Representations of Japan by the video game industry: the case of *Ôkami* from a Japanophile perspective

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Abstract

Video games contain representations, and these can have effects on players, for example on the ways they understand certain concepts or see certain places. The purpose of this thesis is to delve into how Japan is represented in video games. With that target in mind, the video game *Ôkami* (Clover Studio, 2008) for Nintendo's *Wii* console has been analyzed as a case study, and the potential effects of its representations have been reflected on. In order to carry out this work, the context of the Japanese popular culture industry has been considered, while the particular perspective of a Japanophile has been adopted. The first concept refers to the combination of enterprises responsible of popularizing Japanese culture internationally through products (with manga, anime and video games as leaders) since the last years of the 20th century. Regarding Japanophiles, they are understood in this thesis as the most avid (non-Japanese) consumers of those products who, carried by a 'Japanophile' euphoria, have formed a social movement and an identity that are bound to Japanese culture.

The methods employed have mainly been an extensive literature review and a game analysis. The purpose of the literature review has been to provide theoretical background to the thesis, discussing three main subjects: Japanophilia and the Japanese popular culture industry, representations from a game perspective, and representations from a player perspective. This theoretical background has been built drawing mostly from the field of game studies, but also from the fields of cultural studies and cultural geography, constituting the research as an interdisciplinary one. Furthermore, the literature review has also helped to understand better the method of game analysis.

The thesis has produced four main results: firstly, the certainty that *Ôkami* constitutes a door from Japanese popular culture into Japanese traditional culture, allowing Japanophiles to access aspects of the country that do not usually prevail in the products they consume. This traditional world, however, appears commodified and re-conceptualized, displaying popular elements such as cliches. Secondly, the polysemic character of video games is reaffirmed, as well as the fact that they are better understood as generative substrates. This conclusion has been reached upon finding that many of *Ôkami*'s representations are very interpretable, and that some can even contradict each other. The main, most feasible representations of this kind portray Japan as a place of sexism, neoliberalism and ethnical supremacism. The third conclusion is that *Ôkami* contains elements that provide its depiction of the country with geographic authenticity, a feature that is interesting in light of how it can help players to understand better the Japanese reality. According to the fourth and last conclusion, *Ôkami*'s game world is understood as a world of Japanophile affect. In that case, Japan is depicted as a dreamworld that is possible, and Japanophile players are encouraged to bring their philia further and maximize their lifestyle.

Keywords: Representations, video games, Japan, Japanophilia, Japanese popular culture industry, *Ôkami*, game analysis

Acknowledgments

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1. INTRODUCTION

The popularity of digital games and its growth as an industry have experienced repeated bursts since the late 1980s decade and the 1990s, with games becoming, as a result, very relevant cultural elements in our society. Video games form game worlds, and most of those (if not all), along with their condition of virtual realities, contain representations of the material world. These are actually not elements inherent to video games, but rather to media in general. However, video games probably happen to be more complex of a medium than its counterparts, and that is, mainly, due to their procedural and ludic nature. This greater complexity is added to the representations conveyed too; they can represent places or human features, they can be more literal or more metaphorical, they can be very clear or very vague, very accurate or inaccurate, they can be more subjective or less subjective, and they can take the form of texts, stories and images, but also of interactive processes. In other words, these representations have a large amount of qualities and, thus, can be studied from several different angles. But also, in the representations within a game world, all those qualities and more work together, filling it with meaning. Much like with other types of media, when a game world contains reference to the material world, it certainly takes a chance on persuading its consumers (players) to see and understand something in the way it is represented, shaping their perception of a particular reality, which contributes in turn to a collective imaginary of the issue. This way, representations of the material world within game worlds have become very relevant in both social sciences and humanities, and that is the reason why I intend to look into the subject in this thesis.

But the vastness of the subject that was just explained is practically infinite, so what small bit of it am I focusing on, in this thesis? The interest that Japan and its culture have awoken in me for years, my previous research concerning them, my chance to spend a year there during this master's degree program, and the relevance of both the country within the video game industry, and the video game industry within the Japanese popular culture industry, have motivated me to inspect how it is being represented in game worlds. My background as a geographer has been a factor as well in the choice, giving some geographic perspective to the research, not because it focuses on particularly geographic features of a game world or because it draws chiefly from geographic theory (it does not), but because it has the characteristic of focusing on the representations and perception of a *place*. That differs from most of the representational game research done to this day, which tends to focus on other subjects such as history, gender or race.

Once to this point, this aim for the research seemed to be the clear choice, but it was obvious that its scope was still too broad, specially for a master's thesis; it needed to be more narrow. What in Japan or in its culture would I be focusing on, when studying the representations? Rather than answering that question and choosing a specific region, a cultural niche, or a subject to intersect with 'Japan' (such as the ones mentioned above) and ignoring everything left aside, I decided to narrow down the research backing it with a specific context and a point of view. These are, respectively, the Japanese popular culture industry and the 'Japanophiles'. These two concepts have been widely researched and deserve their own detailed explanation in the literature review and theoretical background section, but briefly, the first refers to the combination of enterprises responsible of popularizing Japanese culture internationally through products (with manga, anime and video games as leaders) since the last years of the 20th century. The second refers to the most avid (non-Japanese) consumers of those products who, carried by a 'Japanophile' euphoria, have formed a social movement and an identity that are bound to Japanese culture (in the West they are popularly known as the 'otaku'). The vast majority of them can be considered to be young, and among these, teenagers make up a big part.

This way, the representations of Japan and its culture in a game world are always studied in relation to those context and point of view in this thesis, without leaving part of them aside just because of the topic they refer to. This means that the focus is set on those representations which become more relevant if the game is studied as a piece within the machinery of the Japanese popular culture industry, and on how they may become relevant in relation to the Japanophile collective (specially the Western one) and its perception of Japan and its culture. Aside are left, for instance, the perspectives of a Japanese player, or a Western player who is a rather casual consumer of Japanese cultural products, or who simply cannot be considered a hardcore Japanophile, regardless of how much their perceptions coincide or not with those of the Japanophiles. It must be noted, however, that as it is explained in the methodology chapter, this is not a player-focused research, but a game-focused research. That means that, even though the perspective of the mentioned collective is highly taken into account in order to reach conclusions, it is solely the game content what has been researched throughout the fieldwork (a game analysis). In other words, what I do in this thesis can be understood as opening a product of the mentioned industry, like a box, in order to analyze its content as part of a bigger phenomenon of proven impact. This should help to understand what are those Japanophiles exactly consuming, and how that can potentially affect their collective imaginary.

It would have been interesting to select a few games and study all their content in order to conduct this research, but again, this is a master's thesis and it has its limitations. Therefore, and as advised during the master's thesis seminar, one sole game has been chosen for analysis: *Ôkami* for Nintendo's Wii console (2008, Clover Studio). More about its content and choice is detailed later on, but summarized very shortly, the game sets the player in an odyssey through a mythological Japan.

This introduction is followed by a chapter dedicated to the research plan. Next is a chapter on the methodology and the literature review that was needed to define it. After that, a chapter dealing completely with literature review comes, with the purpose of providing theoretical background to the research. For its part, the fourth chapter deals with the results obtained and the corresponding discussion, which will be developed along with their exposition. In the last chapter of the thesis the conclusions are explained.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research questions of this thesis are the following:

- What representations of Japan and its culture can be found in *Ôkami*, in light of the Japanese popular culture industry context?

- How *may* those representations impact the way Japanophiles perceive Japan and its culture?

Of course, there are a few concepts and other things regarding these questions that have not been explained in the introduction, and need to be commented now. Already in the first question appears the 'Japan and its culture' ensemble, continually used in this thesis, but what do I refer to with that, exactly? The science of geography recognizes two principal dimensions in the world, the mutual interaction of which becomes key in its theory; they are the physical world (approached through physical geography) and the human world (approached through human geography). This is not especially relevant for the thesis in theoretical terms, but it helps understanding my perspective in the research question. Basically, here 'Japan' is intended to stress the physical Japan (e.g. its relief, water bodies, climate, ecosystem...), whereas 'its culture' stresses the human Japan (e.g. its social and demographic structure, religion, traditions...).

Of course, studying the representation of all those subjects in *Ôkami* would be too ambitious, but the context stated in the first question and the perspective declared in the next one must be kept in mind, since they become the common denominator of everything that is paid attention at in the thesis, narrowing down the scope. Therefore, 'Japan and its culture' does not mean here that the whole of it is researched, but rather it implies that nothing in that whole is dismissed as long as it is relevant in light of how the image of the country is sold and co-constructed to and with the Japanophile collective. Having said that, *Ôkami* is evidently not a game trying to tell about the whole of 'Japan and its culture', but it has a specific topic instead, which is Shinto mythology. This is not to say that *Ôkami* contains representations of Shinto mythology only; that would be practically impossible. However, it is clear that some specific topics within 'Japan and its culture' revolve more than others around the theme of the game, and thus become more visible and relevant, leading in the portrayal of the country. For the sake of readability throughout the thesis, 'Japan and its culture' is normally simplified to just 'Japan' from here on.

Regarding the second research question, as the reader has probably noticed, the word '*may*' is stressed with italics. This is to underline the fact that it is not the actual impact that the representations have on the Japanophiles what is researched, a purpose that would require player-focused fieldwork such as surveys or interviews. Instead, the second question (unlike the first) aims for the potentialities of those representations for the said impact, regardless of them turning to an effect or not. As explained before, that effect is out of the scope of this thesis, so it is simply left as an interesting line for possible follow-up research in the future.

This research has not been designed to work around hypotheses, but instead it has played out inductively to a good degree. Still, there coexist normally both induction and deduction in a research, and of course, *Ôkami* was not approached without knowing at all what would it contain or how could it be worthy of study. In fact, those were relevant issues in the process of choosing it as the game to be analyzed. What I mean with this is that, despite not strictly working around specific hypotheses, a couple of general assumptions very likely to be true but not proven before the research served as a guide: firstly, the assumption that the image of Japan shown in *Ôkami* can be related to that one generally promoted by its cultural industry and consumed by the Japanophile collective. Secondly, the one that *Ôkami* largely deals with traditional aspects of Japanese culture due to its theme, and that this way it becomes a door not only to popular but also traditional culture for Japanophiles, something that does not always happen in the products they consume. These assumptions can be seen as the hypotheses, but they do not go further into detail than what has been explained. Therefore, the game analysis has been approached quite openly to anything that *Ôkami* has had to offer in order to answer the research questions.

Before concluding this chapter, a brief account of the limitations of this thesis is appropriate. There are two main limitations which affect the depth and length of the research in different directions. On the one hand, the original idea was to analyze a series of games, with the intention of obtaining a general picture of how Japan was represented in video games depicting it. Finally, that needed to be reduced to a single case study, which alone is not so broadly representative of the issue, but still is part of it. This limitation has been imposed chiefly by a lack of time in the thesis schedule, by the thesis format, which requires a good degree of narrowness in the scope, and finally by resources, since an analysis of multiple games would have required the purchase or rental of most of them, as well as the corresponding hardware, while this thesis is not funded. Instead, *Ôkami* was the only purchase needed. More about this research staying relevant as a case study is expounded in the methodology chapter. On the other hand, it is evident that this research would

have been more complete with a complementary player-focused fieldwork through which the actual impact of the studied representations in the collective imaginary of the Japanophiles could have been investigated. This complement was dismissed due to methodological complexity, detailed in the methodology chapter, but also due to the time, format and resource constraints already explained. By the same token, a complementary game developer-focused approach would have been interesting but had to be dismissed, especially considering supervisory advice and the known difficulty of reaching out to such sources.

3. METHODOLOGY

Two principal methods have been used in this research: literature review (the theory) and game analysis (the empirical fieldwork). Literature review has been chronologically the first method employed, but it has went on and overlapped with the game analysis. That is due to two facts: it was needed before approaching the fieldwork, so that that one could be faced properly and with some theoretical knowledge on the topics of the research, but the fieldwork did also reveal data which required new literature review in order to be treated.

In methodological terms, game analysis becomes the main support for the answer to the first research question, whereas literature review is on what the second research question is fundamentally based on. This is not to say that each method helps solving only one question. In the first one, the very answer is within the content of the game, but it would not be properly investigated without the help of previous research. For its part, the second one would not make sense as a question without a literature review on the phenomenon of Japanophilia, and solving a question with a player component just through a game-focused fieldwork would return too speculative conclusions. However, the results of this fieldwork certainly become a key once they are put in relation to that literature review.

The literature review has dealt with four main subjects, and thus it is constituted by its four corresponding parts. The first of this parts that should be commented is perhaps that one dealing with the method of game analysis. Since the purpose of this part of the literature review is not simply providing theoretical background, but actually allowing the next method to be developed properly, it is fully presented in this chapter, making it a methodology and literature review chapter at the same time. The other three parts of the literature review are expanded in the next chapter and deal with the following subjects: Japanophilia and the Japanese popular culture industry, representations from a game perspective, and representations from a player perspective. Since the literature review does not need further explanation as a method, an account of how the game was chosen, and how the method of game analysis was reviewed and conducted follows.

3.1. The game choice: *Ôkami*

This sub-chapter is dedicated to explaining how the process of choosing a game developed, and to providing a formal overview of *Ôkami* as a video game.

Once it was clear that an analysis of multiple games was not feasible, my biggest concern was how to keep the research relevant in relation to the targets of the thesis, if only one game was to be analyzed. In other words, if my main motivation for the research was to see how Japan was represented in video games in light of the impact that that could have on a collective imaginary, my fear was the content of a single game being too irrelevant in terms of that impact. The concept of 'case study' was the answer to my concerns. In that respect, the work of Ketokivi and Choi (2014) has helped consolidating this research as a case study while keeping it relevant. According to them:

> The essence of case research (...) is found in the duality of being situationally grounded, but at the same time, seeking a sense of generality. Meeting both requirements satisfies what we label the duality criterion. Being situationally grounded means one remains empirically disciplined and pays heed to contextual idiosyncrasies already in the data collection phase. Seeking a sense of generality in turn involves an attempt to transcend the empirical context and seek broader theoretical understanding through abstraction (p. 234).

The point, then, was to approach the analysis of *Ôkami* seeking that duality criterion. This way, the case study of *Ôkami* presented in this thesis arises as the study of a specific game with its particularities, but also as the study of that game as an example of a broader theoretical context. The relevance of the empirical research hinges on the "extent to which a sense of generality can be found in terms of theory" (p. 234), so the study of *Ôkami* is understood as a contribution to theory regarding the phenomena of the Japanese popular culture industry and the Japanophilia.

However, how does *Ôkami* constitute a relevant example within that context? In order to explain that, a formal overview of the analyzed game needs to be detailed. *Ôkami* was released for the first time in Europe in 2007, only for Sony's *PlayStation 2*. It must be noted, though, that it is the version for Nintendo's *Wii* that has been analyzed, which came in 2008. The reason for that is simply a matter of resources: I own a *Wii* console. Also, since the perspective of the Western Japanophile collective was taken in the research, it had to be a Western version of the game. The version in English was chosen, due to its major internationality. It is a single player, offline game, and in terms of genre, there is popular consensus in that it is an action-adventure game. *Ôkami* has much in common with the character of the Japanese popular culture scene, clearly falling within it. An example of that is its use of cel shading, reminiscent of the mangas and animes that are so relevant in the said scene. Other examples include the use of symbology that is recurrent in that industry,

such as the Japanese rising sun, or the fact that it greatly draws on one of its key franchise's game: *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*[1]. Even more importantly, *Ôkami* is known as a game about Japanese mythology, and as such, it is fully expected to be in the catalogs of those gamers who are most interested in the country and its culture. What I am trying to say is that *Ôkami* has the necessary qualities to be considered a game of reference among Japanophile gamers, and that makes it especially relevant as a case study within that context.
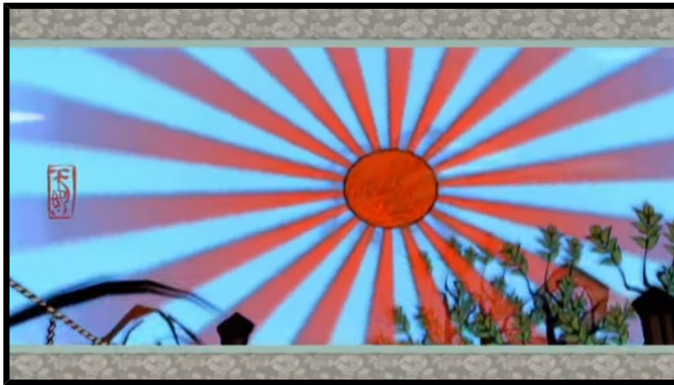

Figure 1. The Japanese rising sun shines in *Ôkami*'s sky.

Figure 2. The Japanese rising sun flag hangs from a stand at the VI Japan Weekend Barcelona.

Despite not selling according to Capcom's (financial backer of Clover Studio) expectations, the game was critically acclaimed since its release, obtaining a score of 92,65% in GameRankings and a 93 in Metacritic, as well as obtaining numerous awards, IGN's 2006 Game of the Year among them. Its scores were slightly lower than that in the version for *Wii*; it is probably due to the horrid implementation of the controls in that case, but anyway, that aspect of the game is not very relevant for the purposes of the thesis. Later, in 2011, a sequel for *Nintendo DS* called *Ôkamiden* (Mobile & Game Studio) would be released overseas.

Before proceeding to the next sub-chapter, the reasons behind choosing a game-focused approach over other kinds of approaches should be explained too. As expressed by Aarseth (2003: 3), playing a game is the most fundamental way to study it, meaning that it is the first priority and that, not doing it turns into a very big limitation. For that reason, given the limited resources I had, a game analysis through playing was my biggest and only priority. Without a doubt, it would have been very nice to look into the actual impact of the game content in its players, adding a player-focused approach, but that presented difficulties in terms of both available resources and methodological complexity. The perceptions players might have of Japan are not shaped by *Ôkami* only, but by a

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1 That can be seen, for instance, in the use of dungeons, the aspect of their maps, the fact that the main bosses must be defeated again towards the end of the game, or the story in which a terrible monster is sealed, then freed.

multitude of cultural products and other type of information available in their lives. Within the phenomenon of the Japanese popular culture, which is very transmedia, that fact is especially accentuated. Therefore, the origin of certain perceptions that Japanophiles might have of Japan is difficult to trace. Added to that, there is the fact that players are not necessarily conscious of all the effects of a game in their perceptions of a subject, which limits interviews and surveys as methods to find those effects. In summary, taking a player-approach to confront the inquiries of this thesis could be a very difficult task, and it deserves its own research project, as a possible continuation.

3.2. Game analysis as a method

Several researchers have inquired before into how games can be analyzed and have tried to turn the concept of 'game analysis', which has precedents such the analysis of literature or films, into a clearly defined method. It is appropriate here to check the most notable work that researchers have done in that regard. Konzack (2002) is one of the first to look into game analysis as a method, seeing two different levels in a computer game: the virtual space, which is limited by the game content, and the playground, which is both the game content and the players, including their culture (p. 90). This understanding is interesting enough for this thesis, since it stresses the fact that there is an active audience to a game, active in the sense that it collaborates with that game in the making of meaning, and providing a certain culture that exists around it. To *Ôkami*, Japanophiles are exactly that; a group of players (not all of the *Ôkami* players) who, with their activity, constitute a playground for the game, a space where its content is shared, debated or even performed. That playground is to be very much taken into account in the game analysis, even if it is rather focused on the virtual space.

Researchers like Zagal et al. (2005) have also provided interesting looks into the nature of game analysis from a general perspective, trying to set up a standard vocabulary for those willing to perform game analysis. They speak of interface, rules, goals and entity manipulation, as well as space and time. However, in this thesis the final aim is not just to analyze *Ôkami* wholly or in general terms. In other words, the game analysis is not the final purpose here, but a tool through which another specific target, defined by the corresponding research question, is to be pursued. Other researchers like Consalvo and Dutton (2005) offer a general vision of game analysis too, but in a different way: they provide a general methodology that allows analysis of any specific subject within a game. Their suggestion is to analyze the following four modules in light of the subject in question: Object Inventory, Interface Study, Interaction Map and Gameplay Log. Their contribution

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is nice, but again, it might not be the best fit in this thesis for two reasons: firstly, the fact that it only allows for very systematic game analyses. This can be very useful in research where multiple games are being analyzed and/or compared, but that is not the case here, where what is needed is a rather deep, single game analysis that is not limited by modules which might ignore interesting content existing outside of them. Secondly, the fact that their approach seems to be very ludological, leaving aside the more narratological aspects of a game. Not only is my intention to contemplate the both sides in *Ôkami*, but also I see the game as one where the narratological side takes on a very relevant, perhaps major role.

The more recent work of Fernández-Vara (2015) is also a holistic approach to game analysis, but more updated, and like Konzack's, it provides a couple of concepts that are inspiring and useful for the game analysis in this thesis. Fernández-Vara speaks of 'text' and 'paratext'. As far as I understand, 'text' works well as a synonym of 'information' here, forming all the content that a player has access to in a game. It is a concept with similar implications than Konzack's 'virtual space', but it is interesting that she sees it as 'text', which can be read as information, just like the text in a book can too. For its part, 'paratext', a concept actually coined by Genette (1997), is of course text too, but it refers to all that text surrounding the main text of a game and creating a context, and has the power to influence its readers even before they play the game. Common examples of that are game reviews or the hardware where the game is played, but if the definition just stated is true and we take into account Japanophile players, the whole context of Japanophilia in which they live can become paratext of *Ôkami*, or of any other product associated with them. In this case, for example, a general predisposition to adore culture labeled as 'Japanese', induced by consuming a large number of other certain products, converts those into paratext of *Ôkami*. For this reason, even if the main text of the game is clearly the main object looked into in this game analysis, paratext is also of paramount importance in it, providing a key context. Fernández-Vara herself deems context as highly important in a game, dedicating to it one of the three main areas that are supposed to be analyzed in a game. In that sense, 'playground' and 'paratext' have similar implications in this game analysis, despite being different concepts.

As opposed to the works cited until now, other authors have investigated the possibilities of game analysis with a more specific scope. Lindley (2005) is one of them, with his inquiry into games and their analysis in terms of the time structure of their ludic space. Unlike Consalvo and Dutton's, Lindley's work is more inclusive with the narratological aspects of games. Most notably he identifies in a game a discourse level, formed by textual, verbal and cinematic (cut scenes)

elements, a performance level, which is formed by all the 'ludic space' within which the player can interact and affect the plot, and a simulation level, at which the whole game world is simulated, extending beyond the ludic space. Beneath that simulation level, as Lindley puts it, exists the 'generative substrate', which is "the system of functions, rules and constraints constituting a space of possible worlds of experience created by the designers of the game"[2]. Lindley's levels offer an interesting insight into the nature of games and are taken into account for the analysis. Furthermore, the concept of generative substrate expresses quite well the aim in this thesis, since there is an intention to understand how the gameplay experiences possible in *Ôkami* can contribute to the perception that its players have of Japan. Whenever the concept is specifically employed in the study of representations, I think it might as well be renamed as 'representative substrate'.

For his part, and also stressing the impact video games can have on players, Bogost (2006) underlines their expressive capacity and proposes the following: "instead of focusing on how games work, I suggest that we turn to what they do—how they inform, change, or otherwise participate in human activity" (p. 45). Pérez (2015) looks into game analysis along the same lines too, producing a paper that is insightful for this thesis, and proposing a model that pays special attention to the social discourse expressed by games. However, due to the limitations of this model which are, as acknowledged by Pérez himself, the impossibility for it to address expressive resources exhaustively and a perspective that is only ludological, it is not adopted in this thesis.

Until now, video game genre has not made an appearance yet, but it is obviously a fundamental element in a game analysis, and therefore it must be treated. Within the *Ôkami* Wiki, in the entry dedicated to the game itself, it is deemed an 'action-adventure video game'. That is quite indisputable; besides the fact that there are RPG touches too, it defines correctly what the game is, according to the popular standards of genre definition. However, as Kirkland (2005) hints, there is not just one possible perspective when it comes to defining the genre of a game. If 'action-adventure' responds to a rather ludological understanding of the game, a more narratological look is possible too. Kirkland speaks of the genre 'survival horror', which certainly has a few ludological implications (for example, the availability of resources like ammunition is low), but he also denotes how elements like bloodstained floors and grotesque monsters, which are inherent to the narration rather than to the gameplay, are typical of the genre too (p. 172-173). If *Ôkami* is seen with that perspective, it can be associated with a large group of games that, in one way or another, make

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2   Note that, despite the textual citation in quotation marks, there is no reference to the page number. Whenever that is the case, it is due to the fact that some reviews like *Game Studies* are purely online-based and do not have pages or numbered paragraphs.

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Japan its theme (for instance, the *Samurai Warriors* series (Omega Force), the *Tenchu* series (Acquire et al.), or the *Naruto: Clash of Ninja* series (Eighting)). Despite their conventional genres being totally different, those games share in fact important attributes, and I will argue that in relation to those, they can be seen as sharing a genre; the Japanophile genre. Thus, in this thesis, *Ôkami* is analyzed as a Japanophile game, rather than as an action-adventure game, and while its gameplay is not dismissed by any means, much attention is paid to its thematic attributes. Kirkland's insight of game analysis, as Pérez's, draws attention to the representational qualities of video games, and that is obviously much useful in a thesis that intends to analyze a game in those terms.

Like Konzack, another one of the first researchers to inquire into the methodology of game analysis was Aarseth (2003), who expressed some insight regarding the fact that there is not just one way to carry a game analysis, but a large number of ways, which depend upon the focus adopted, the disciplinary perspective taken and, most importantly, the actual motivation for the analysis. The type of the game is also a key point in that regard, since it is unlikely, he says, that the same method would work with radically different games. (p. 2). He defines three main levels in games, which result into three main types of games, depending on which of the levels takes more importance. These levels are: gameplay, game-rules and game-world. Aarseth's hypothesis is that "there is a strong correlation between the dominant level of a game and the attraction it has as analytical object for certain disciplines and approaches" (p. 3). His hypothesis is probably confirmed in this thesis, since *Ôkami* appears to be a game-world heavy game, and the perspective I take within game studies is close to cultural/media studies, which he associates with those kinds of games. Aarseth's reflections have inspired greatly the game analysis approach taken in this thesis, since they helped understanding that 'game analysis' should not be conceptualized as a single method defined by strict directives, but rather as a tool the methodology of which can be adapted to the purpose and character of the research.

The work of Aarseth has helped concluding the way the game analysis has been conceptualized in this thesis, and the work of other researchers cited in this chapter has aided in defining better that concept, supplying it with other useful concepts that are related to the nature and analysis of games. Summarizing, in this thesis *Ôkami* is analyzed keeping always in mind the motives behind the analysis, as Aarseth advises, and no closed model has been adopted, since a perfect fit does not exist. Those motives have been expressed through the research questions: the representations of Japan in the game and their potential impact on the perception of the country that its players have. The representations studied exist within the text or virtual space of the game, but the playground

including the Japanophile players, and the paratexts produced both by themselves and the Japanese popular culture industry are very much taken into account, in terms of point of view and context. Besides the Japanophile players, the actual game is also seen as a Japanophile type of game, making Japan its theme and potentially acting as a source of Japanophilia, and the analysis approach is to investigate its generative substrate (its possible gameplay experiences) as such. In Bogost's (different) words, it can be said that the analysis is guided by what can the game do to its players.

Regarding more formal aspects of how the game analysis has been carried out as a method: once it was clear that *Ôkami* was the choice, it was purchased and played until the end of its main story. During that process, which took approximately 50 hours, complementary content was explored and completed to the extent possible in terms of time available, and it was only dismissed when becoming clearly irrelevant (for example in the case of predictable, repetitive side quests). The game was not played a second time, but its virtual space was accessed again several times, whenever needed. Paratexts such as the instructions booklet and fan-made wikis have been much revised, as advised for example by Aarseth (2003: 6) and Fernández-Vara (2015: 6-7) and can be considered part of the game analysis. Regarding the findings, they were progressively written down on paper while playing, in chronological order, and later transcribed digitally while organized by topic. The practical totality of the data collection and treatment were qualitative. Despite not being part of the methodology strictly, it is worth mentioning here that the year I spent in Japan as an exchange student has provided me with knowledge, experiences and language skills that have been useful when treating the data.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first section I present a review on the Japanese popular culture industry, a part of which deals with the production of video games. The Japanophile phenomenon as a result is featured as well. The point of this first sub-chapter is to provide and explain the context within which *Ôkami* is studied. In the second section, works in which video games are studied in terms of their representational qualities are reviewed. The objective has been, first of all, providing this research with theoretical background in relation to that topic, but also many works have served as an example in the study of representations within games, becoming a guide for this thesis. In the last part, the intention is to give importance to the figure of the player too, when considering the effects of representations. That way, representations can be better studied in light of their potential effects, which is very important in this thesis.

4.1. Japanophilia and the Japanese popular culture industry

"Often stressed in Japanese media is the emergence of Western *otaku*, obsessively devoted fans of Japanese animation in Western countries whose love of Japanese animation makes them wish they had been born in Japan" (Iwabuchi, 2002b: 454). This definition for 'Western otaku' matches quite well what I understand for 'Japanophile' in this thesis, and both concepts can certainly be considered synonyms. The wish of having been born in Japan seems to be a reality within Japanophilia, and it expresses properly how it is a 'philia', but it is evident to me that there are many shades within the Japanophile community, and that the said wish is not a sine qua non. Japanophilia can be understood as the product of a cultural/informational flow coursing from Japan to land on other specific regions of the world (while definitely flying across and ignoring others), the so-called West (most of Europe plus North America and Western Oceania) among them. Japanophilia has certainly sparked the creation of a new sub-culture and urban tribe, an identity. If, as Castells (1996) has suggested, the world's spatial logic has shifted from the old 'space of places' to the new 'space of flows', the Japanophile community is native to the cultural flow in question, its physical place of origin being blurred.

The consolidation of Japanese popular culture within the cultural global market, drawing attention from both the academy and the media, took place at the end of the 80s (Iwabuchi, 2002a: 23), led by iconic Japanese anime productions exported to the West during that same decade, such as *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (Zuiyo Eizo, 1974), *Mazinger Z* (Toei Animation, 1972) or *Akira* (Ôtomo, 1988).

According to Kelts (2006: 5), that phenomenon initiated what many cultural historians consider to be the third big Japanophilia wave in Western culture, its predecessor waves being provoked by the artistic trend known as Japonism (second half of 19th century) and the interest of beatnik writers in Japanese spirituality (50s and 60s). This time, the intensity of the Japanophile frenzy would be unprecedented; the popularization of the Internet as a means for consumption of anime and manga (roughly around 2004) would boost the craze, making the phenomenon to reach new heights, and more than two decades since its beginning it did not appear to slow down (Llovet, 2013).

Despite anime and manga being chronologically the leading mediums of the phenomenon, video games have ended up being a companion with as much relevance, constituting the third pillar of Japanese popular culture. This is confirmed for example by Iwabuchi (1998, 2002b), but is also evident to anyone familiar with the said culture's scene; along with manga, video games fill the stands in big fairs dedicated to the new Japanese culture, varied merchandise also stems from one as much as from the other, and crossovers that spread through the different mediums have become more and more common. In short, many Japanophiles have somehow become interested in video games as well as in manga and anime, most probably because both share space within the original sub-culture in Japan where they thrived before being exported, popularly known as 'otaku culture'. Molesworth and Denegri-Knott (2007) propose that all these commodities act "as sources around which the imagination is actualized" and go on to highlight the potential for transformation that digital virtual space has for transforming players-consumers (p. 130).

Obviously, neither all the Japanophiles are interested in video games, nor are all the video games really part of the Japanophile scene; instead, there is simply an overlap between the circles formed by the Japanophile and gamer cultures. It is appropriate to wonder, then, what kind of video games do lie in that shared space. The seemingly obvious answer is Japanese video games, and even though some video games that are clearly not Japanese may sneak in there too, it is evident that the first group is predominant. That, however, sparks the debate, detailed for example by Consalvo (2016: 4-5) of what is it that makes a video game to be Japanese (and in the case of this thesis, in the eyes of the Japanophiles); is it its content, or rather its country of origin? A most probable answer is that both contribute, but actually in this case there is no need to look further into that matter; *Ôkami* is a Japanese production, and its content openly features the culture of Japan as well, to the point that it is being honored. Therefore, the game must fully fall into the aforementioned overlapping space, especially if the fact that it celebrates Japanese culture is compared to Japano*philia*. Furthermore, according to Consalvo (2016), in the last decade the presence of the

Japanese video game industry[3] abroad has shrunk (p. 149). In my opinion, that puts *Ôkami* in a position more representative of the country, especially taking into account its highlighted reference to Japanese culture and its critical success.

To understand well the character of this Japanophile culture with which *Ôkami* can be related, it is important to look at the key agent that is the industry behind it. Therefore, the origins and nature of the Japanese popular culture should be reviewed too, since 'Japanophile culture industry' is in fact nothing else than the Japanese popular culture industry going global, exporting (and adapting) its brand to other countries. Those origins can be traced back to the Meiji Restoration (1868), which put an end to roughly 250 years of *sakoku*, the isolationist foreign policy under the rule of the Tokugawa shogunate that banned international trade in its practical totality. With that, the culture of a more developed West would start to penetrate in Japan, the flux quickly acquiring massive proportions. The fact that the Meiji Restoration was a direct consequence of the pressure exerted by the United States' commodore Matthew C. Perry, who intimidated and threatened Japan with warships from the Edo (now Tokyo) Bay demanding the opening of ports to foreign trade, is symbolic enough, as Japan would ever since become dominated by the West, both culturally and psychologically (Iwabuchi, 2002a: 2). The industry of manga, for example, cannot be understood without the introduction of advanced printing techniques from the West in the beginning of the 20th century, and also since then, manga was heavily influenced by American comics and cartoons, while presenting its own unique character too (Bouissou, 2010: 21, 23).

With the defeat of Japan in World War II and its subsequent temporary occupation and seizure by the United States, the dynamics just explained would become even more intense, if possible, especially taking into account that Japan became one of the United States' most powerful capitalist partner during the Cold War, providing an ideal breeding ground for the spread of North-American pop culture. Japanese popular culture can in fact be understood as a reproduction of that culture, arising from its reinterpretation through a Japanese lens, from combining that foreign culture with a more genuinely Japanese essence, and therefore it is a transnational, culturally hybrid phenomenon by nature. This is not to say that each and every one of the products of the Japanese popular culture industry presents substantial Western influence, but it is important to have in mind the roots of the phenomenon when analyzing any of its elements. Allen and Sakamoto (2006) agree with that view

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3   She would actually say 'industries', in plural, since the hub has become so broad and varied. That would be valid in this thesis too, even more when referring to the whole of the Japanese popular culture, which covers clearly defined sectors. However, I have wanted to underline the fact that all those sectors act as one when considering Japanophilia, pushing into a same direction; therefore I use 'industry', in singular.

by saying that "the 'Japan' in 'Japanese popular culture' is always already dislocated, contaminated, cross-pollinated and criss-crossed" (p. 3). Added to that, there is the matter of self-Orientalism too: according to Iwabuchi (2002b), today's Japanese national identity (and therefore Japaneseness represented in popular cultural content) is greatly influenced by a Western Orientalist gaze (self-Orientalism after adopted) based on exotic and stereotypical icons such as samurais and geishas (p. 459).

Eventually, other cultural expressions than comics and cartoons would be picked up by the Japanese industry, joining the phenomenon. Perhaps the most prominent examples are music (J-Pop, J-Rock) and, of course, video games. As Picard (2013) has explained, the origin and growth specifically of the latter can be contextualized with the same Cold War dynamics that explain the sparking of a Japanese pop culture in general. Video games surely became a key piece for the industry, since it expanded its boundaries and made it able to reach, in cultural and commercial terms, a new unexploited domain, one that was to become tremendously popular. Thus it is feasible to think that, had Japan not bet on the video game industry, its pop culture within the global cultural map and the Japanophile reality may have grown significantly less until today. Despite that and paradoxically enough, video games within the Japanese popular culture industry seem to be a pillar as much as they are an element that is somewhat distant or independent from the core of the Japanophile phenomenon, like an (big) annex; they constitute their own world at the same time that they are part of a Japanophile one. In regard to that, Chen (2013) has shown how video games do not lead their players to consume other Japanese products as much as those lead to video game consumption (p. 422-423).

There has been debate discussing the popular culture industry as a tool for Japan to exert soft power, which according to Nye (1990) "occurs when one country gets other countries to *want* what it wants", in contrast with the more orthodox hard power that will have the country "*ordering* others to do what it wants" (p. 166). Opinions that can be related to that matter have been much varied, ranging from being confident that the industry in question effectively becomes a means of soft power (Heng, 2010) to being skeptical (Omatzgin, 2008), including ambivalent positions too (Leheny, 2006; Bouissou, 2006). Discrepancies, however, seem to revolve around how the concept of 'soft power' is interpreted, rather than around what is the impact of the Japanese industry. It is also important here to take into consideration regions of the world. Leheny points out that, in East Asia, Japan can easily take a model role and transmit the idea of an imagined prosperous future, but that hardly applies in the Western context that is considered in this thesis.

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Continuing with the question regarding culture and power, a nationalist current that originated in Japan with the success of its pop culture exportation in the 90s has been reported by Iwabuchi (2002b). According to him, its promoters saw an opportunity for the country to situate itself in a position of cultural supremacy over the world, much in the fashion of the United States. Iwabuchi refutes that view by relying on the theories that see Japanese pop culture as transnational by definition, already exposed, saying that "the rise of Japanese cultural status in the world is confirmed only by disregarding the contradictory and decentred nature of global cultural power" (p. 448). All in all, my take on the issue is that Japanese popular culture has had a cultural impact in the West and occupied a space in the global cultural showcase, which certainly confers some power (be it soft or not) to Japan, and *Ôkami* shall be considered as a small sample within that phenomenon. The way I see it, Iwabuchi's read is flawed in that it is not so much the nature of the content what matters when considering its capacity as a tool of power, but rather its label, or what do people associate it with, and Japanese popular culture is definitely being associated with Japan. On the other hand, it seems obvious that it cannot rival its North-American or Western counterparts, especially when it has spread among a limited sub-culture above all; Japanese pop culture appears to be consumed with more enthusiasm, but to reach a much more reduced amount of population than North-American or Western do.

When making reference to the Japanese popular culture industry, and especially when relating it to power, it may sound like there has been a masterminded plan carried out by certain Japanese agents since the beginning, with the target of spreading their culture all over the world. As Pellitteri (2010) explains, however, there never were specific plans for that until the more recent years, when Japanese agents have started to adopt certain strategies in that regard (p. 5). In fact, both Pellitteri and Iwabuchi (2004: 6) coincide in that local agents have had a key role in the phenomenon, and Befu (2001) even gives those responsibility for the stereotyped image of Japan that has been diffused (p. 17-18). Nevertheless, it is evident that the role of local agents has diminished since the popularization of the Internet (users could access content without intermediaries since then), and in the case of video games they might have never had a role as important as in for example anime, where local televisions were responsible of retransmitting the product.

In this sub-chapter, bibliography regarding the Japanese popular culture industry to which *Ôkami* can be related too, and the Japanophile phenomenon that is connected to it has been reviewed. Summing it up: the Japanophile community has been defined, to then explain the historical

backgrounds of both that phenomenon and the industry that is behind it in the present. With that, the transmediatic, as well as transnational nature of the content diffused by that industry has been exposed. Finally, its abilities as a tool of cultural power for Japan have been discussed.

4.2. Representations from a game perspective

Since the early times of a consolidated field of game studies, there have been scholars claiming the importance of video games as representations. Myers (2006) is one of them, pointing out the popularization of games as cultural objects in the last decades and their unique nature within that group, tying them to a human activity as basic as play is. According to him, "representational forms function as esthetic objects in the context of the creation, manipulation, and interpretation of signs and symbols". He proceeds then to express the importance, in game studies, of investigating those elements in relation to phenomenological experiences such as play, concluding that "game studies are posed to emphasize, articulate, and explain such a correlation" (p. 48). With his words, Myers expresses well the preoccupations of this thesis. Pérez (2015), for his part, has stressed the relevance of social discourses represented in games, in relation to how they can influence the configuration of collective imaginaries. In the case of *Ôkami*, I believe that not only social discourses but also representations that have perhaps less political content should be analyzed, since they can anyway have a very relevant impact on how Japan is perceived and understood.

Ever since, game research on the subject has been abundant, especially looking into racial or ethnic discourses (Young, 2015; Monson, 2012; Brock, 2011; Šisler, 2008), gender (Perreault et al., 2016; Burgess et al., 2007; Jansz and Martis, 2007) and history (Pötzsch and Šisler, 2016; Ghys, 2012; Schut, 2007), but also into an array of miscellaneous other aspects, such as sexuality (Shaw, 2009), corruption (Reed, 2015), enemies (Allen, 2010; Hitchens et al., 2013), Middle East and war (Höglund, 2008), essentialism and non-essentialism (Voorhees, 2009) or political economic discourse (Dooghan, 2016). The line between persuasion and education seems blurry, and that has resulted in representational research from the perspective of educational potential too, especially with history (Ford, 2016).

Also since the beginning, there has been research denying that video games are representational media. Frasca (2003) has argued that games are instead simulations, since they rely on rules and need to be manipulated by players, unlike more traditional media. I will argue that simulation is not the only possible essence of a game, and that it is not incompatible with representation, but can

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instead coexist with it in the video game medium. For that matter, I believe that simulation itself can be considered a representational form.

When approaching the study of representations in virtual spaces, one of the first difficulties encountered is how to refer to the world where the elements represented belong to, in opposition to the digital world where the representations are found. The first option that might come to one's mind is the term 'real world', but it presents obvious problems. Authors like Lehdonvirta (2010) have made problematic the 'real world' versus 'virtual world' approach in MMO studies, arguing that both worlds transcend their assumed limits, flowing into each other. A paradigmatic example of that is the case of Chinese 'gold farmers'; MMORPG players from China who are paid by other players from richer regions in order to upgrade ('farm') the level of their avatars, a process that can be very tedious (Barboza, 2005). In that example, the supposed boundaries of the game (the 'magic circle', as Huizinga (1949) would call it) are transgressed, and a relation of power between different parties is established thanks to and beyond the so-called 'virtual world'.

Drawing a line between the two worlds might be, in fact, impossible in MMO games. In offline games, however, that phenomenon is less palpable, and I will argue that a dichotomous approach recognizing two worlds is feasible when studying their representations. This is not to say that in offline games there is no flux between the real and the virtual, and Ash and Gallacher (2011: 359) warn about that; representations themselves are a form of that kind of flux. However, I believe it is theoretically possible to recognize a represented world and a representing world, respectively, which in terms of de Saussure (1998) would correspond to a signified and a signifier. The problem with that terminology is that it entails problems of redundant language when referring to the 'representations of the represented world'. Bogost, in his influential book called *Persuasive games: the expressive power of videogames* (2007), uses 'material world' when referring to that represented world. I think that the term is not flawless, since many represented elements do not necessarily need to be material (for example, they can be ideologies, such as 'feminism'), but still, considering that there does not seem to exist a perfect term and that a terminology needs to be used, I follow in this thesis Bogost's footsteps and refer to the represented as the 'material world'.

As already hinted in the introduction, representational elements can present a wide range of different characteristics, and can be therefore organized into different typologies, depending on the perspective from which they are approached. This issue is central in this literature review, given its fundamental character whenever representations are made an object of study. However, a review of

all these possible characteristics and typologies would be tremendously long, if doable at all. Thus, I intend to focus here on those aspects that seem to arise as more relevant in the study of *Ôkami*, given its condition of video game, its context, and the point of view adopted.

Probably, the most primordial type of representations in game studies are 'procedural rhetorics', a term coined by Bogost in his work just cited. According to him, "procedural rhetoric is the practice of persuading through processes" (p. 3), and it is a type of rhetoric inherent to video games, due to their procedural nature. To illustrate it, Bogost uses the example of *McDonald's Videogame* (Molleindustria, 2006), which was designed to criticize the famous company. In that game, the rules encourage or force the player to take unethical actions such as bulldozing indigenous settlements in the forest or bribing climatologists, if she wants to succeed as a manager within the company (p. 29-30). Through that kind of gameplay, and understanding it as a process that is encoded but that needs to be played by a user also, the game has the chance of persuading the player to understand that reality in the way it is represented. In that case, the player is expected to learn that McDonald's employs unethical practices in order to achieve economic benefit. As Bogost conveys, procedural rhetorics are especially good at making "claims about *how things work*" (p. 29). In other words, this kind of rhetoric is perfect for representing processes that happen in the material world, since it is essentially a process. It is worth noting here that Bogost prefers to use 'rhetoric' rather than 'representation' in his term; probably his intention is to stress the fact that they can exert persuasion on players, and that is central to this thesis as well.

If we look at representations (or rhetorics) according to the nature of their technical support, to put it in some way, video games also contain other types of them, which older media has been using before video games came into existence. Bogost also speaks of them, namely: textual representation (understanding text not as in Fernández-Vara (2015), but as written text) and visual representation (meaning images, despite its reference to a sense). In a video game there is also much space for audible rhetoric, different from the others in that is is not received through vision but audition. There does not seem to be much game research on it, if any, but it is taken into account in the game analysis. Against mechanics or processes, Abraham (2015) defends the role of esthetics as a representational and persuading force in games, which is interesting here because esthetics clearly play an important role in *Ôkami*. For his part, Bogost acknowledges that visual rhetoric "is often at work in video games, a medium that deploys both still and moving images" (p. 24), and he proceeds to assert that in video games, "image is subordinate to process", since "images are frequently constructed, selected or sequenced in code" (p. 25). I will argue that that subordination is not

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always relevant, and it can be misleading. In this thesis, rather than the technical nature of the rhetorics, it is the way they are communicated what is at stake. Images are not always presented as processes to the player, despite being actually displayed through a coded procedure. When they are, it is rather the process that is bound to the image, because erasing the procedural component does still allow the image to be rhetoric (even if changing its meaning), but erasing the visual component renders it unable to communicate, and thus inviable as a rhetoric.

Types of representations according to their support have been discussed. However, representations do have characteristics other than those, which make possible other typologies too. The representational study of van Neuen (2016), for example, illuminates the path for another possible spectrum. In it, van Neuen argues that *Dark Souls* (FromSoftware, 2011) features gameplay mechanics which represent the continuous surveillance of people, but at the same time the empowered exhibitionism by use of cameras and social networks in the present times. Shortly, the mechanic consists in players sporadically transgressing their single-player environments and appearing in others', either as ghosts or humans. Without need of entering into the debate of how feasible it is that players read the game the same way van Neuen did, it seems evident to me that the representation described is not the most explicit one; if it were, there would be filming artifacts represented throughout the game world, and avatars would possess cameras and record 'selfie videos' as well, before sending them to others.

Wills' (2016) work sets another similar example, where she sees the motif of a potato in *Portal 2* (Valve Corporation, 2011) as a satire of the agricultural industry. What I mean with this, is that I find relevant a spectrum with two opposite poles: implicit and explicit. That view has been expressed by cognitive science researchers as well (see for example Kirsh (2003) and Rougier (2009)). If von Neuen's and Wills' cases near the implicit end, Perreault et al.'s (2016) on depictions of female protagonists is an example of a more explicit kind of representation at study, straightly imprinted in the aspect of avatars. The more implicit the rhetoric is, the more hidden and open to different readings; instead, when something is depicted in a totally explicit way, the player cannot be mistaken and will easily grasp the message, be it consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, in terms of impact on a collective imaginary, more explicit representations are expected to be more powerful; that is something to be taken into account in the analysis of *Ôkami*.

Another representational attribute that one might easily think of is accuracy, or fidelity to the reality that is represented. To make it clear, the issue here is not to judge how well did Clover

Studio fare at portraying Japan in *Ôkami*, but rather to analyze what role does that fidelity have in relation to the commercial purposes of the industry and the impact on the Japanophile imaginary. That also means, of course, considering what about Japan has been included and what omitted in the game, as Pötzsch (2015) indicates quite explicitly. Several game scholars have done research on this issue; Galloway (2004), who speaks of 'realistic-ness' and 'realism', is one of them. He suggests that these two concepts are not the same thing; realistic-ness is bound to 'realistic representation', meaning the detail of the textures in terms of their polygons or dots-per-inch. The visual appearance of elements in a more general sense seems to be related to realistic-ness too, as Galloway expresses through the example of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4* (Neversoft et al., 2002), which "is realistic when it lets the gamer actually skate, albeit virtually, at the real Kona skatepark in Jacksonville, Florida". Realism, for its part, is more based upon social phenomena, and it usually "arrives in the guise of social critique". Galloway concludes that "game studies should follow these same arguments and turn not to a theory of realism in gaming as mere realistic representation, but define realist games as those games that reflect critically on the minutia of everyday life, replete as it is with struggle, personal drama and injustice". Galloway's observations are extremely valuable for this thesis, inspiring a more critical understanding of what it means for a game to be accurate.

Another author who has looked into similar issues, although from a different perspective, is Chapman (2016). In a study focused in the portrayal of World War I in video games, it appears to him that "most WWI games negotiate popular memory the same way that WWII games deal with the Holocaust: by simply taking story/content decisions that omit images and historical elements associated with it". He goes on to add that "design patterns such as flying games, naval combat games and conceptual simulation grand strategy games allow game developers to engage with WWI history while excluding the elements of the conflict that, even today, fuel its political, moral and memorial uncertainty". In Chapman's opinion, video games present limitations when reproducing cultural memory, due to their perceived cultural role in society, the business conservatism of the industry, and their nature as a medium. Šisler (2016), in that regard, sees a tendency in mainstream video games to present a "reductionist bias toward representation of history and war", and that fact, he argues, "is tied to their core characteristic: procedurality". History and war are not supposed to be the primary themes in *Ôkami*, but I think that Chapman's and Šisler's findings are appliable to other genres and themes to some extent, helping to understanding how or why a game lacks realism. In addition, Šisler provides a set of five design principles that serious games involving representation should present: multiperspectivity, authenticity, constructivism, inclusiveness and contextualization. Neither is *Ôkami* designed as a serious game, but I believe that those principles

might become useful when looking at the realism (as understood by Galloway) of its portrayal of Japan.

An overview of *Ôkami*, though, is enough to guess that realism (in any sense) was not among the target list of Clover Studio. This is not to say that an analysis of it in terms of its realism is rendered purposeless, not at all, since that attribute of its representations plays a relevant role no matter how. What I try to say is that *Ôkami* rather points to a commodification of culture, forming part of the mainstream trends cited by Chapman and Šisler. Luckily, there have been game scholars exploring that phenomenon too. Sterczewski (2016), for example, explains the case of Polish games depicting the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, where the incident portrayal is corrupted by a militarized hypercapitalism promoted by the United States and present in many video games, especially shooters. Sloan (2015), for his part, sheds light on the commodification of nostalgia in recent video games when depicting history, taking advantage of the popular desire that there is for that nostalgia. What is made clear here is the fact that the game industry often uses different topics (history, war, etc.) according to its business interests, potentially having an impact on the collective imaginary of the players, and not only that: as Begy (2015) points out, in many cases, the representations used can also be "unconscious or unintended, yet still reflect culturally situated modes of thinking" (p. 19). Martin (2016) sees this as well, referring to Africa as the 'Dark Continent' and arguing that in *Resident Evil 5* (Capcom, 2009):

> Once the Dark Continent theme has been chosen, the conflicts, plots, characters, and settings associated with this theme become worked out in relation to the social imaginary obtaining in the game's context of production. In the production of the game, the Dark Continent theme is given shape through a Japanese social imaginary (p. 4).

This way, imaginaries become both productive of representations and produced by them.

The case presented by Cragoe (2016) about how the reproduction of myths has been adapted from traditional narratives to RPG games is especially interesting for this thesis, due to the coincidence of the theme with the one of *Ôkami*. He says that:

> As the bringing together of members of the community under a banner of shared heritage and consensus values was one of the primary purposes fulfilled by the myth and folk narratives in the oral tradition, we must necessarily see the transition toward an individualistic relationship between

audience and narrative as one which would alter the larger sociological functions of the traditional narrative. Human beings, however, are social animals, and there remains a need in the social community to find a means for the group identification, normative education, and value sharing to take place. If the traditional narrative is no longer pulling this particular weight, we may surmise that another structure or institution is likely, if not fully guaranteed, to step in to provide this crucial social service (p. 594).

Indeed, through *Ôkami*, folktale and myth might be having a socially different role than it used to through traditional narrative, and that role shall be considered in the analysis of the game. I suspect that this might be much connectable with the commodification theories exposed above. Cragoe even goes far enough to stress the increased use of myth and folktale narratives as tools of "intercultural domination" (p. 593), a phenomenon that can certainly apply in *Ôkami*, as long as it is seen as part of the Japanese popular culture industry context. He argues as well that through video games, folktales travel from their original cultures and can become part of the heritage of players living on the opposite side of the planet (p. 592); that might as well be the case with the Japanophiles.

Another way to understand representations is according to how heavy their political content is. Hong (2014) says that "what emerges is a debate about games' politics of engagement with the real. What is at stake is not so much the object of our engagement (and the legitimacy of its status as "real" or not), but the style of engagement itself we are cultivating across various digital media" (p. 51). Of course, generally the game industry rather seeks the avoidance of that political content to the extent possible, and folktale and mythology as themes offer in fact a fairly suitable niche for those purposes; there is no Holocaust to be ignored as when depicting World War II, for instance. Needless to say, though, it fails in completely achieving that, and it can even be argued that political sterilization is in fact quite political too.

The version of *Ôkami* that is analyzed in this thesis has passed through a process of localization, since the sole translation of the language from Japanese to English is already a form of localization. Therefore, it is interesting here to cite the work of Carlson and Corliss (2011), who remind us that localization processes are also "produced by, and productive of cultural imaginings" (p. 65). They basically argue that many of the localization strategies are based upon false stereotypes, but reproducing (and therefore reinforcing) them after all. They wonder, then, "what does it mean, for example, to read Japanese-ness—or to identify with a cultural other as Sophie[4] does—in a media text that has been consciously modified and adapted to suit different geographically situated

4   Sophie is here a Japanophile who was interviewed by the authors.

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audiences?" (p. 79). This is certainly to be wondered when evaluating *Ôkami*, not only in terms of its signs of localization comparable to the Japanese version, but also as a product of an industry that, already when creating its original products, might consider the immense economic interests it has in the West.

In this sub-chapter it is very convenient to explain the concept of 'cultural odor' coined by Iwabuchi (1998), one of the gurus when it comes to the study of the Japanese popular culture industry. Speaking of commodities, the author distinguishes between those which have cultural odor, and those which are odorless, or '*mukokuseki*' (literally: stateless), as they are frequently referred to in Japan. This dichotomy is absolutely tied to what the commodity in question represents; in fact, it can be considered yet one more attribute evaluable in representations. Iwabuchi argues that when a commodity possesses cultural odor, the cultural presence of its country of origin can be perceived. He goes even further and eventually proposes a switch from 'odor' to 'fragrance', meaning that this smell becomes especially relevant when the country of origin is positively associated with the product, making it attractive. Of course, the elements in the product evoking the country do not necessarily represent its reality with fidelity. (p. 165-166). Instead, the odorless products "do not immediately conjure images of the country of origin in the minds of consumers" (p. 165).

I will argue that what is extremely important here is players associating certain games with Japan, due to their 'Japanese odor'. The reason is the following: when a player plays a game that is Japanese but can be considered *mukokuseki*, she is not supposed to associate it with Japan, and therefore, any representation of any topic is neither associated with the country. However, this is reversed when the video game emits a Japanese odor; then, anything portrayed in it is susceptible to being associated with the country. Of course, 'cultural odor' can be a misleading term, since it deviates the attention from the consumer to the product, disregarding the fact that its existence largely depends on the knowledge and imaginary that the consumer had before making contact with the product. That will be addressed in the next sub-chapter for the sake of theoretical solidity, but in fact, being *Ôkami* such an explicitly Japanese game, and being the Japanophiles the collective to be taken into account, it is evident that it must be seen as a game filled with Japanese fragrance. Therefore, it is assumable that any topic within it, even when it is not a topic exclusive of Japan, is likely to be associated with the country, or in other words, to become a representation of Japan. This idiosyncrasy becomes a primordial key when analyzing the portrayal of Japan in *Ôkami*.

I have spoken of representations in video games. However, before closing out this section, it is also convenient to briefly consider game worlds as a whole, in terms of their representational attributes. Galloway (2004) argues that "within the world of gaming it is possible to divide games into two piles: those that have as their central conceit the mimetic reconstruction of real life, and those resigned to fantasy worlds of various kinds". Where Galloway says 'games', we can also say 'game worlds', and I will add a third, middle kind of game world to his typology: those that, while clearly representing actual places from the material world, are not formally presented as doing so. As an example, the *Grand Theft Auto* series (Rockstar North et al.) often present this kind of game worlds, for instance in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* (2002), which is set in a city (clearly) based on Miami. It turns out that *Ôkami* presents that kind of game world too, or at least that is true in its localized versions; it sets the player in the land of 'Nippon', which in Japanese means 'Japan'. That translation, though fairly well known, is never expressed to the player.

In this sub-chapter, the representational qualities of games have been examined. In summary: the relevance of representations in games has been made clear, especially in consideration with their effects on imaginaries, as rhetorical elements. A distinction between two worlds, the virtual and the material, has been ratified as useful for the purposes of this thesis. Also, representations in terms of their types have been commented, considering their technical support (procedural, visual, textual, audible) and their degrees of explicitness, realism and political content. Commodified representations and localization practices in games have been considered too, along with their possible impact on players. Finally, the key concept of 'cultural odor' has been introduced, and game worlds as a whole representational entity have been recognized.

4.3. Representations from a player perspective

"When analyzing a videogame, one has to take into account the player's position in the game. As a performance activity, the game is not complete until the player participates in it, and therefore the player is also part of the content of the game" (Fernández-Vara, 2015: 30). Due to the importance of the player component even in a game-focused study, a look into representations as experienced by players is demanded; that is what this section is dedicated to. At times, the following arguments might seem a bit redundant in comparison with the previous, but I believe that it is necessary to sometimes retrieve those, since this part of the literature review addresses the same issue (representations), but adding a new perspective (player).

It is evident that the character of a player is key when considering the impact of a set of representations in a video game, since different players might interpret those in different ways. When playing a game, players bring their own culture, knowledge, lived experiences, worldview and other attributes (the playground) with themselves into it, acting those as a lens through which representations are interpreted, or through which a particular experience is obtained from a generative substrate. Tuan's (1977) reflections on how space and place are experienced are insightful in this regard:

> Experience can be direct and intimate, or it can be indirect and conceptual, mediated by symbols. (...) A longtime resident of Minneapolis knows the city, a cabdriver learns to find his way in it, a geographer studies Minneapolis and knows the city conceptually. These are three kinds of experiencing (p. 6).

Somebody who has experienced war directly approaches game worlds that portray it differently than somebody who has not. An Afro-American from Queensbridge (New York) may understand *Grand Theft Auto IV*, a game set in a New York-based 'Liberty City', quite oppositely than a white American from the other side of the East River, in Manhattan, would. Schwartz (2009) concludes that the *Suikoden* series (Konami) games are "a collaborative representation created through interaction between players and designers" (p. 273). Despite referring the author to a specific series in that paper, his assertion is much applicable to video games in general, without a doubt. As he suggests, that collaboration partly relies on the fan-made content, but also on the interactive nature of the medium (p. 272-273).

Ash and Gallacher's (2011) contribution is valuable too: "by attending to the multiple ways in which videogames are interpreted and used in different times and spaces we can consider the ways audiences actively interpret and appropriate various games rather than passively receive them in a uniform manner" (p. 358). Voorhees (2014) considers the rhetorical effect of a game to be a set of potentialities, "a field of possible actions structured by the game but traversed by the player's agency". In his study of *Halo 2* (Bungie, 2004), Voorhees does not understand the game as a set of rhetorical elements exerting particular effects on players, but rather determining the different ways in which players can relate to them. Both Ash/Gallacher and Voorhees speak of 'ways' for the players to interpret games. In this thesis, then, the 'Japanophile way' (or ways, since more than one must exist within it) shall be looked at.

Through a view on the role of the player similar to the one exposed up to now, Galloway (2004) further develops his theory of realism in games by proposing the concept of 'congruence requirement', linking it to the relevance of players' backgrounds as well. According to him, there is no true realism without the congruence requirement, "some type of *fidelity of context* that transliterates itself from the social reality of the gamer, through one's thumbs, into the game environment and back again". To illustrate his idea, he uses the example of *America's Army* (United States Army, 2002), of a clear propagandist nature and intentional bias in its representation of US's military activities. According to Galloway, the game can in fact become much realist depending on the background of the player; if she has previously played, for instance, *Under Ash* (Afkar Media, 2001) or *Special Force* (Hezbollah, 2003), video games that offer a diametrically opposite view on warlike conflicts in Middle East than *America's Army*'s, she can then have more perspective on the issue and is more likely to perceive the ideology of the latter. This way, the game becomes realist not because of the supposed realism of its intended portrayal of something, but because of the (real, existing) ideology that it obviously represents. Similarly, whether *Ôkami* can be considered to represent Japan in a realist way or not might depend on what kind of player is taken into account; as Galloway concludes, "realism in gaming requires a special congruence between the social reality depicted in the game and the social reality known and lived by the gamer".

Discussing the representational condition of Lara Croft, the famous main character of the *Tomb Raider* series (Core Design et al.), Kennedy (2002) points at the limits of purely textual analysis and argues that it leaves Lara's meaning at an ambivalent position, since she can be understood as a feminist icon as much as a sexual one. Regarding how feasible it is to study the content of media and assume its impact on users, Schut (2007) has expounded well that debate. According to him:

> A wide range of cultural studies theorists have demonstrated that media users (...) have more interpretive freedom than academics and marketers typically give them credit for. Just because a movie, television show, or book attempts to get the viewer or reader to buy into a specific way of thinking does not mean that this attempt is automatically successful. (...) In fact, many cultural studies theorists would argue that studying texts in isolation is wasted time—the ultimate measure of communication is interpretation, so effective study of communication should be audience-focused, or at least based substantially upon audience research (p. 216).

Schut himself seems to be against that line of thought, as he answers that "to say that a message sender or the tool of communication have absolutely no effect on the interpretation of

communication flies in the face of everyday experience. I suspect, for example, that most people do not randomly reinterpret the meaning of stop signs on a whim" (p. 217). His words represent well the stance of this thesis, and evoke Lindley's (2005) concept of 'generative substrate', commented in the previous sub-chapter, where neither player nor game are dismissed; a game can be understood as a piece determining a range of possible experiences, and which one of them is obtained depends on the player. Foucault's (2000) discourse on the exercise of power matches surprisingly well the views just exposed, if applied on game design (as a representative of power):

> It operates on the field of possibilities in which the behavior of active subjects is able to inscribe itself. It is a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it releases or contrives, makes more probable or less; in the extreme, it constrains or forbids absolutely, but it is always a way of acting upon one or more acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions (p. 341).

Bogost (2007) recognizes too the communicative role of the player when he coins the term 'simulation fever'. According to him, simulation fever takes place when a player has to engage with the space existing between her subjectivity and the rules of a game (p. 214). To illustrate it with an example: if the player has a certain conception of how the textile industry works, but the game portrays it differently, simulation fever will happen in the player's mind, meaning a situation of doubt and discomfort which might or might not result in the game persuading the player and changing her view. In game studies, 'simulation' has often been used to refer to the rule system of a game, and Bogost uses the concept of 'simulation fever' mostly to refer to the communication of procedural rhetoric, but in my opinion it is valid for other types of rhetoric too, and those are part of the simulation enacted by a game as well.

Previously cited Abraham (2015) proposes esthetics as a powerful tool for video games to persuade players, and that is better understood when put in relation to the simulation fever, something he himself does. As he puts it, esthetics can be seen as a rhetorical tool that fares better than its procedural counterpart when confronting and transforming a player's subjectivity. Kennedy-Clark and Thompson (2011) have also defended the superiority of the visual frame when considering impact on players, at least in a learning context. In their case, however, rather than an ideological struggle, attention from players seems to be the determinant process.

If a player's background plays such a key role in how the meaning of a game is constructed, then

it is easy to think that, perhaps, the said background might prevail over the representation of the playable character in terms of her role within the game world or her aspect. In other words, the role of the *player* within the game world is what could be more determinant, substituting the one of the character. I will argue, however, that the affordances and gameplay provided by the game stay much powerful and relevant, effectively turning the making of meaning into a player-game collaboration. Martin (2016) illustrates well this line of thought in his representational study of *Resident Evil 5* (Capcom, 2011), arguing that "the player fits their own experiences of exploration and conquest into the performance of exploration and conquest that the game's structure affords" (p. 14).

At this point, it is convenient to bring up what has been regarded as 'non-representational theory' (or theories), a much recurrent perspective in cultural geography in the last decades, since it matches well the direction taken here. Non-representational theory seems to put the focus on processes, insisting "on the necessity of not prioritising representations as the primary epistemological vehicles through which knowledge is extracted from the world" (McCormack, 2005: 122). The term 'non-representational' might be a bit misleading; as McCormack himself states, "that does not mean that representations are dispensed with" (p. 122). In that regard, Lorimer (2005) has proposed instead the term 'more-than-representational', perhaps to stress the fact that this theory looks beyond representations but including them. It is important to keep that in mind, since many, if not all of the processes taking place in a player's mind need representations as a trigger in order to happen.

Non-representational theory is not a flawless approach when applied in the context of game studies, and that is due to the procedural nature of video games. As it has been expounded, non-representational theory appears to make a distinction between two epistemological vehicles: processes and representations. However, Bogost (2007) has shown the particular characteristic of video games as a medium: in them, interactive process can become itself a form of representation. If non-representational theory differentiates between 'what is being done' and 'what there is', procedurality merges both in the virtual space of video games, making the 'what is being done' to be completely inherent to the 'what there is' (except for online games where players are able to communicate quite freely through text and/or voice, but that is not the case here). Still, I believe that the approach can be very fruitful in game studies, especially when it comes to considering the figure of the player, which is my aim here. It can be asserted that, when applied to the study of games, non-representational theory gives a secondary role to traditional forms of representation such as visual rhetoric, and focuses on what players do (in and out of the virtual space, with procedural

rhetoric falling into a trap of ambiguousness) and what happens in their minds.

Non-representationalists Anderson and Harrison (2010) have written things about the term 'world' that can be applicable to 'game world' too. 'World', they say, refers to "the context or background against which particular things show up and take on significance: a mobile but more or less stable ensemble of practices, involvements, relations, capacities, tendencies and affordances" (p. 8). As Ash and Gallacher (2011) put it, 'world' is understood in non-representational theory as a "processual world that actively emerges from the practices of users" (p. 359). It is surprising to see how well those views can apply to the study of games from a player perspective, and where Ash and Gallacher say 'processual', the more common 'procedural' could be used. Perhaps without knowing it, Frasca (2003) has blazed a trail in the non-representational understanding of video games. As explained in the previous sub-chapter, he rejected the view on games as representational media, adopting a truly *non*-representational perspective. His approach, despite being too extreme, fits well the understandings of the world just exposed; game worlds can be understood as simulations in which, what matters the most, is the player becoming part of them, as if the game world was real (material). Also, in line with the previous citation of Martin, in the dual (player/character) identity of an avatar, player would take the major weight.

Other game scholars who, despite not proclaiming their works as non-representational, propose ideas that can be related to the same line of thought, can be found too. Newman (2002), for example, argues that what constructs the identity of a character is her moveset, rather than her aspect or story. The character, he adds, is in fact not distinct from the engaged player. In the *Tomb Raider* series, for instance, the main character "'Lara' is the player's ability to run, jump, shoot...". (p. 413). That view, though, has been opposed by Kirkland (2005), who hints that a character's abilities might be compatible with, or even part of her general depiction (p. 173). Crick (2011), for his part, approaches from a different perspective than Newman but points to a similar state of the issue, arguing that "roaming a virtual game world is a fully embodied, sensuous, carnal activity" (p. 267).

'Embodied' is much used as a term in non-representational theory. Along with it, 'affect' arises as another key term which, according to Thrift (2000), plays a strong role woven into the concept of 'embodiment' (p. 219). For Deleuze (1995), "affects are not feelings, they are becomings that go beyond those who live through them" (p. 137). Thrift simplifies that conception and argues that affects can be seen as "emotions (...) coursing through the force fields of flesh and other objects"

(2000: 219). Emotion, says Tuan (1977), "tints all human experience" (p. 8). Shaw and Warf (2009) use 'affect' "to designate the precognitive, unconscious, and embodied reactions to on-screen representations" (p. 1338), and argue that "understanding affect is critical to appreciating the experiential quality of video games" (p. 1335). Their paper is of paramount importance in this literature review, since they are two of the few geographers to venture into the study of games through non-representational theory. Shaw and Warf believe that "discussions that focus squarely on video games as representations miss the way in which these worlds *affect* users on an embodied, preconscious level", adding that the theoretical purchase in their work "is the exploration of the connections between game spaces as representations and game spaces as constellations of affects" (p. 1333). They follow up asserting that "whilst video games can be discerned both as 'worlds of representation' and as 'worlds of affect', (...) these separate dimensions are always intererrelated" (p. 1333). In regard to that, they finally conclude that "the representational and affective qualities of game worlds are not opposites but complementary forces always doing work on the player" (p. 1341).

It is evident that Shaw and Warf acknowledge the fundamental function of representations, despite carrying out a non-representational study of video games. With that, Shaw and Warf's work is very helpful in constructing the theoretical identity of this thesis, and its stance in regard to non-representational theory(ies). This is not, nor has ever intended to be, a non-representational thesis; in fact, it rather is a representational one, perhaps because it is game and representation-focused first of all, seeing effects on players as a complementary subject. 'Complementary', however, does not mean 'unnecessary' or 'relegated'; as it has been repeated, the role that players have in regard to the transmission of information through representations cannot be ignored. It is in order to address this subject that non-representational perspectives become helpful in the thesis. Much like in Shaw and Warf, the representational and affective qualities of game worlds are seen here as collaborating forces too. If it is not itself an affect, Japanophilia can be definitely understood as an affective product deriving from the interconnection between emotions that seem to be innate, such a joy, enthusiasm or the feeling of belonging to something, and the necessarily cognitive perception of a representative element as Japanese. *Ôkami* can be analyzed with that in mind, and that is what this thesis is committed to. Representations as semiotic elements are the main research object, but their affective dimension in relation to the Japanophile collective is considered too.

Shaw and Warf also speak of how the different spatialities of game worlds can entail higher or lower levels of affective power (p. 1335-1336). Constituting *Ôkami* not a two-dimensional game

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world, but a three-dimensional one, the player is supposed to embody the avatar in a more graphic manner, leading to more intense affect. On the other hand, the point of view taken by the player is of third, not first-person, which is supposed to lead to a lower degree of embodiment, not exploiting to the maximum the affective capabilities of the medium.

In the previous section it has been explained how certain themes such as war, history or folktale are being commodified by the video game industry. Shaw and Warf's discourse can be connected to those theories, as they point out that affect suffers that same process too. According to them, "the turn to the explicit engineering of affect by game designers is an essential strategy to keep gamers consuming" (p. 1339), and "each player's sensory register is increasingly commodified and exploited under postmodern capitalism" (p. 1341). Considering that there exists a Japanese popular culture *industry* and that Japanophilia can be seen as an affective product, those assertions make much sense when trying to understand *Ôkami* as a potential Japanophile agent.

Before terminating this section it is convenient to retrieve Iwabuchi's (1998) concept of 'cultural odor' as well. The cultural theorist does not really offer a user perspective of the subject, but I think there is space for that. Iwabuchi makes it look like cultural odor is a quality inherent to products, and that is perhaps true, but it seems evident to me that users' perceptual abilities in regard to cultural origin, which depend on their knowledge and experiential background, are as much relevant when considering whether a cultural odor is perceived or not. This observation, of course, is much in line with what has been argued during this sub-chapter. Staying loyal to Iwabuchi's simile, it can be argued that, if a product can have a cultural odor, a user must have a cultural nose as well (the cognitive ingredient within the affective product). Of course, that nose must also be totally determinant when considering whether an odor is perceived as fragrance or as rather neutral, or even as stench. The Japanese odor of *Ôkami* is so evident that the concept itself might not seem of much use in this thesis, but since the collective that is taken into account is of a very particular kind in regard to how Japan is perceived, I believe it is actually very important to keep in mind that cultural noses matter too, and that they can be of many kinds; Japanophiles do not start to play *Ôkami* without a perception of Japan already built, or even with a neutral one, but they instead bring in a rather idealized concept of the country, at least in general.

In this section, the representational qualities of games have been put in relation to the agency of players. To sum it up: the relevance of players' background in how the representations in a game are communicated has been underlined. That has led to the consideration of a possible 'Japanophile

way' (or ways) to interpret a video game, and also to the concept of 'congruence requirement'. The limits of purely textual analysis have been expounded and discussed, and another key concept, known as 'simulation fever', has been introduced, along with scholarly discussion around it in regard of the power of esthetics. Furthermore, the weight that each of the two components of an avatar (player and character) might have in representational terms has been commented; this has sparked the introduction of non-representational theory(ies), which have been useful for the literature review, especially in relation to the concepts of 'embodiment' and 'affect'. The summit of its application in the context of this thesis is to allow to view Japanophilia as an affective product. Other contributions of these perspectives have been related to considering the level of embodiment that *Ôkami* allows (middle) and to understanding possible connections between commodification and affect in the context of Japanophilia. Non-representational insight has also helped in reaffirming this thesis as a rather representational one and in ratifying the game-focus taken as relevant. Finally, the concept of 'cultural odor' brought up in the previous sub-chapter has been retrieved and reconsidered with the point of view of players.

5. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

In this chapter I proceed to expose the findings that the analysis of *Ôkami* has produced and to discuss them. In order to do that, the chapter is organized in a succession of parts which address the different topics of relevance that have been found.

5.1. Japanese mythology

Ôkami's plot is deeply associated with Shinto[5] culture, narrating a series of stories that are heavily based on Japanese traditional folktales, legends and mythologies. The main storyline tells about Amaterasu, the character that the user has to play as. Amaterasu is a wolf with supernatural talents who finds herself involved in a struggle to save Nippon from evil. In Shintoist mythology, Amaterasu constitutes a major deity, normally depicted as a human-like being, not a wolf[6], and is generally regarded as the goddess of the sun. According to the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, the two main mythological/historical chronicles from which Shintoism has drawn (both dating to early 8th century), the Japanese imperial dynasty (the only one it has ever had) descends from the goddess Amaterasu. She, however, is not alone in the quest, as an array of different main characters help her through the three main arcs of the plot; two of the most notable are Issun and Susano.

Issun is a traveling Poncle, a race of tiny humanoids, and his mission in life is to become a legendary artist. He is responsible of bringing the Celestial Brush, the most important item in the game, to Amaterasu. Thanks to it, Amaterasu is able to fully unleash her power by drawing on the environment, a game mechanic that fits perfectly with the nature of the *Wii Remote* (at least conceptually), since it allows the player to use the controller as if it really was the brush. With it, Amaterasu can draw and create things (such as bombs and gales), slash enemies by tracing a line, restore withered trees, and the like. For his part, Susano is a cocky inhabitant of Kamiki Village who descends from a legendary warrior called Nagi. His role is to 'help' Amaterasu in defeating the evil beings spread through Nippon, most notably the eight-headed serpent Orochi, and I write 'help' in scare quotes because he turns out to be a fraud. In Shinto mythology, Susanoo[7] is another major

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5   Shinto is considered one of the two main religions in Japan, along with Buddhism. In a way, it can be regarded as the most essential or heathen one to Japan, since it is previous to the introduction of Buddhism from Korea. It must be noted that both religions coexist harmoniously, not being exclusive; as an example, it is common that one same family resorts to Shintoist practices for a wedding, while turning to Buddhist ones for a funeral.

6   'Ôkami' has a double meaning in Japanese. Pronounced in the same way, it can refer to 'wolf' (狼) or 'god' (大神). It is understood that the fact that Amaterasu is depicted as a wolf in the game is some sort of a pun by Clover Studio.

7   Despite Clover Studio opting for 'Susano' to name their character, the god is usually referred to as 'Susanoo' when using the Latin alphabet.

deity, in this case the god of the ocean and storm, as well as brother of Amaterasu. Besides, he is not supposed to be any fraud, so that is clearly the choice of Clover Studio.

If the player is familiar to some degree with Shinto mythology, she will realize as the story unfolds that the facts that Amaterasu is depicted as a wolf, or that Susano is neither portrayed as Amaterasu's brother nor as the fearsome being that he is supposed to be are not the only elements dissenting with the standard Shintoist discourse, but actually just the start. On the other hand, *Ôkami* is by no means a story where mythological characters are used in order to fabricate a story that has nothing to do with Japanese traditional folktales; it feels more like a warped version of those tales. In *Ôkami*, Amaterasu's struggle against Orochi in the first arc is actually the repetition of similar events that happened a hundred years before in the same Kamiki Village.

Through that narrative element, the game establishes a series of parallelisms between those characters of the past and those of the present, the latter becoming symbolic reincarnations of the first. Amaterasu, for example, is the reincarnation of the wolf Shiranui, whereas Issun is Ishaku's (his grandfather). Susano reincarnates Nagi (also a fraud), while Kushi, the girl to be saved from Orochi, appears as Nami in the past. Even Tsumugari, the blade obtained by Amaterasu upon defeating Orochi, has its double, wielded by Nagi: Tsukuyomi. Orochi, for his part, remains the same character after those hundred years, being first sealed by Shiranui and Nagi, and ending up killed by Amaterasu and Susano. According to Shinto mythology, Susanoo is supposed to have defeated Orochi alone (and only once), effectively obtaining Kusanagi (represented by Tsumugari) from the corpse. Tsukuyomi, however, is not any older sword, but the brother of Susanoo and Amaterasu, as well as the god of the moon. Izanagi (Nagi) is the older brother and husband of Izanami (Nami), and the begetter of Amaterasu, Susanoo and Tsukuyomi. A *shiranui* is the Western will-o'-the-wisp's counterpart, but *Ôkami*'s Shiranui does not seem to stand for that (or any other mythological element). Lastly, Issun must stand for Issun-bôshi, who could be considered the Japanese version of Tom Thumb, is not a *koropokkuru*[8] but a human, and comes from a folktale that has nothing to do with Amaterasu or the other gods cited. His previous version, Ishaku, appears to be a completely invented character, his name being a wordplay[9].

To complicate things even more, in the third arc Amaterasu travels a hundred years back in time in

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8   *Koropokkuru* do not belong to Shinto mythology, but to the Ainu one. *Ôkami*'s Poncles, the race to which Issun belongs, clearly represent the *koropokkuru*.

9   A *shaku* is a Japanese unit of length equating to 30 centimeters approximately. 'Ishaku' is the Western localized name of the original 'Isshaku', which means 'one *shaku*'. Besides, one *shaku* is made up of 10 *sun*, and 'Issun', the name of Ishaku's grandson, means 'one *sun*'.

order to help her old self, Shiranui, and Nagi against Orochi, but it actually does not make too much sense to keep inquiring about the ways in which *Ôkami* has twisted the legend, since that is not the aim of the thesis and a conclusion can already be obtained: *Ôkami* can be understood as Clover Studio's own interpretation of Shinto mythology and folktales, since it is almost wholly composed of those, at the same time than it does not stay completely rigorous. Rigorousness, in fact, is not that much of a relevant issue here, since mythology is blurry by definition, and even the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* differ in their narrations about the same tales, tales that have been transmitted orally and twisted for ages. If the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* present each their own versions of the incidents, it can be said that *Ôkami* does the same too, albeit in a clearly unorthodox way and adding many other folktales from multiple sources, as acknowledged by its producer Atsushi Inaba in an interview for IGN (2007).

Japanese mythology as represented in *Ôkami*'s narrative structure has been discussed, but it is obviously represented in the game's environment too, through constant visual elements that surround the player. The most notable are perhaps the numerous *yôkai*-like[10] enemies (not all of them) that Amaterasu has to face. Examples of those are the Spider Queen, the Chimera or the Igloo Turtle, the last two essentially being objects that have been possessed by evil spirits (respectively a teakettle and a straw raincoat), a feature that is common in *yôkai*.

Figure 3. Amaterasu faces the Spider Queen, who reminds of a *jorôgumo*, a common *yôkai* in Japanese folklore.

Many other elements successfully complete a game world that is infused with not only Japanese mythology, but traditional culture in general; items as central in Shintoism as circular mirrors serve in the game as saving checkpoints, apparently with the pretext that memories are caught into them,

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10 *Yôkai* are the monsters that belong to Japanese mythology.

and golden *torii*[11] provide a similar function too. Despite not being set in a specific period of Japanese history (if it was supposed to be an ancient period in which the legend of Orochi took place, there would be serious anachronisms and other inconsistencies), *Ôkami* features a pre-modern looking Japan, and that provides plenty of space for traditional elements to make appearance too, from the architecture of old style wooden houses to the *wafuku*[12]. As with the plot, it would not make much sense to keep enumerating such featured elements, since they are actually countless and can be already synthesized in one more outcome: *Ôkami*'s game world has the potential to make players familiar with the more traditional side of Japanese culture. That phenomenon is enhanced if the fact that these aspects are present in other productions of the Japanese popular culture industry too is taken into account; that way, elements such as those commented can be interrelated by *Ôkami*'s Japanophile players, giving more sense to its world and uncovering it as part of a bigger, consistent world, which in turn becomes part of the whole Japanophile world.
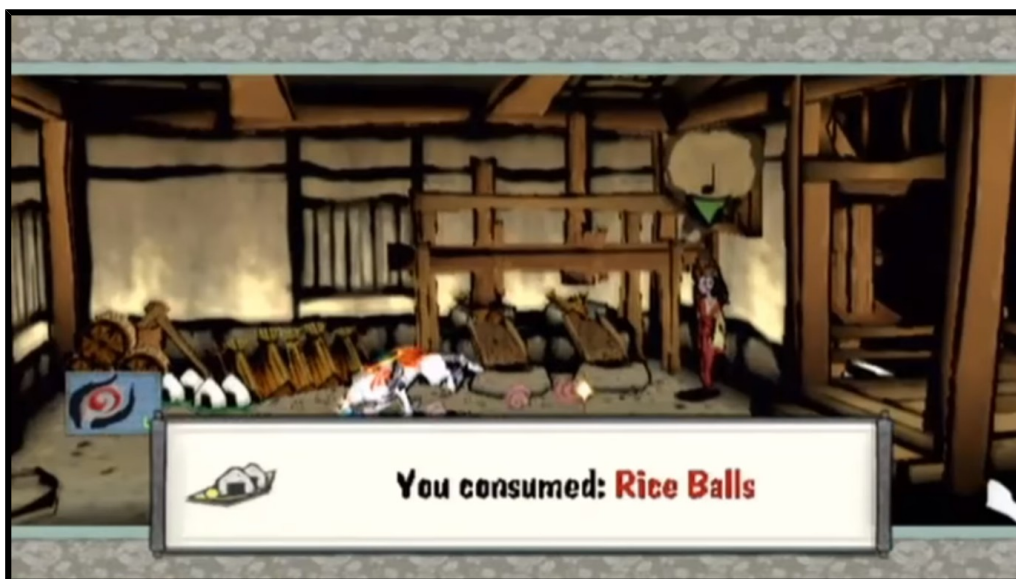

Figure 4. Amaterasu in the watermill of Kamiki Village. Both its architecture and Kushi's *wafuku* can be observed.

Clear examples of productions forming that mesh of Japanese mythology and traditional culture are *Naruto*, one of the most popular manga (Kishimoto, 1999) and anime (Pierrot, 2002) series, and *Inuyasha*, also featured as both manga (Takahashi, 1996) and anime (Sunrise, 2000). In the case of the first, it shares with *Ôkami* the portrayal of multiple traditional elements, with Shintoist ones taking a meaningful role, as well as the appearance of Japanese literary characters such as the eight

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11 Traditional Japanese gates commonly found in Shintoist temples.
12 Broad term for Japanese traditional attire in general.

dogs of Bakin's *Nansō Satomi Hakkenden* (1814-1842). In the case of *Inuyasha*, it is also (partly) set in a pre-modern Japan (Sengoku Period in that case) and puts especial emphasis on the figure of the *yôkai* as well.

5.2. *Ukiyo-e* esthetic

In the previous section *Ôkami* as representative of not only the mythology of Japan, but also its traditional culture in a more general sense has been discussed. However, if the focus is set on that, there is actually one element in the game which takes enormous relevance, as much as mythology does, and that is precisely the reason why it deserves its own chapter. This element is the *ukiyo-e* pictorial style[13] to which the esthetics of the game are conformed.

It is no surprise that *Ôkami*'s esthetics seem to be the most commented issue in its positive reviews; without a doubt, they become the game's most distinctive element, its ultimate identity. In my opinion, that element is key in opening the door of Japanese traditional culture to players. In the first place, the fact that practically everything that the player can see in the screen is represented in the *ukiyo-e* style makes Japanese traditional culture to be completely inherent to the game world, providing it with a unique flavor of Japaneseness. Secondly, it can be said that the game world is not presented to the player only as the virtual representation of a world, but also as a pictorial representation, or in other words, as a *ukiyo-e* painting. *Ôkami* not only tells Japanese traditional folktales to the players, but moreover it does so using a pictorial medium that is traditional to Japan too.

The fact that *Ôkami*'s world is portrayed as a painted world probably has something to do with its high levels of abstraction, despite *ukiyo-e* not being a particularly abstract style. My deduction here is based on the following premise: common 3D graphics fare better than pictorial tools at representing the material world realistically, and that has often been the pursuit in video games. When Clover Studio opted for a *ukiyo-e* style, they probably did so knowing that they were renouncing that kind of goal, pursuing instead a different esthetic motive, such as beauty. In terms of realistic-ness (as Galloway (2004) uses it) that may have resulted in a certain relaxation, giving ground on abstraction. This abstraction is perceivable in multiple ways in *Ôkami*: the deformed shape of anthropomorphic bodies, the simplification of people's faces, often featuring just the eyes,

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13 *Ukiyo-e* style became popular during the Tokugawa Period (17th to 19th centuries) and was characterized by the use of watercolor ink, Katsushika Hokusai being one of its most famous employers. Among multiple other themes, folktales were present in *ukiyo-e*.

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and the exaggeration of the silhouettes' thickness in general, among many others. I will argue that this abstract style suits well the storytelling of folktales and legends, since it goes along with the fact that they are rather ancient, distant and undefined stories.

This section cannot be closed out without retrieving Abraham's (2015) conclusions, which posit that esthetics are an especially persuasive tool. If that is true, *Ôkami* constitutes through its esthetic emphasis the perfect breeding ground for the communication of a certain discourse. If this discourse is directly related to the character of the esthetics, and considering that *ukiyo-e* style is a great match when telling about Japanese folktales and legends in an epic way, then it can be said that *Ôkami* effectively speaks of how beautiful and epic that mythology is. This is a discourse that corresponds perfectly to the Japanophile culture, potentially enhancing the '*philia*', and it is easy to think that 'Japanese mythology' is likely to be generalized to 'Japanese culture' or simply 'Japan'.

Figure 5. *Ôkami*'s *ukiyo-e* on display as Amaterasu restores Hana Valley. The abstractness of its style can be appreciated.

5.3. Geography of Nippon as Japan

The fact that the land of Nippon constitutes a fictionalized Japan must be evident to any Japanophile. That is not only because the word 'Nippon' is widely known as one of the Japanese terms to refer to 'Japan', but also due to how Nippon's outline as displayed in the map coincides with Japan's.
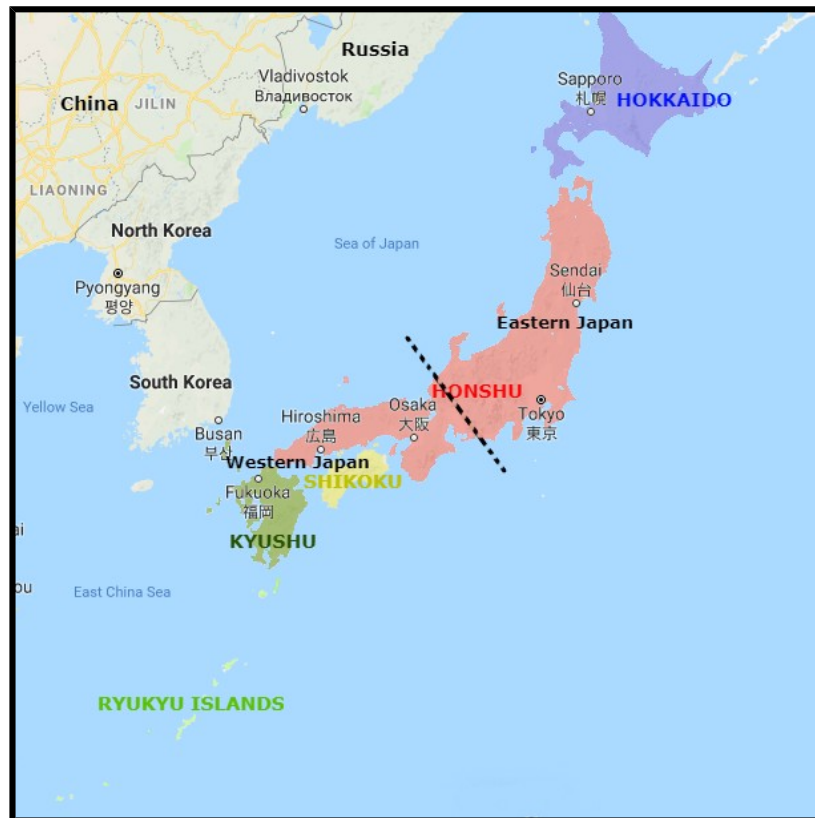
Figure 6. Map of Japan. Each of the state's four main islands (plus the Ryukyu Islands) are marked and labelled with a different color. The dotted line divides it into its Eastern and Western halves, as they are normally understood.

Figure 7. Map of Nippon. Its four islands have been tinted and labelled according to Figure 6, in order to show how they represent Japan's main islands. The dividing line from Figure 6 has also been superimposed. The playable areas are labelled in black, and its original colors and names respected.

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As it becomes evident with the comparison between Figures 6 and 7, Nippon's four main islands represent Japan's; the biggest of them, where most of the story takes place, corresponds to Honshu, while the island of Kamui is substituting Hokkaido. The remaining two must represent Kyushu (upper) and Shikoku (lower), but unfortunately they are neither accessible for the player nor even mentioned. Ignoring nearly half of the country, *Ôkami*'s representation of Japan's geographic reality can be deemed partial in essence; however, the portrayal of the other half presents interesting details that provide it with a sense of authenticity. Perhaps the first thing to consider here is the division of the map between Eastern Nippon, Western Nippon and Kamui. Japan's contour resembles that of a banana, stretching from north-east to south-west in a curve. This feature causes a certain ambivalence when referring to each of the ends (or halves) of the country; is there a western and eastern Japan, or a southern and northern one? Actually, for the Japanese this does not seem to be a matter of ambivalence at all, as they widely opt for the first dichotomy, and so does *Ôkami* too, transmitting that view to its players.

It is not only about how the game chooses to divide Nippon, but also about how it distorts and places it on the map, considering common conventions (north pointing upward): Nippon appears to be more horizontal than Japan actually shows in a standard map, consolidating the understanding of its halves as western and eastern. I believe that a sense of national northernness and southernness is reserved by the Japanese to regions peripheral to a Japan proper only: '*Hokkaidô*' means 'way to the northern sea', while the Ryukyu Islands, which stretch from Kyushu southward to the distant Taiwan, are commonly regarded by the Japanese as '*Nansei-shotô*', which means 'southwestern islands' (even in that case the western component appears, though). Both Hokkaido and the Ryukyu Islands are considered to be part of Japan, but at the same time they are seen as some sort of extension of a Japan proper. Both had been seen as foreign lands and were progressively adhered to the Japanese state up to the 19th century, and both were inhabited by their respective major ethnicities, the Ainu and the Ryukyu, who became minorities in a greater Japan. Hokkaido is the case of interest here, since it is the one appearing in *Ôkami* as Kamui, a snowy land filled with references to Ainu mythology, rather than Japanese. To begin with, 'Kamui' must stand for the Ainu word '*kamuy*', meaning 'deity', and its native Oina tribe are a clear representation of the Ainu people. Kamui's twin volcanoes are called Ezofuji, which is a popular way for the Japanese to refer to Hokkaido's Mount Yotei, also a volcano. Upon entering Kamui, it is easy for the player to notice that many place (Wep'keer or Yoshpet) and character names (Wali or Nechku) do not look Japanese anymore but of another unknown and strange culture. This sense of otherness is further strengthened by Issun and Oki (an Oina), who do not consider Kamui to be part of Nippon.

Regarding specific places, references to Japan in *Ôkami*'s world are not limited to Kamui and the Ezofuji, but they extend to Nippon too. Sei'an City, the imperial capital of Nippon situated in its western half, is the most evident example of that, representing Japan's Kyoto (also considered to be in the western half). Although Tokyo is Japan's *de facto* imperial seat in the present day, Kyoto held that role historically, for more than a thousand years and until the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Added to that is the fact that Sei'an is built upon a lake called Beewa, which must be a reference to Lake Biwa, lying near Kyoto. But perhaps the most interesting trait of Sei'an is its name, which is the Japanese way to refer to the Chinese city of Xi'an, meaning 'western peace'. Actually, Kyoto was originally modeled after Xi'an at the end of the 8th century (the cities were respectively known as Heian-kyô and Chang'an by that time), something that can be noticed for example in its orthogonal urban morphology, defined by the north-south and west-east axis. That orthogonality is also present in Sei'an, and its Aristocratic Quarter is reminiscent of Heian-kyô's Daidairi too, an area that was reserved to the imperial court and various administrative bodies. It can be argued that, by choosing 'Sei'an' as the name for the city, something as real as the influence that Chinese culture has originally had on the Japanese one is expressed. That is not visible only through the figure of Sei'an; *Ôkami*'s 13 Celestial Brush Gods, who provide Amaterasu with special techniques and set the pace of the player's progress in the game, form together a (slightly modified) picture of the Chinese zodiac used in Japan.

Traditional cosmology of Chinese origin rules Nippon in other ways too: there exists a general discourse saying that evil (and therefore death) comes from the north[14], which matches well the Chinese yin and yang geographical logic, where the north, along with the west, is part of the yin half, epitomizing concepts such as death, dormancy, winter or shadow (Tuan, 1996: 17-18).

Due to the setting of *Ôkami* being that of a (undefined) pre-Meiji Japan, there is not much space in Nippon for addressing the geographical reality of a contemporary, urban Japan. That seems to be an impediment when considering the issue (or a way for the developers to avoid it, along with its sensitive topics). Otherwise, subjects such as the fate of the Ainu people within the state of Japan could have arisen, or at least there would have been clear room for them. Still, and no matter how does that happen, it can be assumed that from a geographical perspective *Ôkami* offers to its players an epic, critically sterile picture of the country. On the other hand, I would not say that this image is essentially biased or incorrect; as it has been shown, Nippon contains much of Japan's authenticity

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14 Check for example the Travel Guide scroll called '*Northern Land*'.

too, for example by challenging the false perception of the country as one that is or has been ethnically homogeneous. Without a doubt, that feature is much welcome in light of the game's potential to help Japanophiles in the construction of a deeper and still accurate mental image of the country. If *Ôkami* lacks criticism in its picture of Japan's geography (and history, inevitably bound to it), it can at least spark its players' interest on some issues, which could eventually lead to those players doing some research and critically reflecting on them.

In the previous section I have explained how *Ôkami*'s *ukiyo-e* esthetic articulates an abstract image of Japan. From a geographical standpoint there is an interesting element that reinforces that kind of picture too: enormous, rectangular map signs hang from the sky across Nippon, indicating the toponyms of many of its places. This gives to the player a slight sensation of actually being on a cartographic representation of Nippon (or Japan), rather than on the actual land. Considering that a map is an abstraction of the territory, the whole game world may feel like an abstraction of Japan. Finally, the fact that *Ôkami* does not intend to declare a specific historical time for its story, combining elements from different ages of Japanese history, must contribute to the abstractness of its depiction of the country too.

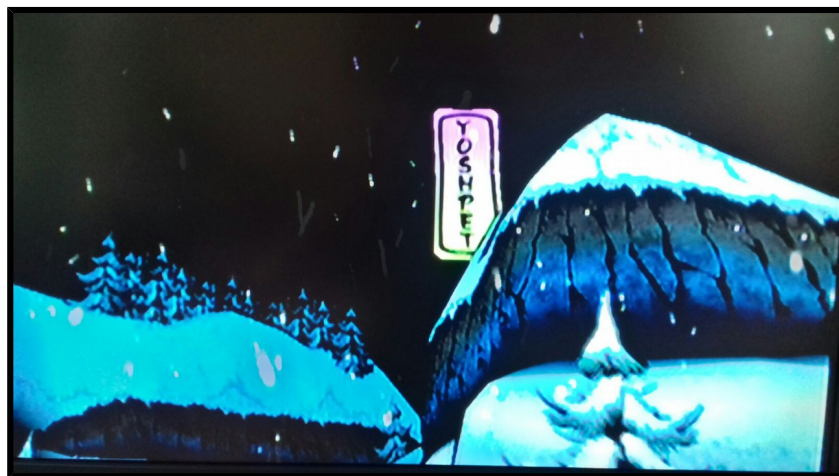**Figure 8.** Map sign of Yoshpet hanging from the sky.

5.4. Nature and art as power

Nature and art play quite similar key roles in *Ôkami,* becoming perhaps the main sources of power in Nippon. For that reason and due to some ties between them, their roles in terms of meaning and representing Japan are analyzed jointly in this section, although in order. First, I will focus on the case of nature.

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In *Ôkami*, supernatural beings often make use of radicalized nature in order to achieve their goals. This is visible since the very beginning, when the legend of Orochi is explained; with a raging sea and a blowing wind as a background, Shiranui uses the powers of wind and vegetation against Orochi, who fights with fire. Amaterasu herself is depicted as a force of nature too, particularly of life, leaving a trail of *momiji*[15] leaves every time she performs an aerial attack or double jump, or making grass to spring around her whenever she lands. The examples are numerous, and nature is not used only by benevolent entities, but by malign ones too. Instances of that are the yellow imps, who provoke tremors to hurt Amaterasu, or Lechku and Nechku, who are responsible of an intense blizzard decimating Kamui. Also, the coming of evil beings is usually accompanied with a purple mist that is reminiscent of droughts and blights, with effects such as withered vegetation.

The use, or even incarnation of nature by both benign and evil sides in *Ôkami* reflects a contradiction that has ruled the relation between humankind and environment ever since (even if less and less up to the present): nature being vital at the same time than a major threat for human life. Amaterasu's fight against her enemies represents the struggle between these two faces. Oki expresses this well when he tells in the midst of the blizzard that "*the* good *earth is losing its power and its soul*" (emphasis added). The Nameless Man does so too by recalling his experience when evil monsters invaded Shinshu Field: "*I was communing with nature when I heard a rumbling like an earthquake, then a blowing wind. I just want to live in peace with nature, man!*". This interpretation makes especial sense if the calamitous character of Japanese environment is considered. For ages, Japanese society has had to battle through natural disasters of all kinds: earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, volcano eruptions, floods, landslides and extremely cold and hot temperatures, among others. It can be concluded that that character, together with the hardships that Japanese society has had to endure, remains captured in the ecosystem of Nippon.

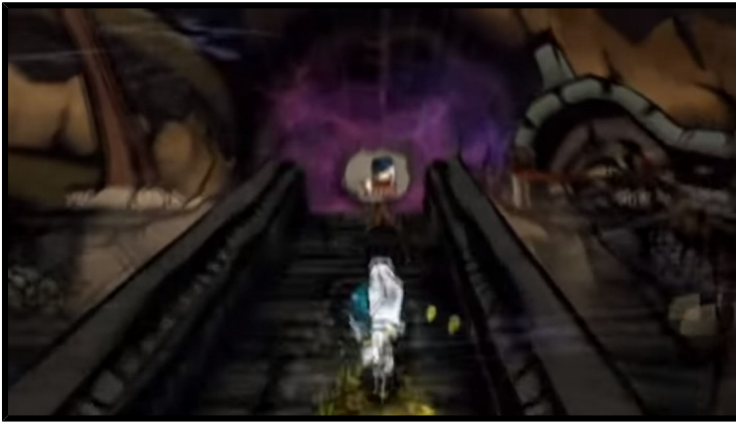15 A class of maple typical of Japan.

Figure 9. As Amaterasu speeds into Orochi's dwelling, the Moon Cave, she encounters collapsed shrines, such as the one on the right of the picture. The image resembles the one in Figure 10, reminding of the seismic character of Japan.

Figure 10. Aso Shrine (Aso, Kumamoto Prefecture) after the 2016 Kumamoto earthquakes.

Regarding art as power, it is exerted mostly through the Celestial Brush, which is used by Amaterasu with varied purposes: slashing, shooting ink bullets, creating things, rejuvenating withered vegetation or manipulating nature in general, among others. Just as with nature, demonic beings also make use of art as power, even if just symbolically; for example, red imps wield shamisens, while yellow imps use drums to provoke tremors. It is worth noting that they always opt for musical instruments, unlike Amaterasu and Issun.

Issun, the Poncle who accompanies Amaterasu throughout her journey, becomes a key figure regarding art. His role in the tale is to be the Celestial Envoy, who is supposed to reach Amaterasu and guide her in the struggle against Orochi, just as his grandfather Ishaku did with Shiranui a hundred years before. That includes bringing to the divine wolf the art of the paintbrush and finding together its techniques, without which they cannot beat Orochi. In fact, Issun presents himself as a master of that art, and Ishaku unveils some interesting information in relation to that, telling that "*we Poncles are the only ones who can communicate with gods. And we train as artists to teach the world their divine power*".What can be deduced from this is that art is not only useful in fighting enemies, restoring the world and solving puzzles, but it also becomes a tool of communication between humans on one side, and gods (and therefore nature) on the other, with Poncles as the users of the tool and intermediaries.

That is a discourse that is maintained throughout the game, and which is closely correlated to the concept of faith in the following way: without the help of art, humans cannot see or be told about divine phenomena, so art is assuming a key role in keeping their faith in gods. Queen Otohime

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encapsulates that when she tells Issun that his drawings "*inspire their* (people's) *faith in gods*". Perhaps the most revealing fact, though, is that common people are not able to see Amaterasu's godly traits, seeing instead a simple, ordinary wolf. It has to be Issun who, incarnating the concept of art, speaks to people for Amaterasu and tells them about the heroic task she is carrying out. That becomes especially evident towards the end of the game, when Amaterasu and Issun split and the latter decides to roam the world and use his pictorial skills to spread Amaterasu's story and increase people's faith in gods, becoming some sort of a missionary.

It can be concluded here that art is not only represented as a type of power with which to physically fight enemies or manipulate nature, but also as a communicative type of power. It is clear that with its role as a medium for Japanese society to commune with nature and gods (which in turn represent particular faces of nature), and to express itself about those realities, art has been given major importance in *Ôkami*. The Nameless Man, a ceramist living in Shinshu Field, poses well this concept: "*I'm actually an artist communing with nature on a deep level, man. I can hardly wait to start firing up some pots again!*". This is very relevant when considering the image of Japan embedded in the game, and here Japanophiles have the chance to grasp that painting, as well as art in a more general sense, has had much importance in those terms in the country.

Speaking of ceramic, there exists yet one more way in which art may be understood as a form of power. It is worth noting that, while pottery items are collectible throughout the game, the player is actively encouraged to simply sell them, and cannot do much else with them anyway. What this suggests is that pieces of art are fundamentally objects of economic value, with the specific function of being sold. Besides, though the Celestial Brush feature seems to have been promoted as a tool thanks to which the player is able to do art ("*use the Wii Remote™ to create images with the celestial brush*", says the back of the keep case), the truth is that the game does not allow much creativity: except for one only occasion in which the player is allowed to freely draw a mask for Amaterasu to wear, she is continually restricted to drawing specific patterns that result in clearly defined functions, without much chance to improvise, for example, in the manipulation of nature. Therefore, art is also being depicted as a strictly functional element, paradoxically losing much of its artistic value and essentially becoming merchandise or a tool.

5.5. Faith and praise

As explained by Segal (2004), 19th century folklorists believed that, in the absence of science as

we know it today, past societies used to rely on mythology in order to explain, for example, natural phenomena (p. 3). Frazer (1998: 804-805) is an example of that view, assuming that via religion, magic ended up being substituted by science in the higher thought. Frankfort and Frankfort (2013), for their part, also provide an interesting concept for this analysis: the idea that environmental elements used to be understood as gods, or as elements very closely interrelated with those (p. 15). As it has been shown in the last section, Nippon is a world where all those beliefs become true, where natural calamity and restoration do not just happen, but they are truly brought by supernatural beings; in other words, *Ôkami* enforces the idea that the folktales, legends and mythology of the country are/were real. Obviously, fantasy is a widely used theme in cultural productions, and I am not trying to say here that its consumers are susceptible to believing it as real; their knowledge and the congruence requirement most probably prevents them from that. But what if the Japanophile way to play the game is considered? I believe that in that case, *Ôkami*'s mythological account might have a persuading effect, albeit less innocent and more underlying than the one just discarded.

The Japanophile world is precisely a world of fantasy, and not only in the literary sense of the term; as it has been explained previously, it is habitual for Japanophiles to wish they were Japanese, and therefore to *fantasize* with that idea, actively implementing some of the culture they learn about to their lifestyles. They do also fantasize with the idea of bringing the worlds and characters they consume to reality, which materializes most palpably into cosplay[16]. That is exactly what *Ôkami* offers to the Japanophile, an opportunity to experience Japanese mythological beliefs as though they really ruled the world, and an opportunity to participate and become part of that (Japanese) world. In my opinion, if *Ôkami* does not persuade to believe that mythology prevails over science, it can persuade Japanophiles to live their make-believe more intensely and to engage more in their own euphoria, ultimately transforming, as a social group, their fantastic cosmos into something more authentic. This assertion makes especial sense if Wills' (2002: 400) view on nature as an element through which programmers transmit authenticity to the players of their games is taken into account.

Nature being ruled by supernatural beings instead of (or in addition to) physical laws might seem a rather weak argument for supporting such statements, but in fact, it is just one of *Ôkami*'s secondary traits pointing towards that conclusion. The main characteristic around which the explained persuasion revolves is the 'mechanics of praise', very central to the gameplay: throughout

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16 Cosplay is an activity in which Japanophiles or other types of fans dress up as characters from the productions they consume.

the game, Amaterasu increases her power by gathering spheres that symbolize praise. Praise can be obtained in different ways, for example by defeating enemies, restoring nature or aiding people; summarizing, it represents the gratitude, faith and worship shown by Nippon's inhabitants to Amaterasu for healing their land or solving their problems. This sets up a process according to which healing Nippon gives praise, which in turn makes Amaterasu stronger. I will argue that this process functions in fact as a procedural rhetoric which can also persuade players to engage more with the Japanophile phenomenon. What is very interesting here is the fact that Amaterasu needs people's praise in order to become stronger, which leads to the discourse that without praise (and therefore faith) there are no possible true gods. Without praise, Amaterasu is rendered weak, staying more of an ordinary wolf and less of an actual goddess.

As I have pointed out before, fantasy and make-believe seem to take an important role within the Japanophile community, and those concepts are not too different from the one of faith; all of them imply believing in things, even if to varying degrees. Drawing a parallel between the fantasy of the Japanophile dream (being a certain character, living in a certain world, or simply being Japanese, for example) and *Ôkami*'s discourse on praise/faith and divine reality, it is easy to think that the latter has potential to persuade the Japanophile with the following idea: the more she believes in and devotes to her fantasy, the truer it will become. This discourse is mainly articulated by the procedural rhetoric explained, but not only: a series of more classic rhetorics, embedded in the narrative and dialogues, support it too. A clear example of that shows as early as in the opening scene, when a man (later revealed as being Susano), in an attempt to prove false the folktale about Orochi, Nagi and Shiranui, pulls out the sword that had the first sealed, Tsukuyomi. As an act of total disbelief towards gods, the attitude of the man goes against what the game promotes, and so it is dramatically punished, resulting in the freeing of an Orochi that turned out to exist, and the consequent devastation of Nippon. Other examples include Queen Otohime telling Amaterasu that "*their* (people's) *faith shall be your power*" or Ishaku lamenting that "*people no longer have faith in the gods like they used to*". For its part, Yami's fifth form bestiary entry, obtained at the final battle, recites: "*Prayer is power. Power is prayer*".

The role of art discussed in the previous section takes on new depth here too, when combined with the concept of faith: without art, godly agency cannot be communicated to ordinary people, which results in little incentive for them to show faith, the basic ingredient of gods' power. A verification of that is the fact that, if Amaterasu appears to be an ordinary wolf in the eyes of humans, she actually becomes that when she runs out of ink, losing both her godly aspect and skills.

This works as an extension of the procedural rhetoric in question, but also Miya textually reminds the player that "*we Poncles are supposed to help people believe in gods*" and that "*otherwise, the gods will remain forever powerless, remember?*".

It must be noted that, the way in which *Ôkami*'s praise mechanics have been interpreted up to here, the Japanophile, as a human, identifies with Nippon's inhabitants, whereas Amaterasu or the gods in general represent Japanese culture and all its products to be praised. This is not, however, the only possible reading; if an approach closer to non-representational theory is taken, giving major importance to the avatar as the player instead of as Amaterasu, then it is the Japanophile who is trying to earn other people's faith and praise towards herself, in order to keep the fantasy real. Issun tells the player that, when people do not believe in her, she has to "*try real hard*". Here, the Japanophile 'tries real hard' to pursue her Japanophile dream or to engage in the phenomenon, whereas others' praise and faith can be interpreted as the more contextualized concepts of acceptance, recognition or even admiration, which she might need in order to feel comfortable with that identity and see her own sub-culture as a more transcendent and *real* phenomenon. The final boss of the second arc, Ninetails, who tries to convince the player that her gods are false, could represent those people who diminish or mock the Japanophiles and must be defeated or ignored. The perspective of the player and the discourse are slightly different here compared to the case exposed before, but the rhetorical effect should stay quite the same: in one way or another, the Japanophile is persuaded to increase her self-confidence and maximize her lifestyle, for example by consuming more Japanese popular culture or engaging more in related activities.

Taking the same approach influenced by non-representational theory, there is yet one more feasible reading of the mechanics of praise, which translates from a procedural rhetoric that would be completely different despite arising from the same process. If praise is directed towards the player and moreover it turns into power, there are two elements to consider: first, the narcissistic dynamic into which the player is put, becoming an increasingly worshiped subject. Second, the fact that Nippon's restoration or people's gratitude are quantified and turned into power. In that case, the solidary cause of saving a land, which is presented at first as the motivation for the player to journey through Nippon, may be giving way to the search for praise and power as the final aim of the game. The main difference compared to more classic RPGs lies in the meaning of the concept of 'praise', substituting that of 'experience', and in the fact that it is obtained not only from defeating enemies (as a side effect of fighting for a cause), but also in exchange of doing anything that is considered to be good. Speaking of the Greek government-debt crisis, Spanish neoliberal prime

minister Mariano Rajoy protested once in an interview that "it is one thing to be solidary, and another to be in return for nothing" (COPE, 2015. Author's translation)[17]. That assertion is a good outline of what *Ôkami* might be telling with its mechanics of praise: do the good, but at the same time earn power in return. Here, instead of promoting the Japanophile dream, the procedural rhetoric lays out an individualist discourse which rather resembles a businessperson's dream, responding to the neoliberal logic of a highly marketed society.

That reading could seem somewhat forced, but just like the previous ones, it is supported by rhetoric beyond the procedural realm too. Issun plays a key role here as the player's travel companion, repeatedly highlighting the importance of finding all the Celestial Brush Techniques and becoming a full god over that of healing Nippon. Furthermore, he also tends to persuade the player to not to accept to help people whenever it is not related to learning those techniques, insinuating that that is a loss of time or a drudgery. Aside from Issun's agency, in *Ôkami* the player is not only obtaining something in return for doing the good, but moreover praise (with the gratitude involved in it) is represented as material, collectible, countable and spendable (in exchange for power or even money). This responds well to materialistic and consumerist social values that, if not intrinsically neoliberal, have been exalted by marketing strategies while in that economic context. Furthermore, the view on artistic value as economic and functional, exposed in the previous section, is coherent with this discourse as well.

In the absence of a player-focused research on the final impact of *Ôkami* on the Japanophile player, there is no other option than leaving the effects of the mechanics of praise open to further research. Shaw and Warf's (2009) work on spatiality and embodiment in games could help here, but as explained, the conditions of *Ôkami* in that regard are rather ambiguous or neutral, and the research on the subject is still shallow. For now, it can be concluded that from the said mechanics stem three procedural rhetorics that can potentially persuade Japanophile players: the first emphasizes the power of a collective and teamwork to make a dream happen, as well as the 'Amaterasu' in the avatar. In this case she is representing anything from Japan that Japanophiles might be dreaming about, essentially becoming a visible personification embodying their faith and praise towards it. The second differs in that it is the Japanophile who is observed in the avatar, and in that *Ôkami*'s praise translates to recognition or even admiration (socially more realistic) from others for being who she is and doing what she does. However, the Japanophile utopia still stands out in the way Japan is represented, and its pursuit remains encouraged. Finally, the third argument

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17 https://twitter.com/cope_es/status/615778637678129156.

considers the player over Amaterasu as well, although, as opposed to the first one, it lays out an individualistic view on the world. Despite the contradiction, I believe that this rhetoric is not incompatible with the previous, since it addresses a completely different topic. Actually, a representation explicitly of Japan does not necessarily exist in this case, but the following fact is relevant: neoliberal values being put alongside the concept of Japan. Given the intense cultural odor of *Ôkami*, these values are much susceptible to being associated with the image of Japan and its culture. This becomes especially important when considering the point of view of a Japanophile, who sees in Japan a model.

Figure 11. Praise spheres come out after Amaterasu has regenerated a patch
of land in Hana Valley.

As explained in the theory, Carlson and Corliss (2011) warn about how some meanings in games are a product of localization processes. Even if this thesis is solely focused on the version of *Ôkami* in English, it is worth noting that localization has been important in regard to the mechanics of praise and their interpretation. As it can be seen in Figure 11, praise spheres are marked with the ideogram '幸', which standing alone is pronounced as '*sachi*', meaning not 'praise' but 'happiness'. In fact, in the Japanese version 'praise' seems to be completely exchanged for '*sachidama*', meaning 'happiness orbs'[18]. I believe it is important to point out the distinction, since simply causing happiness (an essentially altruistic goal) is different from evoking praise towards oneself. The fact that most of the Western players, even when being Japanophiles, will not be able to read the ideogram[19], annuls all its meaning in most of the cases, leaving 'praise' as the only term with which

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18 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hE_i0bnXcpc (4:48).
19 Its meaning is actually translated in the instructions booklet (p.39), but I do not find that very relevant due to the following reasons: first of all, it has to happen that the player thoroughly checks the said booklet for that to have an effect. Secondly, she must realize that the ideogram (one of many that are shown) is the one that marks the praise spheres. Finally and in case that that happens, the whole game still presents the spheres as a symbol of praise, which must prevail greatly over a small detail in the manual.

the spheres can be associated. What can be asserted here is that, without the process of localization, the procedural rhetorics explained until now would not have been possible. Whether the implementation of the concept of praise into the English version was made or not with specific intentions in regard to those rhetorics, cannot be considered in this research. Still, following the line of thought of Carlson and Corliss, it can be asserted that the exportation and localization of *Ôkami* produced a turn into either embracing Japanophilia (well suited for Japanophiles) or individualism and neoliberalism (might be well suited for Western society, though also well matched with American values that are globally prevalent).

5.6. Feminism versus sexism

According to Joyce Lebra and Joy Paulson (as cited by Silva-Grondin (2010)), before Buddhism was introduced into Japan in 552 A.D., women had in its society a similar status than that of men. Shintoism, with the Goddess Amaterasu being the creator of everything and main figure of worship, had much to do with that. *Ôkami* is about Shintoist mythology, and thus some of its view, which could be aligned with feminist perspectives, is captured in the game as well. Obviously enough, *Ôkami*'s main feminist trait is the major role that Amaterasu has in the story, as well as the fact that she is the playable character, but there are other signs too. Her depiction as a very dominant character in Nippon, for example, contrasts with that of Susano, one of the major (if not the main) male figures in the story. Susano's noticeable manliness is ridiculed by what he constitutes: a boastful man who is actually weak and fraudulent. As another example, this contrast is repeated within the imperial government of Nippon, based in Sei'an: whereas Queen Himiko represents a highly powerful woman and owns a major role, The Emperor is a fragile person who gets sick and stays quite irrelevant throughout the story.

As an overview, it can be asserted that *Ôkami*'s narrative empowers female characters more than the gaming world is accustomed to, which converts it into a generally feminist game. However, there are also indications which point to the opposite conclusion. In fact, without knowing that according to Shintoist mythology Amaterasu is a female, there is practically no way to see the character as such; in other words, as though the Shintoist values of ancient Japan did not fit the contemporary ones, Clover Studio decided to strip Amaterasu's femininity away, leaving her genderless in practice. In the first place, the decision to depict her as a wolf instead of as a human does not essentially annul her original gender, but it does help immensely in hiding it without resorting to a flagrant modification of it. Secondly, throughout the game the narrative takes good

care to avoid referring to her femininity, for example by averting pronouns such as 'she', although there exist a few exceptions[20]. Last but not least, Clover Studio do in fact admit erasing Amaterasu's female condition in the instructions booklet: "*though deliberately written to be a genderless character in the game, Amaterasu is portrayed as a woman in the context of Shinto mythology*" (p. 36).

When compared to the original Japanese folklore, *Ôkami*'s interpretation is somewhat detrimental from a feminist point of view, since Amaterasu's gender appears to become a problem. Most probably, the erasure of her femininity responds to marketing strategies and beliefs, but there is no space here to delve into that. The interests of this thesis lie on the game's content, and what can be asserted for now is that the interpretation of Amaterasu as a female or not is left much bound to player backgrounds. A good proof of that is the abundant discussion that this issue has sparked in several forums[21].

In the debate of whether *Ôkami* is representative of feminist or sexist views (or neither), the Poncle Issun arises as a very important figure. A facet of Issun that has not been explained yet is his blatantly sexist demeanor towards women. Issun loves to flirt with women, which is not necessarily something bad, but problems start with him insisting too much. In at least one instance, he even takes it far enough to commit sexual assault, taking advantage of his minuscule size to get into Sakuya's kimono and stay between her breasts against her will. Moreover, the situation is accompanied by cheerful music[22], which seems to suggest that it is a funny one. Other sexist attitudes of Issun include finding interest in interacting with women only when he considers them to be physically attractive, thereby suggesting that the rest of their attributes are relatively irrelevant. This becomes evident in his encounters with Queen Himiko or Kaguya; in the case of the latter, when spotted in a jail cell, he persuades the player with the following words: "*she's got her back turned. They usually turn out to be ugly when they turn around anyway. (...) Forget about her. Let's keep going*".

Considering the major role owned by Issun in the game, he constitutes a highly present sexist

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20 These have been compiled in the Ôkami Wiki. They can be checked in the 'Trivia' section of the following article: http://okami.wikia.com/wiki/Amaterasu.
21 Some examples are found in the following forums:
GameFAQs: https://www.gamefaqs.com/boards/943732-okami/42625610.
IGN: http://www.ign.com/boards/threads/is-amaterasu-a-male-or-female.128537100/.
Neoseeker: http://www.neoseeker.com/forums/37594/t1345973-amaterasu-girl-boy/.
22 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Knu3mIwdNXQ.

archetype with power to either spread his views on women or offend players. However, he reaches such a ridicule point that he might as well be understood as the caricaturization of that archetype, then turning into a feminist critique of the sexist attitudes in question. There are signs which support this reading: Amaterasu effectively notices that there is something wrong with Rao, the Buddhist priestess at Ankoku Temple, when she is about to reveal her true identity: she is actually Ninetails in disguise. For Issun, instead, it takes longer to assimilate the situation, and he innocently asks: "*where's the busty babe we know and love?*". Here, the player is being made aware that Issun's way of judging women (or people in general) is a failure. For her part, Kai, a girl from the Oina tribe, mockingly tells Amaterasu that "y*ou must be very strong if you can cope with Issun*", making evident that the latter, with his character, is a difficult one to bear with. It is convenient here to retrieve Issun's representation of a neoliberal worldview, commented in the previous section; despite repeatedly advising against helping Nippon's inhabitants for the sake of pure altruism, in some situations the player is given no choice but to dismiss that advise (and therefore his ideas). Thus, there is the possibility for Issun to be actually seen by the player as the model of what is not to be followed, significantly turning around some discourses in the game.

Before closing out this sub-chapter, there are a few more aspects in *Ôkami* that need to be commented, since they once again bring us near the conclusion that Nippon is generally a place of sexism, rather than feminism. Firstly, and in accordance to standards that are general to the Japanese popular culture industry, some of the most relevant female characters in *Ôkami* experiment a sexualization that is much in line with Issun's perceptions of women as sexual objects. Rao, with her exaggerated bust, as well as the bouncing breasts of Sakuya, the spirit who dwells in the Konohana tree, are the most prominent examples of that. There would not be anything sexist in coincidentally having a couple of important female characters display such traits, especially when there are women in the material world who may physically identify with them. Nevertheless, the context observed in the thesis matters here, and *Ôkami* follows an evident pattern in which female bodies are utilized and emphasized over other personal attributes for commercial purposes.

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Figure 12. Rao in her first encounter with Amaterasu.

Lastly, the classic sexist conception according to which male lust is okay, but female lust is despicable, seems to exist in the game too. This is clearly seen in the figure of Rao and through audible rhetoric, specifically the music which surrounds her[23], filled with lascivious female voices. Considering that the Rao with whom the player interacts is finally found to be Ninetails, her theme is associating female lust with evil and corruption. On the other hand and as mentioned before, Issun's lust is accompanied by rather cheerful music, and his alignment with the benign side might be significant as well.

5.7. Ainu, Europeans and Japanese

As explained in the sub-chapter concerning the geography of Nippon, the presence (and relevance) of the Oina tribe as representative of the Ainu people and the reproduction of their folklore by *Ôkami* enforces the image of a Japan that is multicultural, not ethnically homogeneous. The fact that Kamui, the land of the Oina representing Hokkaido, does not seem to be considered as part of Nippon would lead to the dismissal of that assumption, but that loses relevance when there exist other cultures in Nippon proper as well (the Sparrow Clan and the Dragonians). For that reason it can be said that, when portraying Japan, *Ôkami* is committed to directing some attention towards its ethnic minorities, specifically the Ainu. Even so, how are the Ainu being depicted and positioned in that game world?

To begin with, the fact that the Oina are being called 'a tribe' is already indicative. It appears to me that the word 'tribe' denotes here a certain disdain, as if to mean that the Oina are underdeveloped people who cannot be compared to the dominant culture in Nippon (which is not given a name, but obviously represents the Yamato, more popularly referred to as simply the Japanese). Further facts

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23   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v20GrmcdW4o.

confirm *Ôkami*'s racist portrayal of the Ainu: the Oina are depicted as shape-shifters who can alter their appearance between that of a human and a wolf, which adds to their image as wild, barbaric peoples. Besides, there are the roles executed by Amaterasu and Oki, the Oina warrior who is to serve his people as a hero, and their relation with both the Shinto and Ainu mythologies. When Lechku and Nechku, the demonic twin owls inspired by Ainu folklore, menace the land of Kamui in the third arc, Oki and Amaterasu collaborate in order to successfully defeat them and save the Oina. Instead, when they face Orochi, a demon who belongs to Shintoism and causes trouble mainly to Nippon, the foreign Oki finds himself unable to unleash his power and deal with the serpent. This sets up a colonialist discourse according to which the Japanese goddess becomes the savior of not only her people, but the Ainu too, whereas the Ainu hero can do nothing to help the Japanese. Also, Shintoism dominates Ainu folklore here, which is implied by the fact that a champion of the first can cope with the monsters of the second, but an Ainu champion is helpless against the demons of Shintoism.

Aside from the Ainu culture, the European one is portrayed in *Ôkami* as well. It is interesting to see how, in that case, the representations of the foreign display a completely different treatment. If Japanophilia has become strong in the West, there certainly exists a solid Europhilia in Japan as well, and that is captured in the game. European culture is represented, for example, in the character called Waka, who likes to employ French words in his speech (English in the case of the Japanese version), and whose flying boat looks like a Christian church with stained glasses. Another example are the Celestials, who are found in the form of spirits inside the Ark of Yamato and wear Greco-Roman tunics, as well as Christian halos above their heads.
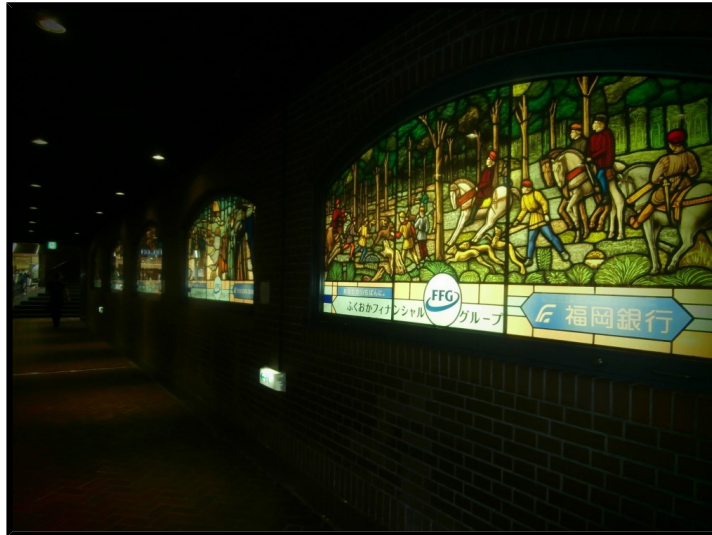
Figure 13. This advertisements of Fukuoka Bank are a characteristic feature of Fukuoka's Tenjin Chikagai, an underground space connecting two main subway stations of the city and serving as a commercial core as well. The enactment of stained glasses in the advertisements is a good example of Japanese Europhilia.

What is important here is what the Celestials and Waka have in common: they all come from the Celestial Plain, which appears to constitute a heaven where gods used to live. Therefore, the European (or Western) culture is being offered an honorable spot in the celestial heights. Even more interestingly, the Japanese culture is given that same status, with Amaterasu herself and the Ark of *Yamato* being native to the Celestial Plain too. This contrasts the treatment given to the Oina as the Ainu. In regard to that, the fact that they are the only cultural group in the game world representing a non-Japanese, non-Western collective existing in the material world must be taken into account.

Ultimately, it can be asserted in this section that *Ôkami* contains a supremacist discourse in which both the Japanese and the Western people are considered superior to the rest. That condition is dictated by the very cosmology of the game world, suggesting that it is eternal and unchangeable. Depending on which perspective is taken, there may be a Japanese supremacism against the foreign, but with the indulged Western people constituting an exception, or there may be a Western supremacism reassessed so that the Japanese are raised and matched to a desired model. The latter perspective makes much sense if a key element of the Japanese popular culture industry explained in the corresponding theoretical chapter is taken into account: the influence that Western, and more specifically American culture has had on it. In that case, *Ôkami*'s supremacism can be seen as a reproduction or a copy of a Western one with global range.

According to the methodology, the topics to be analyzed are mostly those that are main to the game or that have special relevance, so that we can outline what may Japanophiles relate to Japan or, seen it in a different way, what kind of Japan is Nippon constituting. These have been already expounded, but there are a few more that, despite being less present or important, deserve to be at least mentioned.

Firstly, *Ôkami* offers an auditive experience that has not been much commented. Together, the sounds of nature and those of traditional Oriental instruments, often in the form of music, set up a soundscape that constitutes a notable element of the game world. These two sides enhance the presence of two main topics of the game that have been already much discussed: nature and art, respectively. I will argue that, in rhetorical terms, the traditional music is particularly relevant, helping the game world in transmitting something important to the Japanophile player: the feel that she finds herself in (a pre-modern, traditional) Japan or, in other words, Japanese fragrance. This particular fragrance is important in triggering the Japanophile affect in the player, something that, as described in the theory, has a strong emotional component. In this case, if as Abraham (2015) suggested, esthetics possess an underrated rhetorical power in games, music can be added to that group as well, especially considering its emotional potential. Thus, the soundscape joins other explained elements in making *Ôkami* capable of luring Japanophiles deeper into their philia.

Although *ukiyo-e* as represented in the esthetic of the game world has been discussed, the role of the Celestial Brush in its realization deserves some comment as well. By using the Celestial Brush as a painting tool, *Ôkami* allows (forces) the player to participate in the making of that *ukiyo-e* game world, and with it, its folktales. Drawing a parallelbetween Amaterasu as the omnipotent creator of the world (as Sakuya says: "*our mother and the origin of all that is*") and the Japanophile player as the creator of her own dream, a recurrent message can be descried once again: "*armed with divine power and a brush, you must paint your dreams to make them a reality*" (instructions booklet, p. 2). In my opinion, the Celestial Brush mechanic can be seen as constituting one more procedural rhetoric, since it empowers the player in the making of a Japanese legend. This rhetoric persuades the player with a discourse already spread by the mechanics of praise, a discourse according to which Japanophile dreams can be made true.

Gadgetry as evil is another topic which appears significantly enough to be mentioned, albeit it

does not do so very strongly until the end. Perhaps its first strong appearance is in the demons Lechku and Nechku, who seem to actually be wind-up devices ran by a combination of cogs. The most clear example, however, does not show until in the final battle against Yami, a mysterious orb that represents darkness, but something else too: "*its inorganic nature resembles machinery, leading one gadgetry expert to speculate[24] that it is likely the source of all machines*" (Yami's fourth form bestiary entry).

Figure 14. Lechku (left) and Nechku (right) as painted in the scroll shown before boss battles.

One possibility is that Clover Studio wanted to transmit here an ecologist discourse, similar to the one in the anime production *Princess Mononoke* (Miyazaki, 1997), with which by the way the game presents notable similarities. Another possibility is that it was intended to be a critique of the video game *industry*, considering that Clover Studio was formed as Capcom's independent enterprise with the target of doing less mainstream, not so commercial productions. Whichever is the case, the message is not much developed throughout the game, and therefore quite open to speculation and with hardly any effect on Japanophiles' conception of Japan.

One last issue that deserves some discussion has to do with commodification theories exposed in the literature review. As it has probably become evident to the reader at this point, *Ôkami* can be seen as an example of commodification of Japanese traditional culture, meaning that the latter is put at the service of the popular culture industry for commercial purposes. What matters in this case, is

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24 In the original entry it says 'speculated' instead of 'speculate'. The mistake has been fixed here.

how that has affected Nippon as Japan in representational terms. As a piece of traditional, but also popular culture both from Japan and in general, *Ôkami* reproduces a series of cliches that tint its depiction of Japan. Regarding general popular icons, one that especially stands out is the Western heart symbols, which emerge for instance from animals that Amaterasu has fed. Tsukuyomi stuck into a stone and being pulled is yet another cliche, originally coming from the British legends around the sword Excalibur but repeated in contemporary popular culture. With regard to popular stereotypes in which Japan is identified, the abundant cherry blossoms or the Japanese rising sun stand out. With these cliches, what is at stake is the accuracy and realism of the portrayal of Japan, especially considering that a pre-modern Japan is suggested. It is interesting here to remember the reflections of Carlson and Corliss (2011) on localization strategies and commercial interests abroad, although most, if not all, of the symbology in question probably appears in the original version as well. Specifically in regard to the Japanese cliches, Iwabuchi (2002b) might be more right in this case when he warns about the influence of Western Orientalism on the Japanese identity, what he sums up as self-Orientalism.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Literature review in regard to Japanophilia, the Japanese popular culture industry, and representations both from a game and player perspectives has been revised, providing theoretical background to this thesis. With the support of all that work, an analysis of *Ôkami* has been conducted in order to answer the research questions laid out: with the Japanese popular culture context in mind, what representations of Japan can be found in the game, and how may they affect the perceptions that Japanophile players have of the country?

Perhaps the first and most obvious conclusion that this thesis can produce is that Japanese traditional culture adopts a major role in the depiction of the country. Without a doubt, the Japan represented in *Ôkami* is mostly characterized by features that are previous to the massive introduction of Western culture into the country: above all, the mythological world governed by Shinto beliefs, but also the presence of old artistic practices such as *ukiyo-e* or pottery, the folkloric soundscape, or simply the way people dress. To put it in another way, *Ôkami* is set in a pre-modern Japan, even if abstractly. As expressed in the results chapter, *Ôkami* can be understood as Clover Studio's (inevitably modern) interpretation of Japanese folktales. Thus, a modern, pop, culturally hybrid way to produce culture clashes against the genuinely traditional essence of most of the featured elements, giving birth to what Nippon is. As Clover Studio already states in the instructions booklet: "*the result was this game which brings a distinctive blend of watercolour ink style to a digital platform - old meets new*" (p. 2).

What is very interesting here is the following paradox: the game being a Japanese popular culture piece at the same time than one of traditional culture. On the one hand, *Ôkami* becomes, within the Japanese popular culture world, a door for Japanophiles to access more traditional aspects of Japanese culture. This can potentially and constructively spark some interest in the players for the Japan existing beyond that popular culture context, inciting them to broaden their knowledge on the country, much in the fashion outlined for example by Consalvo (2016: 33). On the other hand, this condition is also the reason why Nippon presents a series of cliches and other elements belonging to both the Japanese pop culture and the pop culture in a general sense. As Allen/Sakamoto (2006) and Iwabuchi (2002b) remind, Japanese popular culture appears always influenced by the West, sometimes in the form of self-Orientalism. It can be concluded that traditional culture in *Ôkami* is as much displayed as commodified by the industry, resulting in a re-conceptualization of itself.

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In terms of representations and their effects, this has implications for example when it comes to the role carried out by the folktales. As Cragoe (2016) explains, once folktales have transcended oral cultural contexts and become transcultural, they may serve completely different functions for the people involved (p. 592). These functions have to do with the construction of identities and a place where to belong (more on this is developed later in the conclusions), transcultural domination and, of course, commercial purposes. Obviously enough, other implications of the commodified traditional culture arise from the degree of realism reached by Nippon as Japan. Although *Ôkami*'s representation of Japan is not intended to be a realist one, the fact that certain popular cliches appear in a purportedly traditional Japan seems relevant when the collective imaginary is considered.

The second important conclusion of this thesis addresses miscellaneous subjects that, as it has been discussed throughout the results chapter, are put alongside the concept of Japan, which is much present in *Ôkami* due to two main reasons: the evident Japanese cultural odor (fragrance for the Japanophiles) of the game, and the fact that Nippon as a space is representing Japan; therefore, when for example sexist attitudes take place within Nippon, it becomes a sexist space as much as a Japanese one, resulting in the representation of a sexist Japan.

Sexism versus feminism might precisely be one of the most controversial subjects in *Ôkami*. Although the game certainly presents some feminist elements, in my opinion it is safe to assume that sexism prevails in its discourse. However, in opposition to what happens with the representation of Japan as traditional, which is very explicit and politically lighter, the interpretation of such representations appears to be quite subject to the backgrounds brought in by the players; for example, Issun clearly constitutes a sexist icon, but that can be interpreted in at least three different ways: a player may understand that his attitude is acceptable or even positive, a player may be offended by it, or a player may gratefully understand the character as a critique of such attitudes. This ambiguousness only leads to the conclusion that video games can be highly polysemic objects, and that a certain personal condition such as the one of the Japanophile does not always act as a differential. Therefore, video games in terms of their representations, meanings and effects must be understood as generative substrates, that is, sets of different possible ways in which a player might understand or experience them.

It is possible to reach the same conclusion from looking into other relevant representations of Japan in *Ôkami* as well. For instance, the game's depiction of Japan as a place of Japanese and Western supremacism, with the Ainu being portrayed as inherently inferior, has interesting

implications in terms of realism. On the one hand, Nippon as Japan may be seen as not realist, since it proposes an ethnical reality that is too simple to be true, plus unacceptable. On the other hand, if it is assumed that that virtual reality is emerging from notions established in Japan, and that it is transferring from Japanese minds into Nippon, the representation may suddenly become one that provides *Ôkami* with sheer realism. A parallel assertion could be made in regard to the representation of Japan as sexist. The differential allowing the player to perceive such particularities resides in what Galloway (2004) calls the congruence requirement.

If *Ôkami*'s representative substrate is to be outlined, a couple more representations of Japan existing in the game deserve to be at least mentioned: Japan as a world ruled by neoliberal values, and Japan as an ecosystem under the threat of technology or the industry. However, the purpose of expounding *Ôkami*'s representative variety and the subjectivity of its interpretation is already fulfilled, and perhaps it is interesting to stay on the subject of realism in order to approach the third conclusion: Nippon presents features that point to a certain geographical authenticity in its portrayal of Japan. The most important of these features are the character of its nature, the prominent role given to art, the presence of Chinese influence, the congruence with the Japanese understanding of their country, and the fact that it is not ethnically homogeneous. I believe that this authenticity of *Ôkami* is a valuable trait, since it potentially deepens its players' familiarity with the reality of Japan, and can also spark their curiosity in subjects beyond popular culture, just as the traditional culture contents can do.

The fourth and last main conclusion of this thesis has the Japanophile point of view as a requirement. With that in mind, the most relevant representation of Japan in *Ôkami* depicts the country as a dreamworld that is possible, with divinity representing the Japanophile fantasies. This perception of Japan as an idyllic place is in fact not new to the Japanophile, so what *Ôkami* does is to enhance its existence. Signs that point to this conclusion are strong and numerous, ranging from the fact that mythological laws substitute physical ones in Nippon's nature to procedural rhetorics triggered by the game mechanics of praise and the Celestial Brush, everything accompanied by a persuading esthetic and soundscape. Depicting Japan as a *possible* dreamworld, *Ôkami* can bring Japanophiles closer to their utopia, pushing them to maximize their Japanophile lifestyle.

This understanding of Japan is not necessarily bound to the physical frame of the country, but instead, 'Japan' as an imaginary world where to experiment with emotions and live one's life takes major relevance; borrowing the words of Turner and Harviainen (2016: 1-2), it is constituted as a

world of make-believe, separated from but interleaved with the primary world. With the non-representational contributions of Shaw and Warf (2009) in mind, *Ôkami*'s game world can also be understood as a world of affect: one in which the representation explained leads to a Japanophile affect. Evidently and in accordance to the Japanese popular culture context, *Ôkami* as a world of affect is just part of a bigger, transmedia world of worlds. This bigger world constitutes the structure upon which Japanophiles have built an ethereal homeland, but also upon which they organize their activities and lifestyles in the material world.

Tuan (1977) says that "from the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and viceversa" (p. 6). In a way, the Japanese popular culture world may be understood as a comfortable, familiar and fantastic place (even if discontinuous and often virtual) for the Japanophiles to be within the vast, uncertain or even unsafe space in which we live. Zooming in, *Ôkami* (and Nippon) may as well be seen as a small place within the space formed by the Japanese popular culture world; it is a place, for example, of Japanophile dreams, celebration of Japaneseness and Japanese traditional culture. It is important to keep in mind, though, that it can also become a place of sexism, neoliberalism or ethnical supremacism, among others.

Future lines of research from this thesis basically stem from its limitations. In the first place, the way Japan is represented by video games could be investigated further, taking into account not only *Ôkami* but a relevant group of other games. That way, general trends could be outlined, leading to results that a case study cannot claim. Secondly, and staying in the case of *Ôkami* in this instance, it would be highly interesting to follow up this thesis with a player-focused research, which could test the game's representational qualities in terms of their actual effects on players. Finally, if Japanese traditional culture is commodified in *Ôkami*, Shaw and Warf remind of a context that must not be forgotten: places such as Nippon are also the product of an industry of affect; in other words, affect is commodified as well. With this contribution, Shaw and Warf unveil one more possible line for future research, which would involve an in-depth study of not only the representational qualities of *Ôkami* or their effects on how Japan is perceived, but its affective qualities as well. In that case, and as they warn, the capitalist exploitation of players' emotions and sensory registers should be considered in terms of context.

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