphere of action, a victim of history with no bearing on the contemporary political world. Japan functions in the *Metal Gear* universe as a place of origin, never of return. Very few characters have Japanese names, reflecting the narrative focus on nations embroiled in the Cold War. Japan is more connected to global history through WWII, so characters like Kazuhira Miller appear with G.I. fathers and prostitute mothers. Recurrent character Johnny Sasaki is notable for his Japanese name, but is American in nationality.[16] Similarly, the scientist we know as Dr. Naomi Hunter is actually a British woman raised and orphaned in Rhodesia, who took the identity papers of a 'Naomi Hunter' and pursued her own life in America. The great Japanese universities – Waseda, Tokyo University, Gakushūin, Ritsumeikan – are absent, as characters receive their education from Oxford, MIT and Princeton.

The result of Japan's elision here is twofold. First, it produces a '*mukokuseki*' or 'culturally odourless' game (to borrow Iwabuchi's phrasing). As Mejia and

Komaki have argued, this aesthetic was 'designed to remove Japanese ethnic markers from international cultural products in favor of universal characteristics; in practice, however, the *mukokuseki* style tends to conceive of the universal subject as Caucasian.'[17] Certainly, the main characters Snake and Big Boss look Western in appearance. Tall, with fair skin and brown hair, they have Japanese heritage in the narrative but appear Caucasian in the game environment.[18] Shinkawa Yoji's cover art for *Metal Gear Solid* depicted a stylized Snake frowning in concentration, with heavily shadowed eyes and a monochromatic colour scheme that carry no racial signifiers. But the cover art for *Metal Gear* on the NES in 1987 was much more specific, depicting Snake as a blond Caucasian protagonist. Although Snake's eye colour is indeterminate in the artwork, the bright blue and yellow palette suggests a blue-eyed character. It has often been noted online that this image was copied from a still shot of Michael Biehn as Kyle Reese in the first *Terminator* movie (1984), standing up against a wall in readiness for the action to come.[19] Appropriating Hollywood imagery, the cover joins the visual rhetoric of Western popular culture. The two cover images are very different, producing a composite and racially ambiguous Snake who held a very broad appeal to players all over the world. *Metal Gear Solid* quickly achieved very high sales, an achievement duplicated by other titles in the series.[20] The second effect of eliding Japan is that it sets up a neutral position from which to tell the tale of nuclear weapons and the Hiroshima bomb. It is notable that Hal Emmerich, not Snake, tells the story of Metal Gear through the generational experience of atomic weapons. By presenting the story of the Hiroshima bomb with Caucasian-looking actors, Kojima can elicit sympathy from the Western audience. The anti-nuclear message would have been less relatable, and more political, coming from recognizably Japanese actors.

Unlike artists of the older generation such as Tezuka Osamu or Fukasaku Kinji, well known for their anti-war stance expressed in manga and film, Kojima experienced WWII second-hand, through the remembrances of his parents.[21] Noon and Dyer-Witheford (2010: 76–77) note Kojima's ambivalence towards the US, having grown up listening to his father speak of the Tokyo bombing on the one hand, but enjoying American popular culture in music and film on the other. America is described in *Metal Gear Solid* as 'the land of freedom' and as 'the dominant superpower,' a dualistic image that has its roots in the Meiji period.[22] But the *Metal Gear* games develop a stronger antipathy to the US over time. As Ben Whaley observes, the series as a whole portrays the US as 'a false superpower that betrays its own war heroes and is run by a malevolent AI neural network' (2016: 94). We see this in the depiction of the Genome Soldiers of the Gulf War in *Metal Gear Solid*, and the nanomachine-regulated soldiers of the war in Afghanistan in *MGS4: Guns of the Patriots*. Kojima's sympathies definitely lie with the exploited US soldiers rather than the US government. Japan played no part in the Gulf War (1990–1991), since Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution limited Japan to maintaining a Self-Defense Force (SDF). But the development of *MGS4* took place in the context of the Iraq War, waged by the US and its allies from 2003 to the present. Japan is one of those allies, and

the stronger anti-American tone of the later *Metal Gear Solid* games may have come from Japan's involvement in this unpopular overseas venture.

Anti-American feeling spiked in Japan (and around the world) on 15 February 2003, with massive protests against the proposed US invasion of Iraq.[23] Around 5,000 people marched in downtown Shibuya with smaller demonstrations around US military bases in Japan (Chan 2003). Some anti-war protests in Japan were joined by *hibakusha*, victims of the atomic bombings, leveraging the unique perspective on war held by the Japanese people. Even so, in July 2003 Prime Minister Koizumi agreed to send an SDF contingent to Iraq to help the US with reconstruction efforts. This decision was extremely controversial, as the SDF was sent not at the behest of the United Nations but in answer to a call by the US military. Japan had previously sent UN peace-keeping forces to such places as Mozambique, Cambodia, East Timor and Nepal.[24] But this time, 1,000 Japanese SDF soldiers would deploy with weapons, and were described as 'Japanese troops.' The Iraq mission did not seem particularly like a 'peace-keeping' operation, as Iraq was at that time an active war zone. Public opinion in Japan was against the decision, with polls and newspaper headlines showing a high degree of anxiety about the safety of the troops themselves and what it would mean for Japan to reactivate its military. As the *Guardian* reported, Koizumi 'overrode opposition, a no-confidence motion and a late-night filibuster to ensure the passage of the legislation, which paves the way for the country's biggest military deployment since the second world war' (Watts 2003). In the end, Japanese forces were stationed in Iraq from 2004–2006.

This deployment and the public debate surrounding it formed the context of game development for *Metal Gear Solid 4*, released in 2008. Few Japanese artists have dealt directly with the Iraq War: journalist Watai Takeharu's 2005 documentary *Little Birds* showed the bombing of Baghdad from the perspective of civilians, but there is no 'great Japanese novel' protesting the American invasion or portraying Japan's involvement in the war. The one exception is *Battle Royale II: Requiem* by Fukasaku Kinji, released in July 2003. The film staunchly opposes American foreign policy, deriding the USA as the source of all imperialist ideology in the modern world. Fukasaku is very specific in his critique, naming 20 countries that America has bombed around the globe, including Japan, China and North Korea as well as Cuba, Congo, Laos, Somalia, Afghanistan and others. The child protagonists ally themselves with the children of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the main character Nanahara Shūya establishes his anti-imperialist terrorist base in a cave, styled after Osama Bin Laden. The film ends in the dry, brown-hued mountains of Afghanistan (filmed in Pakistan), with Nanahara and friends catching a ride on an insurgent military jeep, the Japanese girls wearing hijab-like scarves around their heads and faces. Fukasaku Kinji died during the making of the film, and it is widely regarded as his parting shot against the US forces responsible for the Hiroshima bombing and occupation of Japan. Fukasaku may have given voice to an anti-American feeling that simmered below the surface in the early years of the new century, but his political views proved alienating to many.[25]

Unlike Fukasaku, Kojima keeps his distance from real-world politics in *MGS4*. While anti-American feeling is apparent, the setting of 2014 Afghanistan is like, but not exactly like, the Iraq setting of contemporary events; the distance of time and space allows him to maintain an external observer position while commenting on the general theme of war in Central Asia. The advanced graphics capabilities of the PS3 and FOX engine position the player in the midst of an urban battlefield. We start the game on a blasted street, soon sniping from a rooftop with crumbling cement walls. The setting would be familiar to players from news reportage of Kabul or Kandahar, but players could also conflate these scenes with footage sent by embedded journalists in Baghdad or Mosul during the Iraq War, as the sepia tones of the desert cities seem the same across Central Asia and the Middle East, blurring into one another as one giant battlefield. Just as space is conflated across the games, so is time. Tanks rolling across sandy wastes appear in both the Gulf War of *MGS* and the Afghanistan War of *MGS4*, and the player gets the feeling that not much has changed. *MGSV: The Phantom Pain* (2015) takes a nostalgic look at the Afghanistan setting, using the Afghan–Soviet war of 1984 as background to the plot. In this way, wars in the Middle East and Central Asia are essentialized across space and time to form a monolithic 'Other' battlefield, in which Japan takes no part. Kojima's external observer position preserves the myth of Japan as an uninvolved outsider. In this way, Japan's role as victim to other people's wars is solidified, supporting the dominant narrative of Japanese history.

The external position is also used for critique in *MGSV: Ground Zeroes* (2014). Setting the game in Cuba in 1975, Kojima is able to comment on current events without representing them directly. Interviewed by the *Guardian*, Kojima discussed the anti-American critique underlying *Ground Zeroes*. An excerpt from the newspaper is interesting, as it includes the reporter Simon Parkin's comments on the significance of Kojima's vision:

> With Ground Zeroes he escalated the stakes by taking aim at North America's contemporary policies towards terror suspects. 'In the past the US was the centre of the world, where everything was happening,' he says. 'I think my stories have always sought to question this, maybe even criticise it. But the situation is changing. America is not seen as the centre of the world any more. So the focus of my stories is shifting alongside with that change in the real world.' It's a diplomatic answer, but Ground Zeroes is not an especially diplomatic video game. Its incarcerated terror suspects kneel in wire cages, bound at the hands and feet with blinding sacks over their heads. As you hoist them on to Snake's shoulder and sprint to the evacuation helicopter, some break down in tears either through fear or relief. It's grimly political. '[Guantanamo] was definitely something that I made the decision to address in the game,' Kojima says. 'Hollywood continues to present the US army as being the good guys, always defeating the aliens or foreigners. I am trying to shift that focus. These movies might not be the only way to view current affairs. I am trying to present an alternate view in these games.'
>
> (Parkin 2014)

At the time of the game's release, the treatment of terror suspects in the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay had attracted a great deal of criticism from news outlets around the world. Facing global pressure, President Barack Obama freed around 200 of the prisoners, who had been widely regarded as hostages of the US government (Rosenberg 2017). Without referencing these events specifically, Kojima was able to create a commentary on 'current affairs' by way of the terror suspect scenario.

   In a similar use of indirect commentary, American imperialism is explored in *MGSV: The Phantom Pain* through the global force of the English language. The antagonist Skull Face has vowed to wipe out English by means of a vocal parasite, which he hopes will rid the world of its linguistic supremacy. Whaley argues that Kojima's vision of English as a 'parasitic lingua franca' bolsters his critique of 'the foundational narrative of US dominance' (2016: 95). The 'logocentric view' of identity held by Skull Face acknowledges that language transcends national boundaries, leading to the innovative notion that nuclear weapons can act as the 'new common tongue' for all countries (Whaley 2016: 96). However, language cannot be divorced from nations and their histories: British colonialism is clearly the primary reason for the global dominance of the English language. The use of English as the governing language in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other countries of Central Asia stems directly from years of British rule, not the more recent invasion by US forces. The lumping together of US and British imperialism into a purely linguistic dominance ignores the dynamics of empire and colonization that brought British oppression to large areas of the world in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By eliding the historical realities of British colonialism, Kojima is able to gloss over other instances of colonialism, including the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in which hundreds of thousands of Asian residents suffered under Japanese rule. Although the English language is clearly the most viable example for a parasitic linguistic empire, one could imagine a videogame made in Korea or China where the Japanese language served as the vehicle of power and oppression.

Heroism and player agency

The narrative of 'non-heroic' Japan is a safe narrative which elides Japanese aggression in Asia and allows the people of Japan a passive understanding of the war and its aftermath. Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid* joins this 'non-heroic' narrative by focusing strongly on Japan's defeat, positioning Japan as the object of historical forces. The heroic aspect of the narrative must therefore come from individual actions, carried out by the player-character Solid Snake. As the player destroys the Metal Gear weapon and takes out the terrorists, their in-game actions allow an active and subjective experience of the central problem of the narrative. The world may be threatened, and haunted by the use of atomic weapons, but the player performs an anti-nuclear critique through their actions, embodying the ideology of the text and reshaping the historical memory of

Hiroshima in their own experience.[26] When the player saves the in-game world from nuclear disaster, they effectively reclaim agency as the subject, not the object, of the nuclear narrative.

The player achieves this through the character of Solid Snake, but Kojima being Kojima, Snake is not a typical clean-cut military hero.[27] Much like his namesake Snake Plissken in *Escape from New York*,[28] Snake is an anti-hero on the surface – an inveterate smoker, scruffy, with an unshaven face and cocky attitude towards those in authority. He is also the ultimate word in masculinity and nonchalant sexual charisma, enjoying much flirtatious dialogue with his female colleagues while saving the world from nuclear and bioterrorist attacks. He can be chivalrous, but is also a lecher, ogling his colleague Meryl and delighting in sexual innuendo with Naomi, Mei Ling and Nastasha via Codec communication. On the other hand, Snake exhibits many personal attributes that could be considered heroic. He manifests intrinsic strength in gameplay mechanics – there is no levelling up of Snake's 'health points' in the game, just a life gauge that empties or fills depending on damage taken or rations eaten. There is no increase in the maximum HP, telling us that Snake is already a great soldier when the game begins. Naomi Hunter mentions that she looked up to Snake 'as a hero' when she was a child, while Otacon (Hal Emmerich) also likens Snake to a 'movie hero' in *Metal Gear Solid*.[29]

Ironically, Meryl also says she used to idolize FOXHOUND back in the days when Snake served with her father – 'none of that gene therapy like they have today. You guys were real heroes' (El Greco 2004). Meryl can say this because she does not know Snake is a clone (and neither does the player, at this point in gameplay). Of course, we later realize that Snake's strength is not innate but manufactured through bioengineering. This is only one way in which Kojima undercuts the heroic aspects of his protagonist. In terms of moral fibre, Snake fights for what he thinks is right, but over the course of the series we find that he is operating in ignorance most of the time, and is often unwittingly complicit in corrupt objectives. As Martin Roth states, the

> ambivalence of the player-character's role is amplified by the conspiracy plot of the games, which keep the player in uncertainty about the meaning and status of his or her own actions in the world of *MGS* (although some kind of heroic undertone is never abandoned completely)
>
> (2017: 159)

The impact of this complicity is heightened by the sheer difficulty of the missions, each with many steps which must be carried out quickly in order to succeed. Snake's efforts to input the disarmament codes to Metal Gear with the three-step PAL key is a good example: the player goes to extreme efforts to input the codes and shut down Metal Gear within strict time constraints, only to find they have been working to arm the weapon for the terrorists all along. That is, the player's own in-game labour has been used against them.[30] This re-routing of player agency is highly effective, deepening the player's identification with Snake through their shared frustration and disbelief.

Another way in which Kojima undermines Snake's heroic status is that his success is completely dependent on the skill and abilities of the player. *Metal Gear Solid* games are in general more difficult than the typical RPG or Action game, and the boss fights in particular are extremely hard. Each boss has a life gauge far greater than Snake's, and the player needs both patience and endurance to win. Feelings of relief and joy at winning are tempered by extended cutscenes following each battle, in which Snake engages in conversation with each boss, not only gaining knowledge but also showing the underlying human connections between all of us, friend and foe alike. With all the betrayals, sideswitching and doublecrossing in the series, characters we think of as friends can turn out to be villains, while the villains are often helpful and surprisingly kind. In these ways, the heroic attributes of the main character are deployed and undercut by turns, creating a complex character and problematic basis for the process of player-character identification.

As we saw with Cloud Strife in *Final Fantasy VII*, the player is manipulated in *MGS* through their identification with a multi-layered, complicated personality. Kojima pushes this kind of strategy one step further, situating the actions of the player-character inside an overall narrative that is at once individually heroic and yet non-heroic in terms of national history. He also brings the national memory of atomic weapons to life in a way that other developers have avoided – through direct photographic representation of the Hiroshima bomb. Through it all, the self-reflexive mode makes the player hyper-aware that they are merely playing a game product branded as a 'Hideo Kojima game.' As a result, *Metal Gear Solid* is widely acclaimed for its inventive use of console technology and thoughtful manipulation of the player's actions. Martin Roth singles out *Metal Gear Solid* as opposed to other Japanese games in the science fiction genre as providing 'thought-provoking play,' allowing (and sometimes forcing) the player to confront challenging ideas not only in regards to the game text itself but also in relation to the real world.[31] Roth argues that this thought-provoking play is achieved through the creation of three sites of conflict for the player: between coded videogame regulations and possibilities of player action; between acts of violence and the ethical meaning of those actions; and between player expectations of videogame norms versus the crazy, over-the-top actions that must be used to win certain battles (2017: 167–168). Thinking through Kojima's anti-war ideology, I wish to examine violence and ethics in the *Metal Gear Solid* series more closely here.

Violence and trauma in *Metal Gear Solid*

At the end of *Metal Gear Solid*, Liquid accuses Snake of 'enjoying all the killing.' The player-character has at this point slain many of the Genome Soldiers and the four main bosses, Revolver Ocelot, Psycho Mantis, Sniper Wolf and Vulcan Raven. Liquid says 'I watched your face when you did it. It was filled with the joy of battle.' Snake's immediate rejoinder – 'You're wrong!' rings false, as the player has indeed been filled with joy on completing each

gruelling boss battle. Liquid's claim that he 'watched your face' causes discomfort, as the player feels as if they have been somehow spied upon. After the experience with Psycho Mantis, who saw into the player's hard drive, it seems almost possible that Liquid (and Kojima) really were watching the gameplay. Roth observes that it is hard for the player to deny Liquid's accusation, repeated in *MGS2* when Raiden asks Snake if he enjoyed killing others: 'Snake's forceful denial only amplifies the disruption on the part of the player, who is aware of the dual nature of his or her own action, simultaneously playful and violent' (2017: 164). Roth argues that Kojima's critique of violence depends on the playful nature of videogame violence, which takes place in a virtual, voluntary space without real-world consequences (2017: 165). Just as the clash between diegetic and non-diegetic space creates a sense of disjunction in the player through the series, the difference between in-game and real-world violence is also leveraged to produce moments of recognition, surprise and reflection.

It is often noted that Kojima's gameplay mode, which he calls 'tactical espionage action,' depends largely on stealth and sneaking, rather than the 'all guns blazing' mode of most FPS titles. The player-character moves through a hostile environment by employing various tactics, such as 'unobserved movement, subterfuge, camouflage, evasion, trickery, and out-smarting enemies' (Noon and Dyer-Witheford, 2010: 78). Roth explains the importance of sneaking in the series in terms of game time wasted when the player-character is discovered by enemies (2017: 155). Although the player-character is equipped with many advantages in contrast to the enemy soldiers, movement through the environment is necessarily slow and cautious.[32] While Pat Miller (2006) goes so far as to blog about 'Metal Gear Pacifist,' emphasizing the non-lethal aspects of gameplay choices, Roth points out that overall, the games 'carry an admiration for weapons and war with them' (2017: 163). The huge arsenal of interesting weapons available to the player tends to glorify the war setting, while violence as entertainment is always an option. However, as all these critics have observed, the rewards for non-violent play are significant both for their presence, and for increasing the feeling of player choice.[33] This places more emphasis on the player's own violent or non-violent actions, deepening the ethical or moral judgement implied by the designer.[34]

One scene that all these critics have used as evidence for Kojima's thoughtful stance on violence comes from *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* (2004). After many hours of gameplay in which enemy soldiers have been dispatched by lethal or other, less violent means such as stunning them or avoiding them altogether, the player-character Naked Snake encounters The Sorrow, a psychic enemy boss who is in communication with the dead. The scene begins with Snake wading through a river with fire raging on both sides, a bright orange suffusing the screen. A shadowy figure emerges from the river and introduces himself as The Sorrow, telling Snake 'The dead are not silent. Now you will know the sorrow of those whose lives you have ended.'[35] The screen changes to a darker blue-grey palette, and as we wade slowly up the river, The Sorrow floats spectrally above the water, taunting us and shooting a spiralling projectile downstream. If this

makes contact with Snake, a screaming face fills the screen, and the player-character is temporarily unable to move. Ghostly figures appear in the water and surge towards Snake, who must dodge around them. If contact is made, Snake loses health, and again is temporarily paralyzed. If the player has killed many people and creatures during gameplay, the river scenario can take more than ten minutes to successfully complete.

Scholars and critics have emphasized the time taken to traverse the river as a direct commentary on the player's level of violence in the game up to this point. Time is manipulated as a punishment or reward, with 'pacifist' or 'sneaky' players enjoying the fastest navigation of the river environment. In terms of Gonzalo Frasca's analysis, this scene is an example of a manipulation rule which changes the content of the scene dependent on player performance. This kind of rule addresses violence not just through representation, but through simulation with consequences. Put simply, building a rule about the player's degree of violent action shows that Kojima cares about violence, and conveys his ideology on violence more subtly than mere representation could achieve (Frasca 2003: 231). Gamers commenting on The Sorrow boss fight describe its impact and innovative quality, as they had not encountered the idea of consequence so viscerally in videogames before playing through this scene. A representative example comes from gamer Evan Peterson:

> When I first did this fight, I'm not going to lie, I felt really bad that I just killed everyone without thinking. This is an amazing moment, not just in this game, but from video games in general. It let's you reflect on what you've done, and shows that war isn't glamorous like it's portrayed in other games. There are real people on both sides, and this fight really solidifies that fact.
>
> (Peterson 2015)

There are two other points I would like to note about this scene, in relation to Japanese cultural and religious beliefs. The first point is that the player-character cannot fight back against the ghosts in the river. Any contact weakens Naked Snake, meaning that the dead are having a real impact on the character in the in-game world. This reflects Japanese beliefs about ghosts, who are able to affect the corporeal world and cause harm to humans, often in retribution for wrongful death.[36] Kojima Hideo stated in the commentary to the game that this river represented the Sanzu-no-kawa of Japanese folk belief, the 'River of Three Paths' where light sinners may wade through shallower water while heavy sinners must wade through deep water, pursued by ghosts and demons (the innocent cross on a bridge).[37] Since Naked Snake is waist-deep in water, the river suggests the depth of the player-character's sins. The depth of water does not change depending on player actions, however, so all players and all iterations of Naked Snake are seen as heavy sinners in this case.

The second point is that the souls of animals are included among the tormented ghosts. In *MGS3* the hero does not receive ration packs, to be consumed

when health is low, but must kill and eat animals in the surrounding environment in order to survive. These include birds, fish, frogs, snakes, rabbits, squirrels and bats.[38] The appearance of animal souls in the river places animals on a similar moral plane to humans, reflecting a Buddhist tenet held by many Japanese people.[39] Violence against animals had not been an issue to date in the series, although wolves were important in *Metal Gear Solid.* The wolf NPCs in that case were mere enemy attackers behaving on the whole like the Genome Soldiers, triggering discovery alerts and dying in a similar way (spurting blood from gunfire, flashing and disappearing). The wolves also provided comedy, showing love hearts above their heads when Snake equipped the handkerchief of their beloved owner, Sniper Wolf. Animals in *Metal Gear Solid* carried cultural meaning in the narrative – the ravens, caribou and wolves were all described as spirit animals for the Aleutian Inuit people. But in *MGS3* animals become signifiers for the meaning of violence.[40]

   The river scene in *MGS3* is very similar to scenes in Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 film *Apocalypse Now*, where the actor Martin Sheen is shown wading through rivers in Vietnam. The iconic sequence was referred to again in the 1987 film *Predator*, with Arnold Schwarzenegger tackling the river and an unknown adversary in a Central American environment of fire and shadow. Naked Snake is similarly attired, mud-streaked with a bandanna tied around his forehead. The river of *MGS3* is set in the jungles of Tselinoyarsk, in Soviet Russia. The similarities between the three scenes create a generalized image of 'war in the jungle,' collapsing differences in time and space to produce an essentialized war experience.[41] In this way *MGS3* joins the discourse of these two iconic films, taking on some of the force of their anti-war ideology. Interestingly, all three texts may also be seen as pro-war in their glorification of masculine militarism, weaponry and force, even though the central moral message emphasizes the futility of meaningless sacrifice and the miserable fate of the exploited soldier.[42] Having the player themselves traverse the river and encounter ghosts of enemies they have slain is an effective way of moving the filmic experience to the game medium.

   Another element of Kojima's games which speaks to his anti-war stance is the narrative emphasis on victims of war, particularly in terms of post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD. We first see this in *Metal Gear Solid* with the enemy character Sniper Wolf, a Kurd who was abandoned by US forces after the Gulf War:

> I was born on a battlefield. Raised on a battlefield. Gunfire, sirens and screams … they were my lullabies…. Hunted like dogs day after day … driven from our ragged shelters…. That … was my life. Each morning, I'd wake up … and find a few more of my family or friends dead beside me. I'd stare at the morning sun … and pray to make it through the day. The governments of the world turned a blind eye to our misery.
>
> (El Greco 2004)

Sniper Wolf joined Liquid and his revolutionaries to take her revenge on the world, finally able to look at war from an external observer position through her

rifle scope rather than living inside the war itself. Snake's conversation with Sniper Wolf is moving, as he reassures the assassin of her noble status – a wolf, not a mere dog – and brings her life to an end. It is up to Otacon to shed tears for her death, but we are reminded of the fragile status of the Kurdish people again towards the end of the game, where Kojima uses documentary footage to show scenes from the Gulf War. The Kurds are portrayed as victims along with the soldiers of the US infantry, who in the game narrative become human experiments as the Genome Soldiers. War trauma is thus depicted as something experienced by both sides in any battle, humanizing the combatants and eliciting our sympathy. The fact that Sniper Wolf experienced war as a child is echoed in the plight of child soldiers throughout the series, most notably Raiden from *MGS2*.

Kojima returns to the issue of PTSD through the Beauty and Beast Unit in *MGS4*. Each of the four women use external technology and internal nanomachines to enhance their fighting abilities, but each also have very damaged minds from their war experiences. The player fights against each woman in two forms – first defeating the technologically enhanced Beast, and then the Beauty, stripped of the exoskeleton and weapons. The B&B Unit's suits are extremely form-fitting, to the extent that motion capture was undertaken with nude actors.[43] The suits include barcodes and text notations such as 'Power Lines Below' or 'Neuro Abstraction Layer,' reminding the player that the B&B Unit members are cybernetically enhanced. Three of the four women are from developing nations – Africa, Indonesia and South America, while the fourth is from Scandinavia. All have very developed breasts, hips and buttocks, and the player may activate a camera during battle to make the characters pose suggestively. The player had always been asked to identify with Snake's masculinity and male subject-positioning in the series, but in these later games (*MGS4* and *MGSV*) player capabilities tap more directly into the sexual observer-participant point of view. The emphasis on visuality in these scenes makes a creepy juxtaposition with the sounds of horrific war experiences that the B&B Unit re-experience during battle. As Martin Roth notes, the scenes are 'deeply disturbing' (2017: 163).

To my mind, the B&B Unit brings together three concepts of violence in war – PTSD and trauma; bioengineering to produce augmented soldier forces; and sex as an inherent part of violence.[44] Kojima skirts around the idea of sexual violence with these characters, carefully avoiding the issue of war rape with their backstories. The PTSD of the B&B Unit comes not from experiencing rape themselves but from being captured, tortured, forced to kill others (including family members), and commit other atrocities such as eating human flesh. The B&B Unit's mental damage thus stems more from the horror of their own actions than from the male/female dynamics of war torture. This omission of rape is unrealistic, given the narrative context of war zones in which rape was widespread in real life, but the science fiction/ fantasy elements of *Metal Gear Solid* make 'unrealistic' itself a meaningless criticism. Rather, Kojima seems to consider rape a step too far in terms of videogame content, which would attract more severe adult ratings and alienate his audience.

Perhaps in reaction to this conundrum, we do see attempted rape in *MGSV*, involving Snake's female comrade Quiet. Notoriously clothed in bikini top and soldierly accoutrements, Quiet must bare as much skin as possible to breathe and photosynthesize for energy (it's a complex backstory).[45] This characteristic becomes a great weapon for Quiet in the rape scene. Captured, forcibly clothed and denied access to sunlight, Quiet loses her strength, but when the enemy disrobes her and half-drowns her in order to perpetrate rape, the sudden influx of light and moisture onto her skin allows her a rush of strength to easily overcome the attacker. The highly unrealistic nature of Quiet's dilemma points to Kojima's unwillingness to include rape in a character's story, and highlights the sad reality for women in war zones with no recourse to Quiet's solution.

Kojima is on firmer ground in *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* when thinking through issues of PTSD and war injury with the male characters. The title itself, *The Phantom Pain*, refers to the 'phantom limb' syndrome experienced by people who have lost a part of their body through injury. Ben Whaley has studied the representation of phantom limb syndrome in *MGSV* through the character of Kazuhira Miller, who has lost an arm and a leg in combat in Afghanistan. Although he is given a prosthetic leg and cane to help him walk, he refuses a more technologically advanced solution. Whaley observes that 'these clunky aids act as a visual reminder of the physical cost of war' for the remainder of the game (2016: 114). Miller may be placed in contrast to the extreme bodily augmentations of Solidus, Raiden and Gray Fox in the series, as his denial of augmentation serves as a claim to the original, natural human body. A well-known quote from Miller introduces his page on the *Metal Gear Wiki:*

> We hold our rifles in missing hands. We stand tall on missing legs. We stride forward on the bones of our fallen. Then, and only then, are we alive. This 'pain' is ours and no one else's: a secret weapon we wield, out of sight. We will be stronger than ever, for our peace.[46]

The 'phantom pain' of the title thus alludes to the missing limbs of soldiers as well as the invisible psychic cost of war, a pain which serves as impetus to action and a source of mental strength for those committed to seeking a peaceful solution. Whaley argues that Miller's attitude is placed in contrast with Big Boss, who is fitted with a bionic arm that becomes extremely useful for the player (2016: 114). In this way the player gains a strong gameplay advantage through the use of prosthetics. Whaley argues that the bionic arm 'redefines the discourse of sympathy commonly associated with amputation,' and 'provides a path for player mastery over disability' (2016: 116). Through gameplay, Kojima positions disability as something to be conquered and fixed, rather than coped with or borne as a mark of honour. While thoughtful players may reflect on the contrast, many will simply rejoice in the bionic capabilities. However, Kojima does present many opportunities for thoughtful reflection in the long, dramatic cut-scenes as well as rousing speeches such as Miller's above.

Whaley also analyzes PTSD in *MGSV: The Phantom Pain* through repeated flashbacks to the traumatic death of a comrade named Paz, as well as a visceral massacre scene, where the player must exterminate their own soldiers. Both sequences are dissociative events that question the player's understanding of the in-game reality and produce a strong emotional reaction (Whaley 2016: 116–122). Whaley uses the term 'external engagement' to describe Kojima's method of connecting in-game actions with real-world impact, arguing that the *Metal Gear Solid* series as a whole makes efforts to 'merge the identities of the player and central protagonist in order to heighten the sense that the fictional in-game scenarios are connected to the player's real-world actions' (2016: 89–90). In-game events are experienced as something that the player has lived through and been affected by, 'beyond the act of simply pressing buttons and rotating analog sticks' (2016: 104). This experiential connection between gameworld and real world is what makes *Metal Gear Solid* a 'thought-provoking' game text, as Martin Roth contends. Both Whaley and Roth maintain that this quality may move some players to action in the real world, perhaps shifting their perceptions of war and trauma, or questioning systems of rules that regulate our lives.[47]

Overall, Kojima's treatment of violence in the series may be seen as further evidence for his anti-war ideology. In *Metal Gear Solid*, we find comments such as 'This isn't glorious. It's just plain killing. Violence isn't a sport!' and 'War is ugly … there's nothing glamorous about it.'[48] The critique of violence is made clear through both narrative and gameplay. As the series progresses Kojima considers more war-related issues such as civilian casualties, child soldiers, and PTSD. None of these issues are developed completely, as the problems of the main character must necessarily take centre stage. Kojima could be accused of a shallow treatment of some issues, and the connections drawn between battle and sexuality are certainly problematic. However, it should be said that not many videogame developers include these issues at all in their games about war, and the child soldier Raiden in particular elicits deep sympathy from the player. Kojima's representation of war trauma and PTSD seems like a sincere attempt on the part of the game designer to bring a more realistic representation of war to the game medium. That said, Kojima's treatment of violence itself is much more successful. The main reason is that violence can be experienced first-hand as part of gameplay, but trauma must be portrayed in the third person. Making the player reflect on their own violent in-game actions is easier than somehow including trauma or a remembrance of trauma in the player experience. In *Metal Gear Solid*, the player enacts violence and then pays for it with consequences – increased difficulty, loss of valuable side characters, and time taken in the game. Towards the end of the series, Kojima uses similar methods in his critique of nuclear weapons.

Atomic play: nuclear critique in an open world

The last three games of the *MGS* series involve the building, defense and arming of a military installation called Mother Base. Kojima Hideo explained the central role of Mother Base in a recent essay:

> *MGS: Peace Walker* (2010) is set in Costa Rica 1974. Here I wanted players to think about what armed forces and nuclear armament mean in a country that has no military. If nuclear weapons have the power to destroy the world, then why is having them a deterrent? In the end of the story, the hero Snake, chooses to keep nuclear weapons at his Mother Base for this very reason. In *MGSV: Ground Zeroes* (2014), the Mother Base built in *Peace Walker* is destroyed by an enemy force, imbuing the player with a sense of loss and a desire for revenge. A relentless enemy leaves the player with nowhere to run, and they are drawn into inescapable conflict. The continuation, *MGSV: The Phantom Pain*, is the execution of that revenge. Players gather a fighting force and resources to build up an army and secure nuclear weapons as protection.… Additionally, the online game mode offers players the choice to disarm their nuclear arsenal, with the goal of completely ridding the game world of nuclear weapons.
>
> (Kojima 2017)

The question of what kinds of arms to install at Mother Base is central to the ethical question confronting the player in these games. *Peace Walker* ends with the player-character choosing to keep nuclear weapons. This narrative ending is outside the player's control, so the 'choice' is something they may or may not agree with. Snake's decision creates a confrontation with the player's own thoughts on the matter, a confrontation that is perhaps resolved by the destruction of Mother Base in *Ground Zeroes*. In *The Phantom Pain* player agency determines the nature of armaments at Mother Base, and the consequences of choosing nuclear weapons become clear.

As the player progresses in their construction and armament of Mother Base, they are eventually given the option to develop a nuclear weapon. This occurs in an optional online game where the player may build an offshoot installation known as a Forward Operations Base (FOB). Friends who are online at the same time can attack each other's FOB for fun, in a more controlled environment than the completely open MMO *Metal Gear Online*. The description for 'Nuclear Weapon' in the armaments list is as follows: 'The most powerful weapon of mass destruction humanity has ever created, nuclear weapons employ the tremendous energy released by nuclear fission. Merely possessing one makes its owner a threat and has the effect of deterring retaliation from rivals.' The development of nuclear weapons is extremely expensive, costing the player in terms of in-game currency (750,000 GMP) as well as depleting their fuel resources and stocks of metals. It thus takes the player time, effort and hard-won resources to be able to develop these weapons.

There are some benefits to the player in developing a nuclear weapon. Two trophies in the game are connected to this option: 'Deterrence,' awarded for developing a nuclear weapon, and 'Disarmament,' awarded for disposing of one. If a player owns a nuclear weapon, it deters other players from considering an attack on their FOB. Only other players already holding nuclear weapons of their own (or alternatively, those with extremely high 'Hero Points') can attack in this

situation. Secondly, there is a time-based reward, since the more nuclear weapons a player owns, the less often their base will be able to be invaded by other players. The third benefit is that the player's 'PF rank' (offensive and defensive ranking against other players) is dramatically increased.

On the other hand, developing nuclear weapons restricts the player's ability to invade other players' bases. They lose 50,000 'Hero Points' and acquire the same number of 'Demon Points,' in a mechanic that keeps track of the player's moral or immoral actions. The judgement inherent in Demon Points is shown visually: if the player-character accumulates enough Demon Points, Snake will grow a horn on his head and come to resemble a demon in appearance. Since developing a nuclear weapon gives +50,000 Demon Points (DP), some players will find themselves transformed instantly into 'Demon Snake.' Interestingly, a popular method to counteract this effect is repetitive play of the 'White Mamba' mission to extract child soldiers: each child soldier rescued is –120 DP, so extracting all 20 children reduces DP by 2,400 points. It takes quite some time to extract enough child soldiers to make up for the 50,000 point deficit, so the repetitive nature of this task may reinforce the undesirable nature of developing nuclear weapons.

It should be noted that there is no capability in the game to actually use nuclear weapons on other players. Disappointed players on the game forums were met with comments by long-time *Metal Gear Solid* fans: 'This is Metal Gear Solid. They would NEVER let anyone use a nuke in this game, it goes against the message they want to give us. Metal Gear Solid is and always will be an anti-nuke game' (Sekkuar666: 2015). This restriction may also be seen in terms of Frasca's manipulation rules, in which options open to the player carry a judgement demonstrating the designer's intent and values (2003: 231). Players familiar with earlier titles would not have been surprised by this limitation. The player may also choose not to develop nuclear weapons in the first place, and some players on the discussion boards clearly see them as not worth the trouble.

In order to dispose of their nuclear weapons, the player must spend 100,000 GMP of in-game currency, convert the weapon to nuclear waste, and send it off to be stored at the bottom of the ocean. The player is rewarded with the 'Disarmament' trophy and 1,000 Hero Points (which does not make up for the 50,000 points lost by making the weapon). The player may also infiltrate another player's FOB and steal their nuclear weapons in order to stockpile or dispose of them, although a high number of Hero Points and a special cargo upgrade is required. The Famitsu official game guide to *The Phantom Pain* explained that a special hidden ending could be triggered if all players on a specific server disarmed and disposed of their nuclear weapons. The 'Disarmament Event' of 2015 caused a great deal of online discussion, spurred by press releases from Konami and tweets by Kojima himself.[49] From November to December 2015 the total number of nuclear weapons owned by gamers across all consoles (PS4, PS3, Xbox One, Xbox 360, Steam) decreased by the thousands, with Konami tracking numbers on the official game website each day. The momentum did not last, and players soon began developing more weapons, leading to impassioned entreaties by fans to disarm, as on the Reddit site 'Metal Gear Anti Nuclear' (Figure 8.1).[50]

Figure 8.1 Metal Gear Anti Nuclear Reddit page.

Screenshot by the author.

In response, Konami began tracking numbers again in May 2016, but at the time of writing complete disarmament has yet to be accomplished. Kojima comments:

> As far as I know, this goal hasn't been achieved yet, but if we can't disarm ourselves in the real world, at least the fictional game world offers mankind, the creators of nuclear weapons, the unparalleled 'experience' of making the conscious choice to create a nuclear free world. Through this experience, players will come to understand what it really means to take a stand against war and nuclear weapons. Players feel the need to acquire nuclear weapons, but then players across the globe choose to disarm themselves. This experience and its process is the chief aim of *Metal Gear*.
>
> (Kojima 2017)

Here the designer draws a parallel with in-game and real-world 'experience,' the collapsing of which gives meaning to gameplay. Kojima points to the conflict within the player, between 'feeling the need to acquire' and 'choosing to disarm.' In the closing months of 2015 it did seem that global nuclear disarmament was a real possibility in the online multiplayer world. Kojima sees this experience as valuable, with meaning embedded in the process of gameplay itself.

I find it significant that the 'experience' Kojima desired for players is achieved in the optional online section of an open-world environment. The tightly scripted, linear gameplay of *MGS* through *MGS4* did not allow for such a wide range of player choice. The vast world of *The Phantom Pain* gives many and varied opportunities for play, exploration, use of different vehicles, and different modes of physical interaction with the environment (e.g. rock-climbing). The single-player missions can be attempted at any time and (more

surprisingly) in any order, in between which the player may spend time as they please. At times this involves much silliness, attaching sheep to balloons and sending them off into the air, for example. This kind of environment encourages experimentation and risk. To ensure the successful delivery of an anti-nuclear ideological message, Kojima needed to include a smaller and more controlled environment within the wider game. The FOB side missions provide the perfect conditions for player experimentation. The risk involved is in losing or stealing nuclear weapons, not detonating them. Further, since the FOB missions are generally among friends, there is less antagonistic competition than the cut-throat world of *Metal Gear Online.* Lastly, it is notable that the nuclear experiments of the FOB minigames take place within the wider narrative of the central missions, which explore war trauma, PTSD and violence as shown above. In sum, the ideological messages of *Metal Gear Solid* come together in *The Phantom Pain* in narrative, gameplay and real-world experience, providing a fitting conclusion to the series for both player and designer.

From the discussion in this chapter, we see that the *Metal Gear Solid* series provides the player with a grand narrative of modern history, featuring individual heroism set against a non-heroic national narrative. While few would consider *Metal Gear Solid* to be a 'Japanese war game,' I would consider it a vital counter-discourse to the mainstream war game genre in Japan. It has not overcome the 'Japan as victim' stance so problematic for mainstream/dominant war narratives in Japan – rather, it utilizes this stance as a basis from which to put forward a broader critique of war and violence which is rare in videogames. On the other hand, the *Metal Gear Solid* series situates Japan in a global war narrative where the Middle East, Africa and Afghanistan are seen as exotic 'Other' places in which to wage war safely, since Japan (and the nations of North America and Europe) remain untouched. My analysis in this chapter may thus be seen as a first step towards a postcolonial reading of the *Metal Gear Solid* series. The next chapter examines more closely the idea of empire and colonialism in Japanese videogames, analysing the representation of Japan's former colonies in the *SoulCalibur* series, and how Korea in particular continues to be problematic for Japanese game designers.

Notes

1 El Greco (2004).
2 On Kojima's anti-war stance see Miller (2006), Noon and Dyer-Witheford (2010), Whaley (2016) and Roth (2017).
3 Kwan (2016) discusses Kojima's auteurship versus player agency.
4 On the dominant or 'foundational narrative' of modern Japan as war victim see Igarashi (2000). Whaley discusses this narrative in respect to 'great men' in the *Metal Gear Solid* series (2016: 93–95).
5 Schulzke (2013) considers the importance of nuclear anxiety to Cold War narratives in games, including *Fallout*.
6 Part of the following discussion appears in Hutchinson (2019), with more detailed analysis of Kojima's mixed-media method and self-reflexivity in comparison with the film director Fukasaku Kinji.

7 Solidus Light has uploaded the full gameplay divided into 50 episodes, each lasting around ten to 20 minutes. The following scene is titled Episode 15, 'You're Pretty Good' (Solidus Light 2013a).

8 A good account of the beginnings of FMV in games is found in Goldberg (2011: 115, 118–120) where designers Graeme Devine and Rob Landeros are struggling with video techniques in making *The Seventh Guest* (1992).

9 On Konami's FOX game engine see Freedman (2019). Although the polygonal human figures and faces are not so realistic when looking at them now, at the time they were on par with *Virtua Fighter* for capturing and expressing the movements of a human figure. The 3D environments of *Metal Gear Solid*, featuring the straight lines and rigid shapes of an industrial and military setting, still hold up today.

10 These are just some examples of what Psycho Mantis might say, depending on the player's gameplay history on the console. For a full script including all the possible responses, see El Greco (2004).

11 Gee (2009) provides many examples of similar self-reflexivity in *MGS4*, for example water spotting the supposed camera lens to mimic the verisimilitude of documentary film.

12 On procedural rhetoric see Bogost (2007: 28–29).

13 Gee argues that embodiment and lived experience in games are what make the messages and content of the games 'stick' with the player, in a process of active rather than passive learning. Two excellent case studies for this process of 'situated meaning' are the embodiment of the player in *Metal Gear Solid* (Gee 2003: 162–165) and *Deus Ex* (Gee 2003: 76–83).

14 Noon and Dyer-Witheford (2010: 76–77). Kojima also talks about the 'messages' in his games in his afterword to Project Itoh's novelization of *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* (Itoh 2012: 356–357).

15 See Solidus Light (2013b) for a playthrough of this scene, titled 'Three Generations of Emmerich Men.'

16 Named after his character designer Sasaki Hideki, Johnny is also notable for his irritable bowel syndrome. This affliction is played as a gag in *Metal Gear Solid* and *MGS4*, but becomes an important plot point regarding his insusceptibility to nanomachines, ensuring his freedom of will. Johnny thus acts as a counterpoint to the programmed soldiers in the series, and a commentary on the role of the body in human agency.

17 Mejia and Komaki (2013: 329) are describing Capcom's *Resident Evil* from 1996; the same aesthetic applies here. On *mukokuseki* style see Iwabuchi (2002: 28–29).

18 The Twin Snakes egg donor was a Japanese woman, while Big Boss was described as 'third generation Japanese-American' in the Konami-authorized *Official Handbook* (Hodgson 1998). Vulcan Raven describes Solid Snake as a distant relative, since 'Japanese and Inuit are cousins to each other' (El Greco 2004).

19 For example, see Mai (2010). Kojima was not involved in the NES port of the game.

20 Sales of all *Metal Gear* titles surpassed 49.2 million two years ago (Kerr 2016).

21 On Tezuka's war memories and anti-war stance see Tezuka (1999: 42–43); on Fukasaku's experiences see Yamane (2003: 491–507).

22 For more on this dichotomy in Japanese writings see Kamei (1975); on the image of America in Meiji-period literature see Hutchinson (2011: 17–58); on Japan-US power dynamics in postwar Japanese literature see Inoue (2016).

23 In March 2003 the US invaded Iraq in a 'pre-emptive strike' against Saddam Hussein, who was believed to be associated with Al-Qaida and the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

24 This was made possible by the Japanese National Diet passing a resolution in 1992, the 'United Nations Peacekeeping Co-operation Law,' allowing Japanese forces into war zones and other unstable areas to help with rebuilding and security, oversee voting and ceasefires, and other non-military operations.

25 A good analysis of this film appears in Williams (2009).

26 Kapell and Elliott (2013: 365) argue in their conclusion that *all* historical games 'provide the player with agency in interacting with that past,' as opposed to reading a history narrated and assembled by a professional historian.

27 Hartzheim (2017: 180–182) discusses Snake as an 'anti-action hero.'

28 Snake's codename in *MGS 2: Sons of Liberty* was Iroquois Pliskin. Solid Snake's physical similarity to Snake Plissken has been commented on at length – see for example Kojima (2002).

29 The first conversation takes place by Codec, but Otacon tells Snake in person. See El Greco (2004).

30 See McAllister and Ruggill on player labour and hard work in games (2011: 87–90); Espen Aarseth argues more broadly for the centrality of 'non-trivial' effort in games and other cybertexts (1997).

31 On the political possibilities of player action and violence in games, see Roth (2017: 149–155).

32 Roth explains the difference between player-character abilities and enemy abilities in terms of 'sensual perception and action capabilities,' the first referring to the enhanced visual and auditory senses of Snake and the player thanks to camera viewpoints, goggles, camouflage and earpieces, and the second referring to Snake's silence, flexibility and agility in comparison to the enemies, who are 'astonishingly noisy, lazy and relaxed, given the circumstances' (2017: 154–157).

33 See Noon and Dyer-Witheford (2010: 78–79), who maintain that much of the challenge of *MGS3* 'depends on a tension between the availability of an arsenal of deadly weaponry and the rewards for a "no-kill" completion'.

34 Rockstar Games employs a similar strategy in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, in which player choices determine the level of violence enacted by the player-character in non-central missions (Hutchinson 2017a: 167–168).

35 MHamlin (2006) provides a good script of *MGS3: Snake Eater.*

36 On ghosts and retribution in Japanese horror fiction, including videogames, see Marak (2015: 40–53, 60–82). For more definitions of *yūrei* (ghosts) and their motivations see Komatsu (2006: 134–149).

37 Kojima's commentary was compiled by Muni Shinobu (2003) from the *MGS3 Official DVD Extreme Box* as well as staff commentary and other peripheral writings.

38 There is also the *tsuchinoko*, a snake-like creature which in Japanese folklore can speak, tell lies, and fly through the air. For full animal list see strategy guide (Off 2006: 2).

39 A compelling exploration of this theme is found in Tezuka Osamu's manga series *Phoenix* (1967–1988) and *Buddha* (1972–1983), both of which emphasize the interconnected nature of all living things.

40 Chapple (1992) discusses the philosophy of nonviolence to animals and the active protection of animals in Buddhist thought.

41 The boss fight with The Fear in *MGS3* also references *Predator* in that The Fear wears active camouflage, targets the player using a laser sight, and often jumps from tree to tree during the fight. In case the player misses the reference, defeating The Fear in the *Metal Gear Solid: HD Collection* re-release of *MGS3* (PlayStation 3, 2011) gives the player a trophy named 'If It Bleeds, We Can Kill It,' echoing Schwarzenegger's line in the film.

42 Tomasulo (1990) examines the prowar and antiwar themes of *Apocalypse Now*, while Dave Kehr (1987) of the *Chicago Tribune* described the end of *Predator* as an 'apocalyptic finale that raises the antiwar message to the nuclear level.'

43 Kojima originally wanted the cut-scenes to feature the women naked (Ashcraft 2008b), which would have given the game a very restrictive rating and distribution. The portrayal of the BB Unit in *MGS4* caused much online comment over sexist representation of female characters in games, although not to the extent of Quiet in *MGSV*.

44 We see this last point in Sniper Wolf from *Metal Gear Solid*, who may be seen as a prototype for the B&B Unit. Her idea of love and sexual connection takes place through violence, as her 'love letter' to Snake is 'a bullet straight from my gun to your heart' (El Greco 2004).

45 The sexualized appearance of Quiet as Snake's colleague in *MGSV* caused an outcry, with many male game critics describing her almost-nude fan service scenes as over-the-top, unnecessary, and a discredit to Kojima: see Tamburro (2015), Fleming (2013), Champion (2015).

46 See entry for Kazuhira Miller, *Metal Gear Wiki* (2005-) http://metalgear.wikia.com/wiki/Kazuhira_Miller.

47 See Whaley (2016: 126–7) on the impact of game experience on real-world experience of gamers; Roth's argument is more theoretical in terms of politics, action and agency that are possible for the player in a rule-based system (2017: 154–160). Kahne, Middaugh and Evans (2009) study the 'civic potential of video games' to reinforce social or political ideals and spur action in the real world.

48 The first comment is Snake's, in conversation with Raven. The second is Meryl's. See El Greco (2004).

49 Incredibly, this hidden cut-scene is still in the news, accidentally triggered in February 2018 when servers set the number of nuclear weapons to zero. See Chalk and Donnelly (2018).

50 Members can create an in-game emblem to display their affiliation to the movement, and at the time of writing people are still discussing current nuke counts and disposal strategies. Members can display the numbers of nukes they have disposed of, with some members having disposed of 5,000 or more. See *Metal Gear Anti Nuclear* (2018).

9   The colonial legacy

Transcending history and the world, a tale of souls and swords eternally retold.
SoulCalibur series tagline

As we have seen so far in this section of the book, history and memory have played a large part in the development of war-themed videogames in Japan, both in the avoidance of controversial content and in the focus on nuclear weapons. Wars in Japanese videogames tend to take place in distant times and places, enabling a consistent narrative of Japanese glory in the past, and victimhood in the modern age. Japan as the aggressor is almost invisible in the war genre, unless the opponent is a fantasy entity or placed firmly in an alternate universe. Fierce combat against other nations is more likely to be found in games with win–lose binary structures, such as fighting games and sports games. These genres place Japan in more direct competition with other nations from across the world, positing a subjective Japanese 'Self' in relation to a number of different 'Others.' In Chapter 3, I discussed how male Japanese heroes have dominated narratives in the fighting game genre, often set against an imagined America in a replay – and possible revision – of postwar inequities. This US–Japan binary stems from opposition in WWII and the Allied occupation of Japan, which had far-reaching consequences in Japanese society. But going back further, we see the Japanese occupation and colonization of places such as Korea, under Japanese rule from 1906–1945, which has caused much lingering enmity in the region. In this chapter, I consider how Japan's colonial past has impacted fighting games in terms of the representation of Korea and other colonies of the Japanese Empire, and ask whether the same kind of impact may be seen in other genres as well.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, the fighting game genre is a place of stereotype and exaggeration, where characters from different nations are represented by over-the-top physical features, costumes, fighting styles and environments. This use of stereotype allows the player to quickly and easily distinguish the individual characteristics of their opponent in battle. The stereotyped representation of identity in fighting games shares many rhetorical structures with historical discourses of Orientalism and Occidentalism, transposing real-world perceptions

and power dynamics onto the screen.[1] Postcolonial theorists like Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha have long argued that the way in which identity is represented in artistic works has deep connections to power dynamics in the real world. Any kind of text that deals with the depiction of identity has the potential to both reflect and perpetuate social discourses on race, gender, and colonial structures.[2] Souvik Mukherjee (2017) and Paul Martin (2018) have recently called for more attention to be paid to colonial structures of power operating in videogame representation. In previous work, I have analyzed Bandai Namco's *SoulCalibur* series (1995–2018) to show how Japan's cultural and historical 'Self' is privileged through the archetypes of ninja and samurai in the series, while the colonial Others of Korea, Ryūkyū/Okinawa and Micronesia are marked as different and apart through hair colour and other bodily signifiers.[3] In this chapter, I will look at how these distinctions have been expressed not only in the games themselves, but also in art books and other peripherals. Memories of the colonial past have also found expression in localization tactics, particularly for the Korean market.

Of all Japan's colonial Others, it is Korea that seems to be most singled out from the Asian nations as an object of alterity, an 'Other' eternally subject to Japanese colonization. The Korean Other in Japanese videogames provides a good case study of how the colonial legacy has been portrayed in the Japanese arts, and how some genres may be better equipped to deal with its impact than others. Following the analysis of *SoulCalibur* and fighting games, I will consider the representation of South Korea in soccer-themed sports games, showing how soccer rivalry and colonial memory combine to impact the player experience. The last case study of the chapter (and the book overall) will be Sega's *Yakuza* series (2005–2016), which gives a much more nuanced look at Korean identity in Japan through the representation of both foreign-born Korean immigrants and Japan-born ethnic Koreans living in Tokyo. I end with some considerations of the possibilities of narrative-based single-player games for empathy and embodiment, and the importance of remembering 'play' in any analysis of identity-based videogame representations.

SoulCalibur and stereotype

SoulCalibur was developed by Namco as a weapons-based game to complement their other major fighting title, *Tekken.* A long and successful franchise, the *Soul* series has nine main games spanning more than 20 years of development.[4] Demonstrating the series' continued popularity, *SoulCalibur VI* was recently released on the PlayStation 4, incorporating popular characters Noctis from *Final Fantasy XV* as well as Geralt from CD Projekt Red's *Witcher* series.[5] Although many fighting games (particularly *Street Fighter II*) have attracted attention for their use of stereotype in character design, the *SoulCalibur* series has consistently been seen as the most egregious example of gender and racial stereotype, hypersexualization and unrealistic character physiques in the genre.[6] Designs for Western female characters such as Ivy Valentine and Sophitia are well known

for their astounding bust size and exposed skin, while the Japanese ninja Taki is famed for her 'volume,' as character designer Imura Tomoko puts it.[7] Although the series sexualizes its female characters to a greater extent than the male characters, the hyper-muscled men with bulging crotches are also depicted as sex objects for female fan consumption, and it is acknowledged that homosexual fantasies may also be indulged by both men and women players.[8] These observations serve to emphasize the fact that *SoulCalibur* deals heavily in physical exaggeration. At the same time, the designers pay attention to the realities of physics in creating their characters' bodies: characters' heights and weights are presented in detail, creating a 'real' feel to the design. The combination of physical realism and sexualized stereotype creates a strange disjunction, producing a distancing effect.

SoulCalibur is further distanced from contemporary reality through its emphasis on history, placing its narrative events in the sixteenth century. Together with *Samurai Shodown*, *SoulCalibur* is one of the few fighting games given a specific historical time frame.[9] The first game *Soul Edge* is set in 1584, with narrative events in the series spanning Toyotomi Hideyoshi's unification of Japan in 1590 and invasion of Korea in 1592, the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, and the reign of the Wan-li Emperor (1572–1620) at the end of the Ming Empire. *SoulCalibur* also has a strong thematic engagement with the idea of history and time, the rise and fall of civilizations, and the clash of Western imperialism with the Asian nations. European entities such as the Dutch East India Company feature in the narrative, and game peripherals include maps, timelines and complex charts showing the interlocking connections between various characters and their homelands. Arms and armour walk a fine line between historically accurate and wildly fanciful, with basic structures and materials taken into account and then decorated artistically to symbolize the character's personality and place of origin.[10] The series is replete with visual reminders of the time frame: *SoulCalibur IV* populates one of its island environments with dodos, which disconcertingly strut about in the background while players attempt to focus on their battle in the foreground of the scene.

This combination of historical focus and stereotyped character designs make *SoulCalibur* an excellent case study of how stereotype and colonial discourse can intersect in videogames. Stereotype on its own does not necessarily indicate a positive or negative quality. Stereotype in the fighting game genre serves a purpose, for spectacle, entertainment, ease of production and localization, and ease of recognition in the fast-paced style of play needed for success in fighting game tournaments.[11] But stereotype also has discursive significance, and is related to real-world attitudes, formed in specific political and social contexts. One of the most influential writers on the relationship between stereotype and colonial discourse is Homi Bhabha, who sees colonialism as a living system: something not consigned to the past but something that continues to inform our thinking and attitudes in the present, manifesting in works of art and popular culture. Bhabha argues that any judgement of a stereotype as 'positive' or 'neg-ative' misses the point, and we should consider rather what kinds of 'processes

of subjectification' are made possible through stereotypical discourse (1994: 67). Bhabha turns our attention from the qualities of the stereotyped figures themselves to the effects of stereotypical discourse, most notably the 'regime of truth' that it produces. The main point of Bhabha's argument is that stereotypes tell us more about the producer of the text than its object. Analysing the stereotype reveals not only the *assertion* of the author – the statements they are making about the Other – but also the *anxiety* they hold towards that Other. I find this idea useful in thinking through the specific character constructions in fighting games and what they tell us about Japanese attitudes and anxieties in regards to other nations, as well as Japan's own colonial history.

   The character designs of *SoulCalibur* clearly differentiate between Western and Asian characters based on body size, hair and eye colour, as well as the kinds of weapons favoured by characters from different parts of the world. In general, the Asian characters from the *SoulCalibur* series are smaller and lighter than their Western counterparts, but also tend to move more quickly, using fluid jumps and kicks. They wear lighter armour or none at all, and tend to expose more skin than the Western characters (Hutchinson 2016: 163). Taking the mainland Asian characters as a set, they look like any mainstream character from Japanese anime or manga. The Korean fighter Yun-seong and the Chinese fighter Kilik appear as *bishōnen*, while the Korean Seung Mi-na and Chinese Xianghua look like *bishōjo*. Attractive and unthreatening, the women are smaller and more typically 'feminine' than the Western women, while the male characters are highly relatable to the Japanese audience. The most notable characteristic of the non-Japanese Asian characters is that they all display red, brown or orange hair, rather than the black hair common to people of the Asian region. In feudal Japan, European foreigners were known as 'red-haired' barbarians (*ketō*), with the idea of red hair signifying pure Otherness (see Tsuruta 1989). However, in *SoulCalibur*, it is the non-Japanese Asian characters who are given the red hair, becoming more prominent over time (Hutchinson 2016: 165). In contrast, Japanese characters are depicted with black hair, to differentiate them from the rest of the Asian cast. Just as Ryu from *Street Fighter* began the series with red hair, turning brown and finally black to signify his increasing association with 'Japaneseness' over time, the ninja fighter Taki appears with brown hair in *Soul Edge*, turning darker as the series progresses.

   A close examination of character designs in *Soul Edge* and *SoulCalibur* shows how the Korean characters of the series – Seung Mi-na, Hwang Seonggyeong and Hong Yun-seong – are noticeably constructed in sexualized, exotic terms, even more so than the Chinese and other Asian figures. The Korean characters show significantly more bare skin, are frequently seen with an open mouth, wear the brightest costumes and have the lightest hair. This distinction could stem from the fact that of all the mainland Asian nations, Korea was formally annexed and colonized by Japan over the longest period of time (1905–1945), where China experienced Japanese colonialism for a shorter period (1931–1945).[12] The sexualized exoticization of Korea could be read as a classical style of gendered Orientalism, with Japan as the colonizing subject continuing to

construct Korea as colonial object.[13] The physical markers of Otherness are even more extreme in the cases of Ryūkyū/Okinawa and Southeast Asia, represented by the blond Maxi and blue-haired Talim respectively. Maxi's resemblance to Elvis Presley and his duck-tailed hairstyle suggesting a 'cool' 1950s American look indicates the double coloniality of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, first annexed by Japan and renamed Okinawa Prefecture in 1879, and then occupied by American troops from 1945–1972. Interestingly, both Maxi and Talim have backstories that emphasize the encroachment of Western imperialism into Asia, minimizing the idea of Japanese colonialism.[14]

Although Japanese colonialism is elided in the *SoulCalibur* narrative, it is certainly suggested by the privileging of Mitsurugi Heishirō as the normative Japanese male in the series. Like *Street Fighter, Virtua Fighter* and *Tekken*, *SoulCalibur* places the main male character in the P1 position and features Mitsurugi heavily in cabinet art and opening cinematics.[15] But unlike the earlier series, *SoulCalibur* markets itself as a tale of history, with realistic weapons and historical scenarios. The opening cinematics of *SoulCalibur II* show Mitsurugi single-handedly charging against a squad of uniformed European soldiers armed with guns. Running over a series of moored boats, Mitsurugi leaps high in the air to deflect a bullet with his sword, just as the music changes to herald the end of the sequence. Mitsurugi here symbolizes the *shishi* of feudal Japan, one of the 'men of high purpose' who fought to protect the homeland from Western imperialism.[16] Mitsurugi's militaristic aspect is highlighted by his weapon – the traditional *katana* – and his association with sword imagery through his name. According to the Project Soul art book for *SoulCalibur V*, Mitsurugi invented his own name to reflect his chosen role in life, with *mi* meaning 'honorable' and *tsurugi* meaning 'sword.'[17] His birthplace is Bizen, one of the foremost sword-making places in Japan.[18] To further establish his Japanese identity, Mitsurugi's necklace in *SoulCalibur V* features a chrysanthemum motif, hinting at his loyalty to the Imperial house, and the rope belt around his waist resembles the *shimenawa* ropes of Shinto ritual and architecture. Finally, Mitsurugi's soldierly aspect is emphasized by the use of cherry blossoms (*sakura*) in his portraiture and in the place name of his associated stage set, the Sakura-dai gate of Kaminoi castle.[19] Over the course of the series, the cumulative imagery and symbolism combine to suggest the Shinto-based Emperor-worship of wartime Japan.

Mitsurugi's association with the katana and samurai militarism made him a problematic character for export. After *Soul Edge* (1995), some changes were made to Mitsurugi's appearance for distribution to Korea and other places where samurai imagery was found offensive. In *SoulCalibur* (1998) Mitsurugi was replaced by the character 'Arthur,' whose appearance was exactly the same in terms of body shape, costume and weapon, but whose hair was blond. Arthur was also given an eyepatch, presumably so Mitsurugi's face could not be so easily recognized. The changes were cosmetic only, with Arthur keeping the same moveset and narrative ending as Mitsurugi. Even Arthur's 'destined battle' in *SoulCalibur* is Taki, the same opponent that Mitsurugi would face.[20] This limited revision kept expenses down, as text assets would not need major

redrafting. For players in the know, the cheap 'Arthur' solution became something of a joke, which was later played upon by Bandai Namco: Arthur appears as a bonus character in *SoulCalibur III*, with Mitsurugi as his destined battle. However, for players in Korea and other parts of Asia, 'Arthur' made *Soul Calibur* palatable and playable. The localization of *SoulCalibur* shows the strength of the colonial legacy in Korea, and the need to downplay aggressive military imagery from the past.

Japan and the colonies in *SoulCalibur*

Looking at the *SoulCalibur* series as a whole, characters from Korea, Ryūkyū and Southeast Asia are constructed in different ways to those from mainland Asia, Japan or Europe through their visual and narrative representation and their positioning in various game peripherals. In the fighting game genre, every game title will essentialize certain characteristics of countries and nations to emphasize difference and sharpen the feeling of opposition and competition. But it seems to me that the *SoulCalibur* series stands out in the fighting game genre for its Othering of former colonial sites. This may be because *SoulCalibur* is simply one of the few games that incorporated Korean characters from the very first title in the series. *Soul Edge* had two fighters from Korea, the female Seung Mi-na and the male Hwang Seong-gyeong, together taking up one-quarter of the full fighting roster. But neither *Tekken* nor *Virtua Fighter* included a Korean character from the start of the series, focusing rather on China as the Asian Other. In the most well-known example of omission, there are no Korean characters in the main *Street Fighter* series until Juri's appearance in *Super Street Fighter IV* (2010) as a taekwondo expert. The PC game *Street Fighter Online: Mouse Generation* (2008) did include the South Korean character Shin as a blond taekwondo practitioner, but he may have been a prototype to try out the South Korean martial art in a lower-profile game title before attempting such a character in the main series.[21]

It is notable that the inclusion of a Korean character in *Street Fighter* has been something of a sore point for Capcom's developers, and senior staffer Ono Yoshinori has defended the late addition of Juri to the series, pointing to the Korean government's strict limits on Japanese imports in the 1990s. However, it has often been observed that Japanese studios SNK and Namco were able to introduce Korean characters into their rosters and export their games to Korea quite successfully during this period. For example, SNK's *Fatal Fury* series starred Kim Kaphwan as leader of the KOF Korean team since 1992, and Namco's *Tekken 2* featured the South Korean fighter Baek Doo San in 1995 (Ashcraft 2009). SNK's *King of Fighters* series, featuring a diverse cast of Asian fighters from China, Japan and Korea as well as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Mongolia and Thailand, was incredibly popular with Asian audiences, giving rise to an entire 'KoF' subculture (Ng 2006, 2015). Perhaps in response to such observations, Ono offers an entertaining anecdote of the Capcom Korea subsidiary office staff trapping him in conversation at a bar, not allowing him to leave until they

secured a promise of a new Korean character for *Street Fighter IV*.[22] The main point that we can take from this public defence is that the inclusion of a Korean character in a Japanese fighting game is significant, something to be managed, planned and executed with great care and caution.

Japan's representation of non-Japanese Asian characters in videogames takes on more meaning when we consider the political tensions that continue to reverberate between Japan and its former colonial sites. South Korea still seeks some kind of apology or restitution for the years of Japanese occupation, while Korean women comprise the majority of 'comfort women' who were sexually exploited by the Japanese military during the war. Many Korean nationals who could not be repatriated after the war remain in Japan as a marginalized minority known as *zainichi* Koreans (literally meaning 'Koreans who stayed in Japan'), as we shall see below.[23] The resentment of South Korea towards its Japanese occupiers was seen at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in February 2018: the TV commentator who described Japan as an industrial and technological wonder which provided an excellent 'model' for South Korea to follow in the postwar years caused NBC to apologize before taking him off the air, making headlines around the world.[24] Meanwhile, Okinawa continues to pose problems for Japanese politicians, as a growing Okinawan independence movement seeks not only freedom from the American military, but also a political separation from the Japanese mainland in a return to pre-1879 statehood.[25] Lastly, former colonial sites in the Philippines, Southeast Asia and Micronesia still host visits from Japanese war veterans seeking to come to terms with their wartime experience, keeping the war real and visible to residents.[26] In this kind of atmosphere, the ways in which Japanese game developers choose to represent Korean, Okinawan and Southeast Asian characters will have real-world effects.

The problematic relationship between Japan and its colonial Others is made very clear in game peripherals that accompany the *SoulCalibur* series. The colonized status of Korea, Ryūkyū and Southeast Asia is reflected clearly in maps and 'character correlation' charts such as those in *SoulCalibur: New Legends of Project Soul*, a book containing many details of character design and backstory.[27] The main chart is mostly taken up with Europe, then Japan, then the Ming Empire and other places important to the game narrative. In contrast, Korea is represented by a small box with just two names, the living Seong Han Myeong and the dead Yi Sun-Sin. Korea has no arrows projecting outwards from it to indicate influence or impact on other places or characters. Instead, there are two large arrows pointing towards Korea, one from Hideyoshi Toyotomi labelled 'invaded after uniting Japan'; the other comes from Emperor Ming, labelled 'sent troops.' Korea thus appears only as the object of invasion. This is underscored in a later section titled 'State of Japan at the End of the Seventeenth Century' (Project Soul 2014: 121). Although they are not named, pictures of Seung Mi-na and Yun-seong appear here, 'among the Korean warriors who fended off Toyotomi's invasions.' The Asia map has more detail, with a box designated 'Joseon Dynasty' and a large arrow pointing from Japan to Korea, labelled 'invade.' In the region descriptors, Korea takes up the least space, with

commentary focusing on the Korean navy repelling the invaders. Similarly, the section 'Hideyoshi's Troops' describes the strength of Korean resistance, emphasizing Korea's status as an object of invasion (2014: 124–125).

In contrast to the warrior spirit accorded the Korean fighters, there is no mention of Ryūkyū or Southeast Asia in the main character chart, just a box labelled 'Maxi's crew members' (2014: 12–13). Talim is not included in the book or the character correlation chart. The Ryūkyū Kingdom does appear in the relationship chart for Japan, occupying about the same amount of space as the Satsuma Domain. Okayama Domain (Bizen) is the smallest icon, included as the birthplace of Mitsurugi Heishirō. Mitsurugi himself is accorded a full-page spread on 'The Life of a Bodyguard in the Sengoku Era' including 'Timeline of the Swordsman Heishiro Miturugi,' from his birth in Bizen in 1561 to his departure for foreign lands in 1607.[28] The first two pictures on the page show Japanese castles, followed by a battle scene and a burning fortress in China, as well as the Tower of Lost Souls from the game narrative. Mitsurugi, more than any other character in *SoulCalibur*, is attached to real historical events and places. His timeline mentions the Battle of Nagashino in 1575, Noshima Castle, Takamatsu Castle in Bicchu, joining Hideyoshi's forces in 1590, and arriving too late for the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. In these ways, the liminal position of Korea, Ryūkyū and Southeast Asia is reinforced in game peripherals, while the central subject-position of Japan is strengthened.

Videogame representation, like any artistic representation, can betray deep-seated attitudes towards race, gender and other kinds of social positioning, with the potential to alienate and possibly offend audiences, especially when the artistic object is exported overseas. As Homi Bhabha argues, it is not the stereotyped representation of such places in and of itself that is problematic, but what that stereotype means for social relations between the subject (the nation creating the artistic work) and the object (the nation being depicted). Bhabha states:

> The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference ... constitutes a problem for the *representation* of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations.
>
> (1994: 75, original emphasis)

In other words, Bhabha says that the main point about stereotype is not its falseness but the fact that it is fixed, unchangeable, immutable in the imagination. The stereotype also denies 'the play of difference,' insisting that Self and Other are complete opposites with no liminal ground in which to play or be playful. The Other is always an object, something to be looked at or played with as a toy, not someone to be played *with* as an equal in social relations. I find this quote very interesting because Bhabha talks about play. In *SoulCalibur*, we play with the Other, and as the Other. But by inhabiting the body of another, we also foreground our own identity. In fighting games in particular, the skills of the player

are foremost, with the skills of the character subsumed into our own manipulative skillset. The social reality – the subjectivity – of the character is absent, and we merely enjoy the spectacle of a time and place far away from 'here.' It is these social relations that are at stake in any construction of the Other, particularly when colonial practice forms the image and continues to reverberate today. Fighting games depend on stereotype, archetype, and quickly distinguishable figures, for the purposes of gameplay as well as marketing and localization, meaning that essentialized representations of the Other are inevitable in the genre.

Even so, play has been posited as one of the key concepts of post-colonial discourse, foregrounded by Jacques Derrida in his theory of deconstruction (Mukherjee 2017: 104). Because videogames are cultural objects that are actively played, they remain open to player interpretations, decision-making and alternative play styles. As Mukherjee concludes in his book on videogames and post-colonialism, games are able to 'challenge the centrality and fixity of readings and offer a multiplicity of perspectives' (2017: 111). I have also argued for this viewpoint in regards to the *SoulCalibur* series (Hutchinson 2007). The 'fixed reading' of a Japan-centric worldview can be disrupted by player choices that determine the narrative, playing only as Korean characters and beating the Japanese samurai, for example.[29] As such, this kind of multiplicity of perspectives and plurality of player-determined narratives can be understood in terms of a postcolonial counter-discourse.

On the other hand, the static visual representations of the characters are always present in the ubiquitous character select screen, and it is arguable to what extent player action can undermine or subvert the Japanese 'social imaginary' of colonial discourse embedded in the text.[30] The static character designs appear in 'face-off' screens before battle, character galleries, customization screens, and narrative stills within the game, as well as in cabinet and cover art, game manuals and downloadable content such as computer wallpaper. The *Soul-Calibur* series tagline, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, offers a promise that players can 'transcend history and the world,' but it seems that both history *and* the world are constantly positioned in the player's field of vision. The significance of the tagline becomes more evident when considered in the context of postcolonial theory, as timelessness has long been recognized as one of the hallmarks of Orientalist and Occidentalist construction (Carrier 1995: 4–5). As I have argued elsewhere, the specificity of the sixteenth-century setting in *Soul-Calibur* is erased by the ageless nature of the 'tale' being 'eternally retold' (Hutchinson 2016: 162). The 'timeless eternal' of colonialist discourse conveys a fixed message that will never change, as well as an impression of strength and authority (Said 1995: 72). The characters in *SoulCalibur* do not provide realistic depictions of people from specific countries and cultures, so much as Japanese ideas and preconceptions about national identity, based on specific historical circumstances.

Colonial rivals: Korea in soccer-themed videogames

The colonialist representation of Asian nations is also evident in other kinds of videogames with win–lose binary structures. In sports games, we find various Asian countries represented as opponents in various kinds of international team sports, from rugby to basketball. Japan's most intense sporting rivalry is undoubtedly that against the South Korean soccer team, and this intensity is reflected in numerous soccer-themed videogames from a range of development companies. The treatment of the South Korean soccer team in videogames is analogous to real-world negative attitudes, with Korea sometimes rated poorly in skills or left off the lineup altogether. The representation of Korea in soccer-themed videogames reflects the complicated relationship between Japan and Korea on the soccer field through history, not only rivals but colonizer and colonized, which has presented real logistical difficulties in team names and regional representation.

Both Japan and Korea have long soccer-playing histories, encountering the game from British naval officers in the late nineteenth century.[31] But during the period of Japanese colonial rule, Korean soccer players were subsumed into the sphere of 'Greater Japan.' Local matches between Korean and Japanese players became public events for resistance against the Japanese oppressor, stoking Korean nationalist fervour and maintaining Korean identity. This came to a head in 1935 with the creation of the All-Japan All-Comers Tournament, featuring teams from across the Empire. Korea's Hansong team (known as All-Keijō in Japanese) won the first tournament, leading to a contentious debate on the makeup of the Japanese soccer team for the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Although Hansong had the best players, only two of their members were selected. After the war, Korean soccer developed quickly, with Korea joining FIFA in 1947 and reaching the finals of the World Cup in 1954. Japan, on the other hand, joined FIFA in 1929, but would not qualify for the FIFA World Cup until 1998.[32] In the 1970s and 80s, Japan failed to perform well at the international level, with Korea dominating Asian soccer and more prominent on the world stage. The World Cup qualifying match between Japan and South Korea on 26 October 1985 'marked yet another defeat at the hands of Korea' in front of a capacity crowd at Tokyo's National Stadium, disappointing Japanese fans on their home ground.[33]

Given this history, it is hardly surprising that Korea was absent from the first major soccer-themed videogame in Japan, Nintendo's *Soccer* (1985). The game featured seven teams from around the world, representing the USA, Great Britain, France, West Germany, Brazil, Japan and Spain.[34] These countries were thus constructed as the main 'soccer nations' of the time, and it is notable that Japan is the only Asian country represented. More realistically, Sega's *World Championship Soccer* (1989) featured most of the actual soccer teams playing around the world at the time. Each was given a rating of 1–5 based on their perceived skill, with Brazil, Argentina, France, West Germany and the USSR rating highest (5), and China and Japan at the lowest level (1). Korea was also represented, with a rating of 2, along with Morocco, Algeria and Peru.[35] This is an

interesting example of Japan representing itself as a new entry on the world scene, humble but with ambitions to join the best. In contrast, Nintendo's *World Cup* (1990) features 13 international teams, with Japan the only Asian representative, competing on an equal footing with Argentina, Brazil, England, France, Mexico and others. It may be the case that Nintendo, a more conservative and traditional development company, was more Japan-focused than Sega, which prided itself on its international outlook.[36] Sega's 3D *Virtua Striker* (1994) and *Worldwide Soccer '97* both included teams for Japan and South Korea in the Asia/Oceania bracket, without the unfair ranking system of earlier Nintendo games.

Through the 1990s, the soccer rivalry between Japan and South Korea only intensified. When South Korea lost to Japan in the 1993 World Cup Asian Zone qualifier, some Korean fans called it 'the worst humiliation since the 1910 annexation.' Just a few days after this, Japan's 2–2 draw with Iraq in Doha (the capital of Qatar) sent South Korea through to the finals anyway, in a crushing ignominy that Japanese fans dubbed 'The Tragedy of Doha' (*Dōha no higeki*) and Koreans gleefully called 'The Miracle of Doha' (*Doha ui Gijeok*).[37] Probably as a result of this furore, the Japan-only release *Kunio-kun no Nekketsu Soccer League*, developed by Technōs in 1993, has a distorted and negative view of the South Korean soccer team, at such odds with reality that it is featured prominently on the trope website 'No Koreans in Japan!' As the website sarcastically notes, South Korea 'are the weakest team in the game, being even worse than such real-life soccer powerhouses like Thailand, Mongolia, and New Guinea.'[38] The SNES game *Super Formation Soccer 94*, also a Japan-only release, omits South Korea from the lineup. Real-world games between Japan and South Korea at this time saw Japanese fans lustily singing the imperial *kimi ga yo* anthem before matches and waving *hinomaru* flags. These current symbols of Japanese national identity were not officially designated the national anthem and flag until 1999, when the government confirmed their status in the face of strong opposition.[39] John Horne and Derek Bleakley see this activity as 'a safer form of Japanese national identification' (2002b: 129) than the fierce intellectual clashes over *Nihonjinron* discourse, to say nothing of the violent hooliganism of soccer fans in other countries, but this assessment is undermined by the negative representations and exclusions of the South Korean team in 1990s soccer-themed videogames.[40]

Officially licensed videogames featuring the Japan Professional Football League, or 'J-League' for short, proliferated after its establishment in 1992. The first was Nintendo's *J-League Fighting Soccer* for the Game Boy (1992), followed quickly by many others, such as Sega's *J-League Pro Striker* (1993) and Namco's *Prime Goal* (1996). Konami's *J-League Jikkyō Winning Eleven* (1995), also known as *Pro Evolution Soccer*, is still going strong in 2018. Soccer itself has benefited from this kind of commodification, alongside consumer goods and manga like the long-running *Captain Tsubasa* series (Watts 1998). A massive boom in soccer videogames was reported in *Wired* magazine (Snow 2008), with rising sales attributed to the growth of soccer in Japan and Korea

following their co-hosted World Cup of 2002. This co-hosting in itself was problematic, studied extensively in scholarship on Japan-Korean relations.[41] More recently, tensions have arisen in the J-League with the signing of *zainichi* Korean players to Japanese teams. The situation reached a head in 2014 when the Urawa Reds signed the *zainichi* Korean player Tadanari Lee, a striker who had represented Japan in the 2008 Summer Olympics, with a famous goal knocking out Australia in the 2011 Asian Cup. But Urawa supporters reacted with racist comments, hanging a banner in the stadium reading 'Japanese Only.' In punishment, supporters were banned from the next Urawa game, and the match famously took place in an empty Saitama Stadium (ironically constructed for the 2002 co-hosted World Cup).[42]

Of all the marginalized minorities living in Japan today, residents with Korean origins are at once highly visible in popular culture and also faced with terrible bias and discrimination. As John Lie (2001) has shown, *zainichi* Koreans contribute greatly to Japanese arts, sports and entertainment, but unlike the K-Pop stars from mainland Korea, *zainichi* Korean people face more obstacles in their careers and everyday life, with limited prospects for education, employment and marriage compared to Yamato-Japanese citizens. While some Korean residents cling fiercely to their national and cultural identity, others choose to keep their background hidden and pass as Japanese.[43] The *zainichi* experience is of interest to many readers and moviegoers in Japan: *zainichi* literature proliferates, and films like Sai Yōichi's *All Under the Moon* (1993) and Isao Yukisada's *GO* (2001) enable Japanese audiences to empathize with the Korean-Japanese experience and feel for a moment what it must be like to live as a Korean in Japan.[44] In videogames, however, there are no main playable characters identifiable as *zainichi* Korean, and minor Korean characters are marked by their Otherness, as marginalized people in contemporary society. This marginalized status has borne some interesting narratives in the action genre, particularly in Sega's popular *Yakuza* series (2005–2016). These games are set in realistic environments simulating contemporary Japan, with long gameplay times allowing for deep psychological development on the part of the main protagonist and supporting characters. Now in its sixth iteration on PlayStation 4, the *Yakuza* series has some of the most positive and complex representations of Korean characters in Japanese videogames.

Korea in the *Yakuza* series: minorities on the margins

In some videogame genres, the Asian Other is conspicuous by its absence: in Chapter 7 we saw how the Japanese games industry has shied away from war-themed games involving Asian nations. Kojima Hideo also based his war-themed games in various interesting locations around the world with the exception of Asia, as we saw in Chapter 8. While I have not analyzed dating simulations or school-based sims in this book, it can be noted here that few non-Japanese Asian characters appear in these games, which focus on very specific social situations in a Japanese office or high school. The JRPG genre tends to

feature main characters with a 'blank-slate' construction like Link, onto whom the player can project their own identity, or a *shōnen*-style male character like Tidus representing the 'everyman,' with the emphasis on the quest itself rather than the nationality of the character. JRPG characters hail from fictional worlds, betraying their 'Japaneseness' through ideology and attitudes rather than specific countries of origin. To find more realistic depictions of Japanese society, including a range of characters with different ethnicities, it is useful to look at the action genre. Here we find many stereotypes of the Asian Other, with storylines involving clashes between different mafia/Triad or martial arts groups. China often takes the position of the antagonist in these games, the most famous of which is undoubtedly *Shenmue* (1999). In other titles, the Korean mafia fills this position, acting as the foreign Other for various turf wars. The *Yakuza* series employs Korea in this way, but complicates the Korea–Japan relationship by including *zainichi* Korean characters prominently in the narrative.

Known as *Ryū ga Gotoku* in Japan, translating as 'Like a Dragon,' the *Yakuza* series was created by Nagoshi Toshihiro, with the first two games written and scripted by yakuza crime novelist Hase Seishu (Kwan 2016: 143). The main narrative of the first *Yakuza* title introduces a foreign Korean crime syndicate, the Jingweon Mafia, whose members have Korean names and are listed in the *Yakuza Wikia* as Korean in nationality. This group plays a similar role to Triad gangs in Japanese action films, the Asian Other against whom the native Japanese gangster can assert his manly code of honour. Throughout the series, the Korean mafia members are depicted as suave and competent. Their leader in *Yakuza 6* is the charismatic Joon-gi Han, often shown with a jacket and scarf over his bare chest. An ambitious entrepreneur, Han takes over the Stardust hostess club and introduces more sexual enticements for customers. Han may be seen as the sexualized Korean character in the mode of Yun-seong from *Soul-Calibur*, with bleached grey-white hair pointing to his essential Otherness. In this he is similar to the main antagonist of *Yakuza 2*, Gōda Ryūji, with hair dyed a bright blond. Known as the 'Dragon of Kansai,' Gōda was the natural son of the Jingweon boss and his wife Suyeon Jon, adopted by Jin Gōda after the famed 'Jingweon massacre' left most syndicate members dead 20 years previously. Gōda is thus a *zainichi* Korean character, with a Japanese name but Korean heritage.

The most well-known *zainichi* characters in the *Yakuza 2* narrative are Yeongmin Ji and Daejin Kim, who both survived the Jingweon massacre as young adults. The two men are spared by Kazama Shintarō, leader of the Dojima yakuza clan, on account of their youth. Both men take Japanese citizenship and change their names, passing as Japanese.[45] It is a major plot point of *Yakuza 2* that these men – now named Kurahashi Wataru and Terada Yukio – are secretly of Korean heritage. Their *zainichi* status is all the more shocking since both have attained positions of high responsibility in their chosen professions, Kurahashi as the chief superintendent of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police and Terada as the fifth leader of the Tojo yakuza clan. Character descriptions tend to play up the plot twists with phrasing like 'In truth, Terada was actually a Korean named

Daejin Kim.'[46] Similarly, Sayama Kaoru in the same game is a prominent detective in the Osaka police force, but does not know that her mother was Suyeon Jon (making her Gōda Ryūji's half-sister). These astonishing revelations give much narrative excitement to *Yakuza 2*, and also show the strength of 'passing' discourses in contemporary Japan. If it were widely acceptable to discover one's Korean heritage and share that knowledge openly, the plot twists of *Yakuza 2* would lose much of their impact.

The *Yakuza* series is also notable for including realistic portrayals of foreign Korean nationals who live successfully as immigrants in Japanese society, including Mirei Park, director of the idol talent agency Dyna Chair in *Yakuza 5*, who was an idol singer herself in her youth. A visiting Korean pop star named Il Yu-Jin must also be accompanied around town in one of *Yakuza 2*'s side missions, with the aim of avoiding his many enthusiastic fans.[47] This speaks to the growing popularity of K-Pop music in contemporary Japan, as does the close relation between the Korean and Japanese idol industries in *Yakuza 5*. The game *Yakuza 4* has been noted as directly 'averting' or contradicting the 'No Koreans in Japan' trope, by way of its Korean immigrant characters inhabiting Little Asia.[48] Tanimura Masayoshi, a half-Japanese, half-Thai policeman, grew up in Little Asia and feels great sympathy with its residents. Side plots in the game involve Tanimura acting as Korean language interpreter for the police force as he seeks to protect Korean immigrants from exploitation and unsafe labour conditions.

Embodying the Other

Poet and activist Thien-bao Thuc Phi has criticized videogames that place Asian characters into stereotyped roles such as the yakuza thug or the Triad member. Phi (2009) argues that these types of characters remain as mere represented objects, rather than taking a subject position. But when the narrative as a whole takes a sympathetic approach to the lived reality of those marginalized members of society, then the player is forced to reckon with the marginalized position of the character vis-à-vis the police and other established institutions. The example of Rockstar's *GTA: San Andreas* (2004) shows that when a racial minority figure is introduced as the main playable character in a narrative-based action-adventure or role-playing game, the fact that the minority is placed in the subject-position of the player has a great effect on the industry. The African-American main character Carl Johnson (CJ) was revolutionary, and had a demonstrated impact – on players who felt they were 'coming home' to Grove Street, as well as on industry insiders who had thought that a black main character was an impossibility.[49]

I can imagine that the Japanese games industry will produce such a game in the future, with a sympathetic *yakuza* character in the lead role. This character could have an arresting secret which he (probably he) finds out during the course of the narrative, such as finding out he has *zainichi* or *burakumin* origins.[50] Dealing with this identity crisis would provide suitable psychological development for the

character, while enlisting the player's sympathies for people marginalized in Japanese society. An even stronger statement could be made by incorporating *zainichi* status into the character design from the start, so the player experiences discrimination and persecution at the hands of mainstream institutions, much as CJ does in *San Andreas*. If the industry takes the position of 'marginalized person' as their starting point, many interesting narratives could result. Manipulation rules could also make the player experience certain limitations or restrictions in their abilities or movement, for example, bringing home the realization that non-Yamato people in Japan face a different set of realities in life.

Although Japanese literature underwent many revolutions in the Meiji period to produce the first 'modern novel,' Futabatei Shimei's *Drifting Clouds* (1887), it was not until 1906 that Shimazaki Tōson produced *The Broken Commandment*, featuring a member of the outcast *burakumin* community as its main character.[51] This novel was the first major literary effort to directly address discrimination and the Japanese rhetoric of blood purity. Tōson's novel has attracted criticism, as a Yamato Japanese person taking on the voice and subject-position of a community to which he did not belong. But without *The Broken Commandment*, Japanese literature would have taken much longer to feature *burakumin* and members of other marginalized groups as main characters. Nakagami Kenji, the great *burakumin* author popular in the 1970s, would undoubtedly have faced a steeper uphill battle, with more obstacles to publication. The novels and stories of *zainichi* Korean writers may not have found an audience. Now, when foreign-born Korean characters and Japan-born *zainichi* characters are becoming more numerous in literature and other artistic media, videogames are the next logical step. The difference with the game medium is that the Korean character can appear not only in terms of realistic representation, but also in the process of player embodiment.

Through this book we have seen how players of all kinds of videogames embody the Other, identifying with a game's character to various degrees in both diegetic and non-diegetic space. In fighting games, a player often identifies extremely closely with one particular character, as a physical extension of their fighting body. In linear narrative forms, this melding takes place over a longer period of time, and is more psychological in nature. It is most probably outside the fighting game genre where we will see a realistic representation of the Other come together with a subject-positioning of the player as that Other. In this process, the Other becomes the Self.

Playing *GTA: San Andreas*, I became CJ for 200 hours. I look forward to a Japanese game that will place me in a non-Yamato position for a similar amount of time. *GTA: San Andreas* was developed by Rockstar North, a non-American company, occupying an external viewpoint on US society. In the absence of prominent *zainichi* Japanese game developers, it may fall to a studio outside Japan to develop such a game for the Japanese market. Japanese game companies are generally conservative, with Nintendo's 'consensus management' still the norm in many studios. It also depends on genre – it is unlikely that we will see a foreign-born person, *zainichi* or *burakumin* main character in a fantasy

RPG any time soon. But certainly, in game genres dependent on the simulation of social reality, such as gangster narratives or school simulations, the 'outcast' character could provide a compelling player experience of subjectivity through social positioning. In this way, Japan's colonial legacy, as well as its inherently multiethnic demographic composition, could point the Japanese games industry in new and thoughtful directions.

History, memory, and re-imagining war

Part III of this book has examined Japanese attitudes to war, nuclear weapons, and the colonial history through a range of videogames and genres, from grand strategy in battles between warlords in the feudal era, to WWII-themed arcade shooters and online collectible card games, 'tactical espionage action,' fighting games, sports games and first-person action roleplay. The ideology put forward by most of these games has been on the conservative side, either glorifying war or criticizing it from a safe observer position. War and colonization have been positioned mostly in the past, preferably the distant past. Kojima Hideo's vision of war, and Japan's place in it, is in the end a remarkably sanitized view of Japan as a victim, enabling a strong anti-war stance. Putting this together with the centralized, privileged positioning of Japan in fighting games and sports games, it is unsurprising that Japan's former colonies are depicted in problematic ways in these genres.

It is perhaps no coincidence that *SoulCalibur*, the fighting game series which included Korean and other colonial characters from its very beginnings, also aimed to 'transcend history and the world' by its emphasis on timelessness and myth. But *SoulCalibur* depends heavily on essentialized constructions of the Other, marked by physical difference and imperial narratives. By setting the game's action in the sixteenth century, imperialism may be understood as the machinations of the Dutch East India Company rather than the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. That Japanese colonialism is elided in the series speaks to the continuing strength of the Japanese Empire in historical memory. Overall, this section of the book has shown a country still caught up in its own vision of the past, still processing and re-processing the identity crisis of a failed war and empire. Videogames provide a rich medium for re-imagining the past, in alternative fictions and play. Videogames also enable grand experiments with human nature, as in Kojima's games of nuclear disarmament. For players, this presents exciting opportunities to approach the war, history and the colonial legacy in new ways, gaining nuance and added layers of meaning with each successive generation of game design. Japan's view of itself, and of its relations with Asia and the West, will continue to be worked out in videogames, incorporating varied perspectives as the medium matures. The Japanese perspective on the past and the modern world may also be understood in terms of Japanese culture, reflected and disseminated in videogames as artistic works that are products of their time.

Notes

1 See Hutchinson (2016), an earlier analysis of colonialism in the *SoulCalibur* series based on detailed analysis of character design. In this earlier work, I also analyze representations of Europe and 'the West' in terms of Occidentalism.

2 Good examples of these arguments are found in Said (1993, 1995), Spivak (2006), Bhabha (1994).

3 Hutchinson (2016). On archetypes of ninja and samurai in Japanese films, see Barrett (1989). In 2006 the two companies Namco and Bandai merged to become Namco Bandai Games, renamed as Bandai Namco Entertainment in 2014.

4 The nine main games are the original arcade release *Soul Edge* (1995), ported to PlayStation consoles in 1996 and released as *Soul Blade* in the USA, Australia and Europe; *SoulCalibur* (1998), in arcades and on the Dreamcast console; *SoulCalibur II* (2002), in arcades, PS2, Xbox and Nintendo Gamecube; *SoulCalibur III* (2005), in arcades and PS2; *SoulCalibur Legends* (2007), a spin-off title for Nintendo Wii; *Soul-Calibur IV* (2008), on PS3 and Xbox 360; *SoulCalibur Broken Destiny*, a spin-off game for the PlayStation Portable (PSP) in 2009; *SoulCalibur V* (2012) on PS3 and Xbox 360; *SoulCalibur: Lost Swords* (2014), on PlayStation Network, and *SoulCalibur VI* (2018) on the PlayStation 4, Microsoft Windows and Xbox One.

5 *SoulCalibur* has long used popular character tie-ins to boost marketability and sales, including Ezio from *Assassin's Creed*, Darth Vader from *Star Wars*, and Link from the *Legend of Zelda*.

6 I believe that the increasingly sexualized construction of Sarah Bryant in *Virtua Fighter* and Nina Williams in *Tekken* took their cue from Ivy in *SoulCalibur*, setting off a 'sexualization race' among companies who could produce (and get away with) the most outrageous skin exposure and physical forms. As mentioned earlier in this book, the decadent trajectory led ultimately to *Dead or Alive: Beach Volleyball Edition*, with female characters performing nearly naked for the presumed male audience.

7 See designer notes in Project Soul (2014: 32). Character designer Shimazaki Mari admits that Ivy's costume in *SCV* is 'probably the most out of place as far as the game's historical setting is concerned,' although 'all of the materials were things that she could have acquired in the 17th century' (Project Soul 2014: 159). However, the main question for me is not the anachronism of Ivy's costume but the impossibility of her physique. Shimazaki mentions 'exposed skin' as one of Ivy's determining characteristics, but does not address the underlying structure of Ivy's body.

8 A companion book to *SCV* includes the double-page chart 'Bust Comparison,' featuring all the female characters either nude or nearly naked, with bust size in centimetres and cup size. On the same page, a tiny box labelled 'Extra: The Manly Men' features only six male characters, all in loincloths or other coverings (Project Soul 2014: 154–155). Recent games include more alternatives: Hilde's body is completely covered with plate armour, while Algol's slimmer yet chiselled physique offers homoerotic aesthetics: see designer comments (Project Soul 2014: 28).

9 SNK's *Samurai Shodown* was the first game to introduce weapons-based fighting, a clear antecedent to Namco's *Soul Edge* in 1995.

10 The online *SoulCalibur Archive* is a trove of detail on the designs of characters, costumes, sets, armour and weapons. Project Soul has published many strategy guides and artbooks for the series (e.g. 2012a, 2012b). Each title has dedicated guides and walkthroughs, in English and Japanese.

11 On practical reasons for stereotype in this genre see Hutchinson (2007: 286).

12 W.G. Beasley (1987: 11) criticizes Myers and Peattie (1984) for minimizing the impact of Japanese expansion into Manchuria and Chinese territories after 1931.

13 For more on the Korean colonial experience, Japan's Orientalist discourse, and how these relate to tensions today, see Chapman (2008: 84–114). On Japan-Korean relations in the 1990s see Bridges (1993).

14 Hutchinson (2016: 171–172). For more on Okinawan colonial identity see Taira (1997); on Micronesia see Peattie (1984), also Falgout, Poyer, and Carucci (2008).

15 In the first game *Soul Edge*, it is Mitsurugi's image that first fills the screen in arcade attract mode, while his face is the default choice for Player One in the character select screen. Although the P1 icon is highlighted for different characters in subsequent games, Mitsurugi continued to be honoured with the top-left position in the character select screen, following the conventions set by Ryu and Akira in earlier fighting games. *SoulCalibur VI* has Mitsurugi in default P1 position for Arcade Mode.

16 Radical *shishi* from the southern states of Chōshū and Satsuma went on to form the Meijji government (Huber 2005). Bizen was part of the Satchō alliance, so Mitsurugi's opposition to the Westerners may be interpreted as both symbolic and historical in this sequence.

17 See Project Soul (2014: 57).

18 As the Bizen Osafune Sword Museum proclaims, 55 of the 111 Japanese swords designated National Treasures were crafted in Osafune in the Bizen domain, present-day Setouchi City in Okayama Prefecture. www.okayama-japan.jp/en/spot/1073 Accessed 28 December 2018.

19 Cherry blossoms bloom and fall quickly, thought to resemble the ephemerality of the samurai's life.

20 See Arthur's page on the *SoulCalibur Wiki* (2007-): https://soulcalibur.fandom.com/wiki/Arthur Accessed 28 December 2018.

21 See 'Shin' page at https://streetfighter.fandom.com/wiki/Shin Accessed 28 December 2018.

22 See Kotaku interview, www.gamespot.com/articles/super-street-fighter-iv-qanda-with-yoshinori-ono/1100–6253476/ Accessed 28 December 2018.

23 See Dudden (2008); on the varied and changing terms used to refer to Korean people in Japan, see Ryang (2009: 4–7). Many of the variances stem from places of origin (North or South Korea) or political or community affiliations. I will use the common term *zainichi Korean*, mindful of the differences that this usage elides. On discourses of *zainichi* identity and their change over time see Chapman (2008), Lie (2008). For more on the split between North and South Korea affecting *zainichi* Korean communities, and their legal status in Japan, see Ryang (2009: 8–12).

24 Qin (2018), Baker (2018). For more on international relations between Japan and Korea see Glosserman and Snyder (2015: 3–11, 93–119).

25 At the time of writing, the relocation of the US Marine Corps Futenma Air Base to the offshore location of Henoko Bay is one of the main issues for the mayoral race in the nearby town of Nago. Internet searches for Futenma Air Base will bring up pages of links to news items on the protests, which have dragged on for more than a decade. See *Japan Times* (2017).

26 For example, see Jose (2005: 124–127) on Japanese tourism and pilgrimages to sites in the Philippines.

27 Project Soul (2014). These charts serve the same function as SNK's Osaka office wall, tracking the many convoluted relationships between fighters from different nations and warring factions. The main chart is on pp. 12–13; also see 'Relationship Chart – Japan' (p. 121) and 'Relationship Chart – Asia' (p. 124).

28 'Miturugi' here is not a typo, but a variant of the transliteration of the Japanese syllable 'tsu' as 'tu.'

29 For a more detailed discussion of player skill and agency creating or disrupting fighting game narratives, see Hutchinson (2007).

30 See Martin (2018) on the 'social imaginary' of Japanese colonial discourse informing racial representations in *Resident Evil 5*.

31 On the history of Korean soccer see Lee (2002); for Japan see Horne and Bleakley (2002a).

32 Notably, it was Korea who knocked Japan out of the qualifiers in 1954 (Horne and Bleakley 2002b: 122–123).
33 See Horne and Bleakley (2002b: 124).
34 Review by Rignall (1986).
35 A good longplay of the game is found at TurkishBullet19 (2016), with the player hovering the cursor over many country selections to show their statistics.
36 SEGA stands for 'service games,' with roots in a US company that sold coin-operated entertainment to American military bases in Japan and Hawaii. Along with Capcom, Sega is seen as more Western-oriented in management and game design, but was listed on the Tokyo stock exchange as a Japanese company from 1986, with headquarters in Tokyo since 1984. For more on Sega's history see Pettus (2013), Horowitz (2018).
37 See Horne and Bleakley (2002b: 127).
38 See TV Tropes, 'No Koreans in Japan!' (n.d.)
39 See Horne and Bleakley (2002b: 127–128); McCormack (2002: 34).
40 Shimizu (2002) and Takahashi (2002) examine Japanese soccer fandom and hooliganism.
41 See McCormack (2002), Butler (2002) for more on the co-hosting decision.
42 The J-League chairman Murai Mitsuru commented that the ban was meant to punish the club as well as the supporters, as the club did not take down the banner (McKirdy 2014). The Urawa Reds are well known for their boisterous and sometimes violent supporters (Shimizu 2002).
43 For more on the *zainichi* experience in Japan as well as their origins, history and political differences within the community, see Mitchell (1967), Lee and De Vos (1981), Weiner (1989), Ryang (1997, 2000), Hicks (1997b). On the multiethnic nature of popular entertainment and sports in Japan see Lie (2001: 53–82).
44 Wender (2010) overviews *zainichi* literature in Japan; *All Under the Moon* is analyzed by Iwabuchi (2000). *GO* enjoyed 'outstanding Japanese box office success' (Kuraishi 2009: 114).
45 Modern adoption of Japanese names by Korean residents has its roots in the 1941 *sōshi kamei* law regarding household registry, which encouraged, 'but ultimately did not force,' colonial and wartime Korean residents of the Japanese Empire to adopt Japanese names (Ryang 2009: 5–6). Richard Kim's 1998 memoir *Lost Names* explores the effects of name loss on Korean residents in wartime, who by his account did feel forced into the change. Ryang examines the identity crisis engendered by *honmyō* (real name) versus *tsūmei* (passing name) in Japanese society (2009: 12–14); see also Hicks (1997b: 66–85).
46 See *Yakuza Wiki*, http://yakuza.wikia.com/wiki/Yukio_Terada
47 This resembles the *GTA: Vice City* (2002) missions to escort the Scottish punk rockers LoveFist around town while avoiding fans.
48 See TV Tropes 'No Koreans in Japan!' (n.d.)
49 See Miller (2008). *GTA: San Andreas* was the highest-grossing game for the PS2 in the U.S., selling over 17.3 million units. For more on racial dynamics and player-character identification in this game see Hutchinson (2017a).
50 Many *yakuza* members are of *zainichi* or *burakumin* origins, although hard data on numbers is elusive: Kaplan and Dubro (2003: 132–133), Hill (2003: 80). *Burakumin* are outcaste members of Japanese society, historically shunned for their involvement in 'impure' trades like tanning or butchery, among other reasons. A good overview of *burakumin* and other minorities in Japan is Weiner's introduction to his book (1997).
51 Futabatei's novel was a response to his friend Tsubouchi Shōyō's essay 'The Essence of the Novel' (*Shōsetsu shinzui*, 1885) which argued for a more modern approach to literature. See Ryan (1971).

Conclusions

In late 2015 Kojima Hideo split from Konami, founding Kojima Productions and relinquishing creative control of the *Metal Gear Solid* franchise. Many interpreted this move as the end of an era, not only for the *Metal Gear Solid* series, but for Japanese games and console games in general.[1] It is true that the Japanese industry experienced something of a slump at that time, as the development pipeline for major studios and platforms slowed and eyes turned instead to the possibilities of online, social and mobile gaming rather than waiting for the next big console or franchise title. With the advent of virtual reality gaming and the promise of Oculus systems, magazines began to predict a 'no console future' some years ago.[2] Against the odds, Japanese game designers have continued to push the capabilities of the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One consoles, and more recently the Xbox One X and Nintendo Switch, producing startling innovations and rich narratives to absorb players in new and interesting ways. Old titles like *Ōkami* have been remastered in high definition, while *Resident Evil* was remade with different controls, animated 3D models and widescreen support. The latest instalments of game series examined in this book have met with high sales and excellent critical reviews.

To give some examples, *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* (2015) sold three million copies in the first week of its release.[3] *Final Fantasy XV* (2016) reassured longtime fans of the series, with many feeling that Square Enix has redeemed itself after lower sales of *Final Fantasy XIII* and problems associated with the online MMORPG *Final Fantasy XIV: A World Reborn*. Games like *Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (2017) and *Super Mario Odyssey* (2017) have brought classic characters to fully explorable open-world environments. For all its faults, *Kingdom Hearts III* is breathlessly awaited by fans. The predicted 'end of Japanese console gaming' has not come to pass. In fighting games, *Tekken 7* has enjoyed high enrolments for tournament play in the *Tekken World Tour*, while the Evolution Championship Series features *Tekken 7* alongside *Street Fighter V Arcade Edition* and others. Any reader of *PC Gamer*, Kotaku, or IGN will see many Japanese titles reviewed each month alongside offerings from the big studios in Europe and North America. In short, the Japanese games industry is still a force to be reckoned with on the global stage.

In this book, I have examined a wide range of titles from a variety of genres, showing different methods of characterization, narrative and gameplay across different kinds of games. I have generally focused on arcade and console games rather than PC games, many of which were limited to Japan-only release.[4] I did not include genres such as dating simulations and *otome* games, visual novels, rhythm games, and many others.[5] I hope that other scholars will fill in these gaps and further broaden our understanding of Japanese game genres. What I have tried to do is give a broad overview through three different approaches to Japanese videogames, choosing case studies which best illustrate the main idea. Part I examined how Japan has been packaged as a cultural object in videogames, for consumption at home and abroad. Part II examined ideology and critique in Japanese videogames, addressing issues of social breakdown, nuclear power and bioethics in a range of genres from the JRPG through to stealth action, fighting games and survival horror. Part III analyzed the problems inherent in the war game genre in Japan, considering the legacies of nuclear attack and Japan's own colonial history. Through the book, I have sought to illuminate how players encounter Japanese culture through playing videogames from Japan, in terms of material culture and environment, artistic traditions, and the worldview of Japanese designers, shaped by current events.

The topic of 'Japanese videogames' is a large one, and I have taken two different approaches to the study in different chapters of the book. In some chapters I examined one game or one series of games in detail, performing a close reading, while in other parts of the book I took a broader cross-section to show the range of game genres concerned with a particular problem. Both strategies are useful: a close reading of one text allows for a detailed examination of imagery and its meanings, while a wide comparative study across a number of different genres can help us understand prevalent themes in videogames made at a certain point in time. In both cases, the videogame can be seen as expressing and joining a broader discourse on Japanese culture and society.

Throughout the book I have examined videogames as texts, artistic works which comment on their cultural context, sometimes as a reflection of the status quo, and at other times offering a critique on their sociopolitical environment. As such, some of the case studies could be read as counter-discourse to the mainstream, offering alternatives to the existing state of affairs and suggesting change. I have developed a number of ideas on videogames, ideology and discourse in this book, some of which will be uncontroversial and some of which may spur more discussion. Of the latter, I would include the idea that a single videogame title can be seen as a discursive structure in and of itself, and the idea that videogame play can be understood as a discursive act. These two ideas stem from existing studies on videogames and culture, videogames and ideology, games as rhetorical structures, gameplay as embodiment, and gameplay as a social and political action. Both ideas need further and more rigorous development, which I hope to address in future work, although I am sure many scholars may already be thinking along these lines.

Scholarship on Japanese videogames was for some time divided between anthropological studies of fans and players, and market/economic considerations of games as export objects, related through studies of the 'media mix' and fan consumerism. Neither approach adequately addresses the power dynamics inherent within the game text, or why Japanese game designers choose to represent Japan and its Others in the way they do. Because market and fan studies seem more connected to the 'real world' than text-based studies, they can seem more useful (or more utilitarian) on the surface. But textual studies also engage meaningfully with the real world, by situating the game text within its wider discursive context. That context includes Japanese culture, society, politics and the historical moment, as well as Japan's perceived place in the wider world. Japanese studios make games with the global export market in mind, meaning that game designers are not just making a statement about Japanese culture and identity in a hermetically sealed vacuum, but also representing Japanese culture and identity for an international audience. In this text-context scenario, the anti-nuclear critique of *Final Fantasy* not only acts as a re-processing of memory for the Japanese audience, but also as a warning to the whole world, simultaneously broadcasting the Japanese perception of Japan as a unique victim within that global community.

At the beginning of this book I stated that my main aim was to bridge the two fields of Japanese Studies and Game Studies, so here I would like to consider some advantages of including videogames in Japanese Studies, and Japanese production contexts in Game Studies. From the Japanese Studies perspective, I strongly believe that our field is greatly enriched by the inclusion of videogames in the range of art forms that we choose as an object of study. Including videogames in Japanese Studies means studying the entirety of Japanese artistic output – not just the 'classical' forms of Noh, bunraku, kabuki and the *Tale of Genji*, and not just the 'Cool Japan' exports of J-pop music, anime, manga, street fashion and cosplay, but also the first-person experiences of the arcade as well as the home console and PC, in a vast range of genres and ports allowing for a great variety of artistic expression and experimentation. Videogames provide a wealth of information about contemporary Japan, and how 'Japan' is represented in art today. Japanese Studies should take account of the impact that videogames can have on their audience, and recognize how big that audience really is – this new medium is the chosen form of entertainment for much of the current generation, and it is here to stay.

For our students, videogames provide useful textual evidence from contemporary Japan. We learn about the material culture of Japan by interacting with the 3D environment, whether it be the inside of a chaotically messy home in *Katamari Damacy* or the streets of Yokohama and Tokyo in *Shenmue, Persona 5*, or the *Yakuza* series. We learn about prevalent attitudes towards race, ethnicity, gender and sex, through the visual representation of characters as well as their behaviour and interactions with other characters in the same environment. The fears, anxieties, desires and dreams of the Japanese people are enacted and expressed through videogames, enabling the player to enter the world and

experience the same emotions as the main character. By embodying that character, the player experiences the world of the game more closely, being part of the narrative, making decisions that lead to different outcomes, or creating the narrative in the win–lose scenario of games with binary structures. Surface representations and their underlying rhetorical structures provide rich opportunities for study in this medium.

Similarly, Game Studies as a field is strengthened and deepened by taking into account the cultural context of Japanese games. Videogames as objects can be studied for their ludic properties as well as those elements that anchor the game in a specific culture and reflect a certain way of looking at the world. Studying the *Final Fantasy* or *Metal Gear Solid* series for their strategies of embodiment and player-character identification shows how they have been so successful on the world stage, as excellent examples of embedded ideology and deep psychological immersion. But when we place those series in their Japanese context we can also appreciate that ideology as deeply entrenched in the Japanese worldview, with specific ideas about family, war, nuclear power and bioengineering. Most games in this book are widely known across the world, triple-A titles from large studios with international production offices. But they also have their roots in the Japan of the 1980s and 1990s, with specific developments happening in the Japanese economy, family structure, and international relations. Kojima's obsession with nuclear weapons makes more sense in the context of a country remembering Hiroshima and experiencing a number of accidents at nuclear power plants, just as the reliance on genetic mutations in Japanese survival horror makes sense in the context of 1990s debates on assisted reproduction and cloning. Japan-specific attitudes to brain death help us understand the horror that Japanese audiences may feel towards the suspended animation experienced by Kazuya Mishima, Cloud Strife and Big Boss – a horror that may not be felt or even recognized as problematic by audiences elsewhere in the world.

The title of this book, 'Japanese Culture through Videogames,' thus points to a learning experience on the part of the player and scholar, using videogames as texts to learn about Japanese culture. Japanese games have their own distinctive elements, which have emerged over the course of this book. In terms of art and aesthetics, we have seen games that draw on Japanese anime and manga conventions as well as older ink drawings and hand-painted styles. The specificities of 3D rendering in creating realistic game environments have provided a 'Japanese feel' that is recognizable and imitated. The sexualized representation of even very young women's bodies in Japanese games may not be found so often in Western games, especially the inclusion of sexual relations in gameplay. On the other hand, guns and gun violence are much less prevalent on the Japanese screen. On the level of narrative and thematic content, we see a number of anxieties that are understandably more prevalent in Japanese games, particularly the fear of nuclear war and nuclear meltdown. Japanese games have a higher degree of ambivalence about war, and are actively engaged in negotiating history. Historical memory is a contentious issue that continues to inform studio choices

about what to include in games, and how to go about representing war and the figure of the heroic soldier. Other choices take place more on the level of assumptions and embedded attitudes, seen in the social divisions and omissions in game representation, as well as the echo of colonial oppression.

Similar observations could probably be made about the particular distinctions of games from anywhere in the world, as each country or region has its own pre-dilections for graphics, interfaces, game genres and narrative content.[6] So perhaps we should ask the question, what have Japanese games been able to do that games from other places haven't? At the most basic level, Japanese games offer us a Japanese view of the world. That view may be beautiful, idealized, Orientalist, ironic, nationalistic, biased, narrow-minded or expansive, depending on the game title, genre, and the time in which it was made. But the Japanese perspective enriches our own, allowing us to see the world from another angle, and expanding our vision. By playing Japanese videogames, we experience Japanese culture. The game does not have to lay claim to some kind of ineffable Japanese 'essence' or be the expression of 'authentic' or 'traditional' Japan (although many games do indeed lay claim to such things). The game is already a Japanese cultural artefact, and each game from Japan is equally 'Japanese,' even if the view put forth in the text is not the same as in other games from Japan. There is no one great monolithic 'Japanese culture,' that can be grasped and shown to others, nothing tangible we can point to and say 'Ha! That's it!' But playing Japanese videogames allows us to experience the vision of Japanese designers, how they see and represent 'Japan' to themselves and others. Playing Japanese videogames, we can not only learn about Japanese culture, but also realize our own assumptions, highlighted by differences we experience in the game text. This includes assumptions about what is funny, what is silly, and what is meaningful in gameplay. For this reason, the Japanese games industry provides an important counter-balance to the games produced in Europe and North America. I have thoroughly enjoyed my research into Japanese video-games during the writing of this book, and I hope to play many more.

Notes

1 Parkin (2015). Leigh Alexander has read the subtext of *Metal Gear Solid 4* as the 'console war' between the Western and Japanese games industries, a war that Kojima thought was unwinnable (Bissell 2006: 186–187).
2 This was one of the cover stories for *Games*[tm] issue 153, in 2014.
3 Griffin (2015).
4 Picard (2014) and Szczepaniak (2014) maintain that Japanese PC games are under-studied, and hope to remedy this with their scholarship.
5 Visual novels, dating sims and *otome* games also tend to be on the PC; rhythm games are generally studied *in situ* as part of arcade culture (Ashcraft 2008a; Katō 2011).
6 See the various essays in Mark Wolf (2015).

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