

## “That’s Not Real Victory”: Atomic Bomb Collective/Cultural Memory in *Call of Duty* and *Valkyria Chronicles*

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### Abstract

This paper examines how pre-established atomic bomb discourse is remediated through video games and becomes part of collective/cultural memory in both the West and Japan. Collective/cultural memory of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, generally speaking, has differed greatly between the West and Japan. Western (mostly American) collective/cultural memory discourse has remained largely unchanged in its support of the use of the bombs. In contrast, Japanese collective/cultural memory has shifted over time and can be said to have fractured into multiple systems of memory. Hashimoto (2015) divides Japanese memory of the war into three discourses: heroism, victimhood and perpetrators. Within this model, memory of the atomic bombs is located within the victimhood category. This dichotomy of collective/cultural memory adequately describes how traditional media have portrayed the war and shows the discrete differences between Western and Japanese collective/cultural memory discourses. However, little research has examined how video games fit into these systems. In response, this paper engages in a comparative case study of *Call of Duty: World at War* (2008), *Valkyria Chronicles* (2009) and *Valkyria Chronicles 4* (2018). These games are prototypical examples of how pre-established collective/cultural memory systems are recreated within video games. *Call of Duty* portrays the atomic bombs as a necessary, or perhaps even noble, part of World War II while *Valkyria Chronicles* uses an alternate reality version of World War II-era Europe as a way to call attention to victims and discuss issues of atomic warfare through allegorical representations of the atomic bombs. This representation allows for controversial issues (such as Japan’s role in the war) to be bypassed and focus to be placed on victims of atomic weapons. Ultimately, the paper argues that these games are representative of how video games remediate pre-existing collective/cultural memory in their representations of the past.

### Introduction

Nearly 75 years have passed since the atomic bombings of Hiroshima (6 August 1945) and Nagasaki (9 August 1945), yet the events of those days, and the continued trauma they brought, maintain cultural relevance in both the United States and Japan. This can be seen in the continued interest in historical research surrounding the atomic bombs and their aftermath, which has produced a vast historiography. Additionally, there has been persistent representation of the bombs and their victims in popular culture including films, television programs, literature, art and manga. While there has been much research into these other mediums and into how video games interrelate with history in general, there is little work that specifically

engages with how video games interact with larger atomic bomb discourses in both the United States and Japan. This paper engages in a case study of *Call of Duty: World at War* (Activision, 2008), *Valkyria Chronicles* (Sega, 2009) and *Valkyria Chronicles 4* (Sega, 2018) to argue that pre-established atomic bomb discourses, in both the United States and Japan, are remediated by video games and become part of larger systems of collective/cultural memory.

To accomplish this, the paper is divided into three distinct parts. The first section outlines and defines critical theory central to the main argument. Collective/cultural memory, discourse and remediation are specifically discussed to form a theoretical basis for the remainder of the paper. When understood together, collective/cultural



memory, discourse and remediation create a system of memory labeled as “discourse(s) of the past”, which is used as an analytical tool for media that engage in historical and memorial practices. The second section briefly examines relevant American and Japanese historiography of the Pacific theatre of World War II (1931-1945)<sup>1</sup> and the atomic bombs to establish the dominant historical discourse in each area. Primarily, American discourse of the war has remained positive and defends the use of the atomic bombs as part of a larger, justified war. In contrast, Japanese discourse of the war has been fractured and is much more diverse in how it remembers the past. The third section engages in a case study of *Call of Duty: World at War*, *Valkyria Chronicles* and *Valkyria Chronicles 4* where the games narratives and gameplay are compared to the dominant historical discourses to elucidate similarities and differences. Ultimately, these games largely follow established discourses and are representative of how video games remediate pre-existing collective/cultural memory in their representations of the past. This is significant to the field of game studies because it theorizes an alternate approach to how video games interact with history and reveals key cultural differences between American and Japanese video games.

### History, Memory, Video Games

There is a growing literature examining the relationship between video games and historical practice. Chapman (2016) provides an important theoretical view of how both history and video game histories are created arguing that all history is a construction that is neither entirely factual nor fictional (8). As a result, he argues for “historioludicity” which combines historical representation and thought with video game ludic discourses (such as rules and opportunities of action) (22). In other words, historically based video games create historical narratives through game design focused on representing the past in combination with player input. Squire (2004) offers the

idea of video games, like the *Civilization* series, as “historical possibility spaces” where players can interact with a game world based on a given historical time period and thus develop their own understandings of the past through gameplay (120). Other theories rely upon the idea that video games create historically authentic experiences through remediation that “feel” realistic for players rather than historically accurate experiences based upon true to life historical representation (Kapell and Elliot 2013, 361; Campbell 2008, 186; Penney 2010, 198). These theories, when taken together, have developed a framework for understanding video games set in the past as a type of historical narrative or representation. Each, in their own way, argues that historical video games are not fully based on fact but, regardless, contribute to the understanding of the past for players.

In addition to these more general studies of video games and history there have been numerous studies that examine an individual game or game director with an eye towards history and representations of the past. Most recently Hutchinson (2019a) has examined Hideo Kojima’s use of atomic bomb footage in the *Metal Gear* series (8-15). Additionally, theorists have examined historical or nuclear representation in series such as *Kantai Collection*, *Final Fantasy*, *Medal of Honor* or *Valkyria Chronicles* (Hutchinson 2019b, 130-248; Hess 2007, 339-356; Koski 2017, 396-414). Yet, there has been comparatively little work that specifically examines where representations of the past in video games originate from a historiographical perspective. While focus has been placed on the final content of historical video games, and the value of their subsequent representation of the past based on that content, other important issues have been sidestepped; namely what are the cultural influences that create these representations in the first place? Where do they originate? This paper argues that these questions can be answered through a combination of collective/cultural memory theory, discourse theory and processes of remediation.

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<sup>1</sup> In the United States one of the more common ways to name and date the war is the Pacific War (1941-1945). The dates of the war in this conception start with the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941) and end with Hirohito’s Imperial Rescript of Surrender (15 August 1945). However, in Asia the war is named and dated differently based upon nation, region, and politics. The dating of 1931-1945 used here encompasses the Japanese annexation of parts of Northern China in 1931 to create the puppet state of Manchuria. However, it would also be fair to

date the war, from a Japanese/Chinese perspective, as 1937-1945. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident (7-9 July 1937) can be viewed as the beginning of open hostilities between Japan and China, and thus, as the beginning of the Greater East Asia War. This paper uses the terms Pacific Theatre of World War II and the dating 1931-1945 as an attempt to include as many discourses as possible, particularly discourses that have traditionally been marginalized.

## Collective/Cultural Memory

Collective/cultural memory theory offers an alternative approach to studying the past and how that past is used in the present. Generally, the field argues that people formulate their memories in groups (rather than individually) based upon cultural touchstones, shared beliefs, objectivized culture or public spaces (Halbwachs 1980, 33; Nora 1989, 7-15; Assmann 1995, 132). As a result, the collective/cultural memory that is generated becomes a cultural construction that is neither truth nor falsehood. Collective/cultural memory is not permanent, rather it is constantly being created/recreated, written/rewritten and formulated/reformulated. Functionally, collective/cultural memory is not about remembering a truthful past but, instead, creates a vision of the past that is beneficial for contemporary society (usually to the benefit of entrenched power). Collective/cultural memory is not necessarily monolithic as multiple systems of thought or ways of remembering the past can exist in competition or coexist with one another. However, even in situations where multiple systems are present there is typically a predominant or hegemonic system.

The field of collective/cultural memory studies is diverse and varied, spanning numerous decades and academic fields. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this analysis, it is how media have been incorporated into the field that are most relevant. Zelizer (1992) extensively studied how John F. Kennedy and his assassination have been remembered in the United States in her book *Covering the Body*. By primarily focusing on the role of images, especially those found on television, Zelizer concluded that journalists set up narratives where they emerged as authoritative spokespersons of the JFK assassination (Zelizer 1992, 44, 187). As a result, when academics and historians attempted to study the assassination, they found that the vacuum had been filled by media personalities (115, 177, 183). This leads Zelizer to the conclusion that the American public is willing to cede retelling and memory to popular culture (210).

Erll (2007) also examines the role of media in her large-scale theorization of cultural memory. She considers media to be essential to any discussion of memory in contemporary society writing, “Cultural memory would be inconceivable without the role that media play on both levels- the individual and the collective” (2007, 113). Within her conception of cultural memory, Erll understands media as an interface that connects two levels of memory

(the individual and the collective). She further describes this relationship by modifying Marshall McLuhan’s famous phrase “the medium is the message” into “the medium is the memory” (Erll, 2007, 113-115). Consequently, within Erll’s theorization cultural memory in contemporary society cannot be created or exist without media.

In terms of the current analysis collective/cultural memory is understood as the system by which individuals interact with and remember the past (regardless of whether they experienced the events that they are remembering). This is facilitated through various media, but focus will be paid to collective/cultural memory generated through history/historiography and video games. This understanding is grounded within the field of collective/cultural memory studies with an eye toward expanding the field specifically into game studies and memory of the Pacific theatre of World War II.

## Discourse

With collective/cultural memory defined it is necessary to understand where, and how, these systems are created and maintained in the interest of entrenched power. Collective/cultural memory is not created without guidance and forethought of action. Discourse theory, in part, describes what motivates these decisions and formulates collective/cultural memory. Discourse, though now a popularized term, is perhaps best described by Foucault (1972). He theorizes the construction of knowledge, power relations within knowledge production, and the general practices of discourse creation by arguing that discourse is socially constructed but still has defined limits as to what can appear within it. He contends, “...relations are established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioral patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization...[yet] they do not define [a discourse’s] internal constitution, but what enable it to appear” (Foucault 1972, 45). Social relations thus define the limits and practice of a discourse. Collective/cultural memory systems, as a type of discourse, can only produce certain types of knowledge about the past.

This leads to an obvious question: what exactly defines and creates the outer limits of a discourse? Foucault argues that institutions shape discourse formation. The power of these institutions results in a system of formation that is a complex group of relations functioning as a rule (Foucault

1972, 73-74). Institutionalization of knowledge also determines who gets to speak, who is qualified to speak, and who is afforded the prestige, privilege and presumption of correctness within a discourse (Foucault 1972, 50). These are all important concerns when considering a discourse and its place within society. Foucault teaches us that discourses are not naturally occurring but are instead deeply connected to institutional power and privilege. When studying collective/cultural memory, use of his theories can help to assess the memory systems that exist, as well as why they exist in the forms that they do. Using Foucaultian analysis can also reveal hidden structures of power that are central to the formation of discourses.

Foucault provides an excellent framework for understanding discourse, however, his work is limited regarding media theory because he focuses primarily on archives. As a result, Foucault does not extend his analysis of discourse past 1850 (Kittler 1990, 369). Friedrich Kittler expands upon Foucault's work in his book *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*. Kittler emphasizes the role of power in the creation of discourse as he argues, "No discourse...can manage without authorized controls. In no culture is the dice throw of discourse not steered and curbed, checked and organized" (1990, 16). In expanding his understanding of discourse into the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, Kittler develops the idea of the discourse network as a way of incorporating new technologies. He defines a discourse network as, "...the network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and process relevant data" (Kittler 1990, 369). This expands discourse analysis to include the "second industrial revolution" which includes computational processes such as the storage and transmission of data (Kittler 1990, 370). As a result, Kittler provides a theorization of how discourse works within societies that rely upon computational organization of information rather than paper archives.

Kittler's expansion of discourse theory into the current century is essential for game studies as it allows for an easier understanding of how video games (from the code to the narrative) can be understood as discourse. For the purposes of analysis in this paper discourse will be understood as systems of information, narrative or scholarship that put forth a specific argument. Of course, these discourses are understood to be heavily influenced by powers structures and pre-established norms.

### Remediation/Premediation

Stated simply, remediation is, "... the representation of one medium in another..." (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 45). Bolter and Grusin further describe this process stating that when remediation occurs, "The content has been borrowed, but the medium has not been appropriated or quoted" (1999, 44). In other words, remediation can be understood as the process where narratives or imagery from one media/medium are altered so that they fit into and be presented within another medium. For example, a book, a film and a photograph can all communicate a similar message about the same event, but each does so within their own genre specific way. By drawing upon other media in their own representation, a new piece of media can make its message understandable and relatable to an audience.

In terms of history and collective/cultural memory, Erll expands this basic understanding of remediation, coining the term "premediation," which she defines as, "... a cultural practice of experiencing and remembering: the use of existent patterns and paradigms to transform contingent events into meaningful images and narratives" (2009, 114). Thus, according to Erll, historical events can turn into powerful premediators, becoming narrative schemata which can be used to create successful stories. Yet, she cautions that when these stories become trans-cultural, they can become decontextualized (Erll 2009, 127). Ultimately, Erll uses the theory of premediation to describe how existing memory influences the content of media and how these media effect and interact with collective/cultural memory. An event that is typically depicted in one way in one type of media will then be depicted in a similar fashion in another media. If this event is well-known, such as World War II, it is even less likely to be altered through remediation because significant premediation has already occurred or is culturally expected or accepted.

For the purposes of this work, established historical/historiographical discourses in both the United States and Japan are considered as the basis of premediation that influence the content of *Call of Duty: World at War*, *Valkyria Chronicles* and *Valkyria Chronicles 4*. Additionally, the process where historical texts become part of the narratives of these video games are considered as a process of remediation.

### Discourses of the Past

In summary, this paper combines collective/cultural memory, discourse theory and remediation into one research methodology to study the historical aspects of the

narratives, gameplay and imagery of *Call of Duty: World at War*, *Valkyria Chronicles* and *Valkyria Chronicles 4*. As a form of shorthand, this methodology is referred to as “discourse(s) of the past”. This methodology examines how historiography creates collective/cultural memory and specific discourses that are remediated into video games. This creates a cyclical system as the video games then become an updated version of discourse that influences players’ own interpretations of the past.

## **War Memory Historiographical Discourse**

This section briefly examines American and Japanese historiography of the Pacific Theatre of World War II. It should be noted that, due to space constraints, these historiographies are meant to be representative of the larger arguments found within each system rather than being exhaustive. No historiography can ever be truly complete, especially given the constant revision and expansion that typify the field. However, the goal of this section is not to capture the fields in their entirety but instead to define the hegemonic way of remembering the past that is revealed in each historiographical tradition or practice. This is done to provide a baseline for comparison for the selected video game case studies.

### **American War Memory**

American historiography, in line with collective/cultural memory, has been largely positive in analyzing American actions during World War II. There has been, in general, support and defense of the use of the atomic bombs (as well as conventional and firebombing). This sentiment is summarized by Brewer (2009) in her study of American propaganda during World War II, where she argues, “Americans preferred to remember the propaganda version of a noble war fought for democracy and freedom by innocent people forced to defend themselves against a vicious enemy, a war fought overseas by decent men while on the home front everyone contributed, a war in which the Americans played the starring role and the Allies had big parts, a war that

delivered a better life” (140). On its own this type of sentiment is understandable; it is unsurprising that an American public that just experienced (or directly fought in) total war would be content with a simplistic propagandic version of the events of the war. Yet, this vision of a “good war” becomes problematic as time passes.

Positive representations of the war and the use of the atomic bombs did not develop naturally. As outlined by Lifton and Mitchell (1995), early atomic-bomb discourse was highly structured and limited by censorship that had been orchestrated in tandem by the American government and occupation forces. Indeed, early reporting on the bombs had to rely solely upon government-sanctioned information (11). Alperovitz (1995) points specifically to three prominent American politicians, Henry Stimson (1867-1950), Harry Truman (1884-1972) and James F. Byrnes (1882-1972), as central forces behind early attempts at engineering American public opinion towards support of the atomic bombs (448-457, 460-465, 499-570, 571-588). In addition to these measures, General Douglas MacArthur (1880-1964) denied journalists access to both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, even going as far as to deny gasoline to planes after two reporters broke the ban (Lifton and Mitchell 1995, 47-49) These tactics allowed the government to control all outgoing information about the bombs and the victims. This control allowed for an official discourse of the atomic bombings to be established and become the only substantial discourse in the direct aftermath of the bombings.

The early discourse of support for the bombs has been replicated in American historiographical discourse to the point that support, justification or tacit approval of the use of the atomic bombs remains the hegemonic position. Most of this scholarship relies upon the idea that the atomic bombs were necessary to either save American lives or shorten the war. In other more extreme cases the decision to use the atomic bombs still follows a simplistic understanding of the war where good triumphed over evil.<sup>2</sup> This has helped to buttress popular support of the use of the atomic bombs in collective/cultural memory.

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<sup>2</sup> For examples of the dominant discourse of support or excusal see Bernstein (1996), Bix (1996) and Frank (2005). For support of this historiographical discourse see O’Reilly and Rooney (2005) who label any argument that does not support the decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki as “counterfactual” and, therefore, incorrect and false. This is not to imply that all American historiographical discourse of the atomic

bombs has supported their use in some way. For example, Dower (1986; 2010) and Zinn (2010) are against the use of the atomic bombs (or stray away from simplistic views of support and justification). Despite these works, careful historiographical analysis of the use of the bombs indicates that support or tacit approval of the bombs is the dominant way of depicting the decision to use the bombs.

Indeed, there has been only a (comparatively) small amount of inquiry into the more difficult or problematic aspects of the ways that the Allied powers fought the war in popular culture. This includes, of course, the use of the atomic bombs. Minear (1995) describes the issues of remembering the atomic bombs within American discourse noting that there are no American museums that commemorate the victims of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (350). This leads him to argue that, “Monuments in [the United States] to Hiroshima and Nagasaki take the viewpoints of the victimizers” (Minear 1995, 350). Minear does not find this to be particularly surprising, as he notes that nations do not commemorate their own atrocities (351). Crucially, he argues that in the United States the atomic bombings of Japan have become a bookend pair with the Pearl Harbor raid. This allows Americans to conceive of the atomic bombings as fit punishment for Japanese aggression (363-364). He thus provides a reasonable explanation for the deficits of atomic bomb memory in America and the West. The result is a decades long discourse of support or approval of the use of the atomic bombs that has created a strong collective/cultural memory of the war and bombs within American culture. This historiographical and popular discourse is entrenched and premediates narratives of World War II and the atomic bombs within other media.

### Japanese War Memory

Japanese collective/cultural memory of the war is far less unified than its American counterpart. In Japan war memory is fractured into several factions, none of which can be deemed truly hegemonic or marginalized. This fractured discourse is outlined by Hashimoto (2015) who summarizes her work, “I survey the stakes of war memory after the defeat in World War II and show how and why defeat has become an indelible part of Japan’s national collective life, especially in recent decades. I probe into the heart of the war memories that lie at the root of the current disputes and escalating frictions in East Asia that have come to be known collectively as Japan’s ‘history problem’” (2). This method allows Hashimoto to collect diverse ways of remembering the war and organize them into a more understandable and comprehensive categories.

Hashimoto identifies three “trauma narratives” within Japanese war memory. The first category of narratives emphasizes the stories of fallen national heroes. The focus of these narratives is the justification of past sacrifice by

Japanese soldiers, sailors, pilots and civilians that is claimed to have brought contemporary peace and prosperity to Japan. These narratives conveniently ignore state culpability in the eventual defeat of Japan in the war. The second category promotes empathy and identification with victims. The catastrophe and carnage of total war is a major part of these narratives. (It is within this category that Hashimoto locates Hiroshima and Nagasaki narratives and memory). Finally, the third category counteracts the first two by placing emphasis on Japan (i.e. the Japanese government and military) as a perpetrator during the war. The crimes of the Japanese government and military are the focus of this final category (8). These three types of narratives co-exist with one another and none occupy either a purely hegemonic position or a purely marginalized position. Indeed, within different temporal spaces and the memories of individuals any one of the three types of narratives can dominate. Importantly, none of the narratives dominates or finds itself marginalized everywhere.

Hashimoto summarizes the issues of these diverse memories within Japanese society as, “[A] cacophony of memory narratives, far apart in moral sentiments and interests, [that] accounts for the disarray in the nation’s representation of its metahistory” (8). She adds that the system is not, as oft-claimed in the West, about leaving the past unexamined, arguing, “...it is not about national amnesia but about a stalemate in a fierce, multivocal struggle over a national legacy and the meaning of being Japanese” (9). Crucially, in the consideration of this model it should be noted that, Hashimoto does not consider war memories to be fixed recall but as, “...subjectively constructed in particular present conditions” (19). She presents a system of discourses that are in perpetual struggle with one another as their proponents attempt to put forth their preferred discourse as the correct, dominant or hegemonic discourse wherever possible (i.e. academic history, textbooks, popular culture, etc.). Despite this struggle each discourse also continually interacts with the others and is constantly building/reconfiguring/rebuilding.

Further historiographical analysis of this characterization is beyond the scope of the current analysis however, it is worth noting that several other studies can be used as support for Hashimoto’s vision of Japanese

collective/cultural memory of the war.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of the current analysis it will be argued that there is no dominant or hegemonic way of remembering the war in Japan (at least not to an equivalent level of the positive depiction found in the United States) but that there are several discourses of the past that consistently vie for supremacy while, paradoxically, coexisting. Among these is a discourse of Japanese victimhood that encompasses memory of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

## Video Game Case Studies

The previous sections have outlined a discourse(s) of the past model of analysis and defined the dominant historiographical discourses surrounding the Pacific Theatre of World War II in both the United States and Japan. This section applies this model by examining the narratives, imagery and gameplay of *Call of Duty: World at War*, *Valkyria Chronicles* and *Valkyria Chronicles 4*. This is done to elucidate the similarities and differences between pre-established discourses and the ludic discourses of the games. Ultimately, the ludic discourses are influenced by the dominant discourses and help to establish or maintain collective/cultural memory in both the United States and Japan.

### **Call of Duty: World at War**

Activision released *Call of Duty: World at War* (hereafter CoD: WaW) in 2008, as the fifth title in the long-running *Call of Duty* series (2003-present). The game, an action heavy FPS, places the player into the role of two sets of soldiers in an interwoven storyline based upon the historic battles of World War II. One half of the story focuses on a group of Russian soldiers battling Nazi German forces as they push towards Berlin while the other half concentrates on American soldiers in the Pacific as they moved from island to island in a drive towards the

Japanese home islands. Even though the series has had numerous sequels (most recently *Call of Duty: Black Ops 4* in 2018) and has featured World War II numerous times (most recently in 2017 with *Call of Duty: WWII*) CoD: WaW remains the only game in the series that has featured the Pacific Theatre of World War II.<sup>4</sup> This makes the game a fascinating example of American collective/cultural memory in a ludic form, found within one of the highest selling and most popular game series in the industry.

Stated simply, the narrative and gameplay of CoD: WaW relies heavily on the American mythologized version of World War II that depicts the conflict as a battle between good and evil. In the game’s opening mission, titled *Semper Fi* and taking place during the Battle of Makin (20-23 November 1943), the player character, Private Miller of the U. S. Marines, starts the mission as a captive of the Japanese forces. The player watches as one of Miller’s comrades is violently stabbed to death by a Japanese soldier after refusing to reveal important intel about the suspected U. S. invasion of Makin. The Japanese soldier then approaches Miller, knife drawn, seemingly with ill-intent. Luckily for the player, the Japanese soldier is stabbed in the back by an American rescue team sent to locate Miller and his comrades. At this point the player receives a weapon and the FPS action of CoD: WaW begins. This not-so-subtle narrative framing allows the player to take the role of a heroic American soldier enacting righteous vengeance on an evil foe via action gameplay. This foe has, of course, just been depicted committing a war crime.

This is not the only example of the player being given narrative justification for their actions while also being depicted as a righteous hero. Another mission, titled *Black Cats* and taking place rather nebulously “South of Okinawa” in 1945, has the player take control of an American amphibious aircraft. The player, who is a gunner in the aircraft, takes part in the sinking of a Japanese merchant vessel, which they are assured is a legitimate target because it is part of the enemy war machine. As the vessel sinks a

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<sup>3</sup> While far from an exhaustive list there are several works that can be read through Hashimoto’s characterization of Japanese war memory. Stahl (2016) examines critical postwar literature and the ways that it is used as a counter-discourse of conservatist history. Nozaki (2008) and Nozaki and Inokuchi (1998) have examined Ienaga Saburo’s famous court challenges that petitioned to allow his textbook to be allowed in Japanese classrooms. Watanabe (2001) and Igarashi (2000) offer readings of the role of popular culture in formulating Japanese opinions of the past. Finally, the *hibakusha* (survivors of Hiroshima and

Nagasaki) literature tradition along with “peace education” movements have also influenced how Japanese people remember the war.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that nuclear weapons appear and are used in numerous titles in the *Call of Duty* series. However, *CoD: WaW* is the only game in the series that depicts the use of the atomic bombs that were dropped on Japan in 1945. While, the series provides a more nuanced vision of nuclear weapons, a full discussion of all representation of these weapons is beyond the intended scope of this present work.

radio transmission informs the crew that an American ship has been sunk in combat with Japanese air power. The rest of the mission involves switching between pulling American sailors out of the ocean and manning a machine gun while shooting down Japanese aircraft. The player is given audio confirmation that it is okay to sink a Japanese ship and then engages in heroic actions against a Japanese foe.

Yet it is the conclusion of the game that best replicates the American discourse of the war which excuses or justifies the use of the atomic bombs. In the game's final mission, titled Downfall, the player controls Russian soldiers as they storm the final bastion of Nazi power in Berlin, the Reichstag. The mission ends with a dramatic recreation of the flying of the Soviet flag at the end of the battle (2 May 1945). This concludes the playable portion of the game, however, ending in May 1945 leaves out almost 3 months of the war. During this time period the Americans heavily bombed Japan with conventional, fire and, finally, atomic weapons. In CoD: WaW this section of the war is removed as the player transitions directly from flying the Soviet flag over the Reichstag, the seat of power of perhaps history's most hated, murderous dictatorship, to historical footage of the *Enola Gay* dropping an atomic bomb on Hiroshima before finishing with footage of General Douglas MacArthur's speech on the USS Missouri (2 September 1945) and a reminder that 60 million people died as a result of World War II.

A direct connection is made between Nazi genocide and the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima (there is no depiction of Nagasaki). The message becomes clear, the Japanese (allies of the Nazis) were evil, and the atomic bomb was a justified (and moral) action against a deserving foe. This ludic discourse is derived from the familiar American historiographical discourse.

#### ***Valkyria Chronicles and Valkyria Chronicles 4***

Whereas CoD: WaW creates discourses of the past through an attempt at historical recreation (or at least some

adherence to historical "accuracy"), the *Valkyria Chronicles* series creates narratives of the past through allegorical representations of past events. The series takes place in an alternate reality that highly resembles World War II era Europe. The storylines take place in Europa and typically follow the Second European War (or its direct aftermath) in which the Federation (located in the West) fights the Empire (located in the East) both for continental domination and the procurement of a fictional ore called Ragnite.<sup>5</sup> While the majority of the weaponry in the series has real world equivalents (and is even based off designs from World War II) there is also a class of super soldiers with fantasy powers. These women are known as Valkyria, descendants of a powerful race, that have immense power such as super speed, ability to deflect bullets and a special ability called the Valkyrian final flame (discussed below). The player engages in this world through a combination of strategy, 3<sup>rd</sup> person shooting and visual novel style gameplay.

In the first game of the series, *Valkyria Chronicles* (hereafter VC), the player controls Welkin Gunther and a ragtag group of soldiers from the small nation of Gallia. Picturesque Gallia is sandwiched between the much larger Federation and Empire and is rich in ragnite, which leads the Empire to invade the country despite Gallian neutrality. While much of the game and series is historiographically interesting, for the purposes of this analysis two major events will suffice.

The first is the capture of the Imperial commander Selvaria at Ghirlandaio. Selvaria is a Valkyria and one of the main antagonists of the player-controlled Squad 7 militia. After several encounters on the battlefield with Selvaria the player is tasked with defeating her at the great citadel of Ghirlandaio. With this task accomplished Selvaria is taken captive by Squad 7, who are forced to hand her over to the Gallian military forces (whom have been depicted as pompous and particularly condescending to their own militia throughout the narrative). Selvaria requests that the militia be used as guards to escort captured

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<sup>5</sup> In general, within the allegorical representation of the series, the Federation maps onto the Western Allied powers (United States, Great Britain, France) while the Empire maps onto Nazi Germany, though neither of these mappings fits perfectly. Ragnite functions similarly to petroleum as it fuels the numerous tanks of the series while also having many other uses, such as being an ingredient in explosives, medical packs and small armaments. Notably, there are no equivalents for the

Soviet Union or Japan in the early parts of the series. In *Valkyria Chronicles 4* a side story reveals that one of the playable squad members, Azusa, is a spy from "the Far East" who was "raised by a clan of assassins". Given her name, skills and physical appearance it can be strongly interpreted that she is from a nation equivalent to Imperial Japan, though this is never confirmed.



Imperial troops back to the Gallian capital, which the Gallian General Damon accepts.

This gives Squad 7 (and the player) a perfect vantage point to witness the Valkyrian final flame. Shortly after being taken captive it is revealed that Selvaria allowed herself to be captured so that she could sacrifice herself to both destroy the citadel and kill the Gallian army forces. The imagery of this is a clear allegorical reference to the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Selvaria begins to glow blue as she slowly walks towards a gloating General Damon. Slowly the flames extend outwards and a great flash of light envelops Damon as he screams. From outside the citadel members of Squad 7 witness a massive explosion, complete with a shockwave and resulting in a mushroom cloud that contrasts against an orange and red sky. As with the events at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, within the narrative no one fully understands what has happened, but they recognize the massive destruction and loss of life in a blink of an eye.

On its own, the scene is astonishing within the narrative, as there has been no previous indication of the sheer power of the Valkyrian final flame (in addition some players, of course, would be able to make the connection between the game and real life events which adds to the shock). Yet, VC extends beyond this single depiction of the ultimate power within its fictional universe. Midway through the narrative of the game it is revealed that one of the soldiers of Squad 7, Alicia, is also a Valkyria though she was unaware of her powers. Having seen the effectiveness of Selvaria’s final attack, Alicia is forced to contemplate her own powers and debate whether she should use them in battle.

In a later mission, Squad 7 fails to divert an enormous Imperial super tank, the Marmota, from the Gallian capital regardless of player actions. Alicia, seeing no other way to stop the tank from invading the capital, slowly walks towards the Marmota, glowing blue and intent on using her Valkyrian final flame. Welkin sprints after her; their dialogue is particularly telling. Alicia seeing that Welkin wishes to stop her yells, “I’m one life! My death could save a whole country!” He responds, “You could destroy them with your power, but that’s not real victory. Real victory... is something we must claim for ourselves without relying on your power.” This can be easily read as a criticism of the American decision to the atomic bombs. VC sets up an

alternate reality where both sides have access to the ultimate weapon. The Empire uses their weapon “pragmatically” regardless of human consequences while the Gallians refuse to sacrifice even a single person in their pursuit of victory. Within the universe of VC, the “evil” side uses their ultimate weapons while the “good” side refuses, regardless of possible justifications or rationalizations. This subverts the typical American interpretation and makes victims of the super weapons the focus of the debate surrounding whether the weapons should be used or not.

These two events are not the only time that the VC series examines the atomic bombs through its fictional universe. *Valkyria Chronicles 4* (hereafter VC4), released by Sega in 2018, makes the use of Valkyrian powers a central plot point. To summarize briefly, in VC4 the player takes control of a Federation squad that is invading Imperial territory. After the Federation Army is nearly wiped out, the player’s squad is the only fighting force remaining and, consequently, is selected for a secret mission aimed directly at the Imperial capital.

The player and their squad ride aboard three massive land ships (the vehicles are entirely fictional but resemble battleships that travel over land or frozen ocean) designed by the United States of Vinland.<sup>6</sup> Two of the ships are lost to enemy attack but one manages to breakthrough to the capital. At this point the protagonist, Claude, discovers that the ships were propelled by Valkyria, all of which were young girls, forced into powering reactors. If this is not abhorrent enough, he also learns that the plan is to ram the land ships into the Imperial capital and detonate them via the Valkyrian final flame.

Claude decides against carrying out this objectionable plan but discovers that one of his squad mates, Minerva, wishes to go through with it. Her squad had been wiped out before the mission and she harbored an intense hatred for the Empire. As she stands in the bridge of the ship, with her finger literally on the button, Claude attempts to dissuade her from carrying out the plan. He says, “Once that lever is pulled, it’s no longer war. It’s genocide. This beautiful city will be reduced to a barren wasteland. Millions of lives, young and old...gone. Dust on the wind.” Claude is successful in dissuading Minerva in a scene that should be read as another reference to the end of World War II that borders on not even being allegorical. It is a condemnation

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<sup>6</sup> Given the name “United States of Vinland” along with the fact that the nation is located across an ocean and allied with the Federation it is fair

to conclude that the nation is the VC universe’s equivalent of the United States of America.

of actions of the real past from an allegorical, ludic narrative.

## Conclusion

Utilization of a discourse(s) of the past model of analysis shows that pre-established historiographical discourses heavily influence ludic narratives. In the United States there is an established historiographical discourse that, at its most extreme, celebrates World War II as a good war and justifies or rationalizes the use of the atomic bombs. This, of course, effects collective/cultural memory of the war and influences remediation of World War II narratives. The discourse is strong enough that it premediates ludic narratives. In the case of CoD: WaW the result is an extremely pro war, narratively uninventive storyline. In Japan, a similar phenomenon occurs in the VC series when a generally non-unified discourse about the war is recreated and, as is typical, only one aspect of the war is focused on heavily: the use of the atomic bombs and resultant Japanese victimhood. While these depictions may not be purposeful or deliberate, they are relevant manifestations of cultural constructions of the past.

However, it must be asked: what is the relevance of these narratives? Do they cause any harm? Are they incorrect? To answer this, consideration must be given to what is missing. By portraying a necessary, good or heroic war, video games such as CoD: WaW cyclically engage in collective/cultural memory construction where an idea is premediated before being remediated and creating the same message for the next piece of popular culture (or academic inquiry). Ominously, this means that the right to fight foreign powers and use of atomic weapons, become further justified by an entrenched collective/cultural memory. In a similar fashion, the VC series interrogates American use of atomic weapons while it raises ethical questions about the atomic bombs. This places Japanese victims, especially *hibakusha*, at the center of the historical discourse. Yet, tellingly, it avoids larger issues of Japanese war crimes and culpability. The series builds upon specific aspects of Japanese collective/cultural memory but does not create a unique discourse of its own. It replicates the pre-existing issues within Japanese war memory. Ultimately, these games do not necessarily teach us about history or an authentic past. Nevertheless, they are valuable cultural touchstones that teach us how contemporary societies view their past and how they wish to organize their present.

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