

Kingdom Hearts, Territoriality and Flow

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between companies Square-Enix and Disney as played out within the games of the Kingdom Hearts (キングダムハーツ) franchise. We contrast the relationship between these two transnational companies within the franchise's aesthetics and theoretical logics over the course of the various games. We are particularly interested in the games' own thematization and problematization of concepts of globalization, transnationalism and cultural flow. The games narratively and interactively foreground the collapse of membranes that separate worlds, producing legitimate and illegitimate modes of territoriality and intermixture.

Author Keywords

role-playing games, franchises, Japan, globalization, translation, transmediation

THE FRANCHISE

The Kingdom Hearts franchise consists of a collection of disparate Disney and Square-Enix franchises that each exist within the Kingdom Hearts universe as separate 'worlds.' Half of the worlds like 100 Acre Wood, Wonderland, Atlantica, Agrabah and Port Royal, are Disney owned or licensed material with their appropriate characters. The other worlds, Destiny Islands, Traverse Town, Twilight Town, Hollow Bastion, Radiant Garden, and The World That Never Was, were created specifically for the series, with either randomly migrated Final Fantasy or newly created Square-Enix characters. These worlds are interesting as means of looking at ideas of national boundaries, distributed authorship and along lines of translation and transmediation.

The franchise had its origins in a chance encounter between two executives. In 2002, Square Soft (now Square-Enix's¹) HQ was in the same building as Disney's Japan branch, and Square producer Shinji Hashimoto began a conversation

¹ When we refer to decisions and policies clearly belonging to the corporate entity that existed before the 2003 merger of Square, Inc. with Enix, Incorporated, we will refer to "Square" and "Square Soft;" otherwise, we will refer to "Square-Enix."

with an unnamed Disney executive that led to the collaboration between the two companies. The work is primarily the product of Square: the directors, producers, and team leads are all Square employees, merchandise from the game is sold by Square-Enix's merchandising group, and Kingdom Hearts merchandise has very little presence in Disney retail spaces. Disney's contribution has been to give the development team authorization to create worlds based on Disney properties.

Reflecting this industrial relationship is the structure of the games as traversable narrative spaces. The main protagonist is Sora, who begins the first game on Destiny Island. Sora is a Square-created character; character design in Square games has institutionally been accorded authorial status, with character designers joining composers, art directors and producers in the short list of named credited artists. The director of the game, Tetsuya Nomura, distinguished himself as a character designer on Final Fantasy titles. The character design process can precede story development, and is a reflection of the producer's perception of its audience: the Final Fantasy games usually feature males in their mid-to-late teens, while Sora is 14 years old in the first game, aging appropriately in subsequent games.

Sora is joined by Donald and Goofy in *Kingdom Hearts* and *Kingdom Hearts II*; in *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*, Donald and Goofy are resources for certain battles, and do accompany him throughout his passage to different worlds; yet the player-avatar is clearly and unambiguously mapped onto Sora (or his doppelganger, Roxas) for the larger part of all the games. The worlds themselves are generally drawn from Disney properties, however, with a few exceptions.

If the game has been actively authored by Square-Enix, then the Disney Interactive (after a reorganization, renamed "Buena Vista Games") contribution could be described as somewhat more aloof. Nomura reported that Square-Enix was unsure whether they would be able to use Mickey Mouse extensively in *Kingdom Hearts II*, receiving authorization to include the character prominently only after development of the title was well underway.

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THE GAMES

The Kingdom Hearts franchise consists of four main games, *Kingdom Hearts* for the Playstation 2, *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories* for the Game Boy Advance, *Kingdom Hearts II* for the Playstation 2, and finally *Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days* for the Nintendo DS. There are numerous variations with versions, remakes and also two off platform cell phone games. For this work we are analyzing the English and Japanese versions of the four main games with as much variation as we can including the English, Japanese and Final Mix versions of *Kingdom Hearts*, the English version of *Chain of Memories*, the Japanese remake, *Re: Chain of Memories* for the Playstation 2, the English and Final Mix versions of *Kingdom Hearts II* and finally the Japanese version of *358/2 Days*.

Kingdom Hearts was released in Japan on March 28, 2002. It was released with a few additional elements, and an English translation in North America on September 17, 2002. Finally, *Kingdom Hearts: Final Mix* was released in Japan with the added elements from the North American release, a few additional tweaks and additions, an extended ending and the English language cutscenes on December 26, 2002.

Kingdom Hearts follows the story of Sora as he becomes a refugee in Traverse Town from his original home in Destiny Islands. He teams up with Disney characters Donald and Goofy and travels to various Disney franchise worlds such as *Tarzan's* Deep Jungle world, *Little Mermaid's* Atlantica and *Nightmare Before Christmas's* Halloween Town searching for his lost friends Kairi and Riku, fighting Heartless and Disney villains such as Jafar, Captain Hook and Maleficent and sealing the keyholes that lead to the hearts of those worlds. The story culminates with the defeat of Ansem, the Seeker of Darkness, who the player later learns is really the Heartless of Xehanort, the first disciple of Ansem.

Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories was released in Japan for the Game Boy Advance on November 11, 2004 and the English translation was released in North America under month later on December 7, 2004. It was then remade for the Playstation 2 as *Re: Chain of Memories* and released in a compilation with the *Kingdom Hearts II: Final Mix+* on March 29, 2007. *Re: Chain of Memories* was then translated and released individually in North America eight months later on December 2, 2008.

Chain of Memories is a two part game: in the first part you play as Sora entering Castle Oblivion on the ground floor and traveling up to the 13th floor, and in the second part you play as Riku entering from the 12th level basement and traveling up to the ground floor. Sora, searching for Riku and King Mickey is lured into Castle Oblivion with the promise that he lost something dear that is within the Castle. He assumes that this lost thing is Riku, but 'remembers' his old friend Namine as he travels up the floors. The game plays with ideas of memory, how it ties

between people and the ideas of both true and false memories, how they are created and whether they are more or less real. Sora's side ends with him entering a sleeping pod in order to exchange his memories of everything that happened in the Castle for getting back his previous memories lost during the journey up the floors of the castle, which include his previous journey and particularly of Kairi. In Riku's journey you arrive at the castle through the machinations of DiZ (who the player does not know is the true Ansem) masquerading as Xehanort's Heartless (still known to the player as Ansem). Riku works his way up from the basement dealing with his previous abandonment of his friends and family in order to gain the power of darkness and how that darkness resides as Ansem (really Xehanort's Heartless) in his heart. The story culminates in Riku's decision to walk the middle path between light and dark.

Kingdom Hearts II was released for the Playstation 2 in Japan on December 22, 2005 and was translated into English and released in North America on March 28, 2006. *Kingdom Hearts II: Final Mix+* was then released on March 29, 2007 in Japan with additional, added elements, English cut scenes and including the previously mentioned remake, *Re: Chain of Memories*.

Kingdom Hearts II begins roughly a year after *Kingdom Hearts* with the player controlling Roxas, who we learn in the first few hours is Sora's Nobody. After seven days in a computer generated world Roxas rejoins Sora and the player then takes over as Sora who has no memory of the events of *Chain of Memories*. After briefly meeting King Mickey Sora, Donald and Goofy then continue their search for Riku by visiting new and old worlds, and trying to unravel the mystery of the Nobody's plot. Eventually, Sora (and the player) is informed that what was previously thought to be Ansem was really Ansem's out of control disciple Xehanort's Heartless and the leader of the Nobodies is Xemnas, Xehanort's Nobody. The second half of the game involves trying to find a pathway to the world of the Nobodies in order to stop their plot to utilize Kingdom Hearts. The game culminates with Sora and Riku fighting Xemnas, returning to Destiny Islands for a final reunion with friends, and then the implications of a future journey when a letter from King Mickey arrives (by bottle in the ocean).

The most recent game, *Kingdom Hearts: 358/2 Days* was released in Japan for the Nintendo DS on May 30, 2009 and it is slated for a September release in North America.

358/2 Days takes place between right before the end of *Kingdom Hearts* and the beginning of *Kingdom Hearts II*. The events of *Chain of Memories* happen simultaneously with the first section, but off camera. The game follows 358 days in the life of Roxas, Sora's Nobody, as he works for Organization XIII going on missions to collect hearts for Kingdom Hearts, making friends with Xion and Axel, and finally questioning his identity and leaving the Organization

only to be captured by Riku and put into DiZ's computer generated world in order to join his memories and being back with Sora, which happens in the beginning hours of *Kingdom Hearts II*. The game follows a mission format where you have specific goals for each mission from information retrieval of new worlds to general heart collection to specific battles against singular Heartless, both large and small. The game explores the idea of emotions from the perspective the three Nobodies, Roxas, Xion and Axel, who supposedly have no emotions as they have no hearts.

There are three games that we have not included in this round of research, but which may be included in future work. Primarily is the Playstation Portable game *Kingdom Hearts: Birth By Sleep* slated for release in Japan in late 2009. Second are the two mobile phone games *Kingdom Hearts* for the V Cast, which was released in 2004 in Japan and 2005 in the United States, and *Kingdom Hearts Coded*, which was released to various mobile phones in late 2008. We have also not worked with the other media adaptations including the novels and manga.

ON METHOD AND FUTURE WORK.

Our primary methodology could be described as the critical and interpretive traversal of the game-artifacts that constitute the franchise, transcribed into recordings of gameplay sessions which we then review, study and analyze. The tools we use to produce and analyze these games are being developed by the Software Studies initiative at Calit2 in UC San Diego, under the direction of Lev Manovich. We also refer to an extensive literature created by players and fans of the game, both to guide gameplay and to reveal the elements of the game-system that may have escaped our own play. Translation is a dominant theme in this project; we are thus playing the games in both their English and Japanese releases, and transcribing the passage through the game allows us to compare translated elements.

This is an ongoing research project. The franchise is still producing new content; the authoring teams continue to create new narratives and game-play experiences. There are certain structural elements of the games that we intended to analyze in greater depth, including the changes in the battle system, the nature of the elemental and synthesis systems, and so forth. Within this article, we explore at some more depth two of the visited worlds; we will be expanding these world-interpretations as we carry on. The blog "Gummi Ship" (<http://gumiship.blogspot.com>) is our work in progress.

The next title in the Kingdom Hearts series, *Birth By Sleep*, will be set before the events of the first game. We expect a continued exposition of the game's cosmology, expanded allegorical mappings, and "pre-historical" narratives of the Disney-sourced worlds. We hope to continue our reading of these works on our blog, for as long as the franchise is active.

PROTECTIONISM, DEVELOPMENT AND THE PRIME DIRECTIVE.

The Prime Directive is a term from *Star Trek*. General Order #1, the Prime Directive, dictates non-interference with the internal affairs of other civilizations. This coincides with the real world understanding of Westphalian sovereignty where nations have the sovereign right to direct their own affairs and control their own borders. Of particular importance within the Star Trek world are the secrets of both space travel and the existence of other worlds and civilizations. This then coincides back to the real world understanding of 20th century media and cultural interventionism/imperialism. The joke, of course, is that within the Star Trek universe and Westphalian sovereignty within modernity non-interventionism and the prime directive are both avoided at any and every opportunistic turn. In Star Trek, while the Enterprise's crew tried its best to avoid informing people of the outside world and giving them technology, Captain Kirk was known to break the Prime Directive regarding intervention time and again both in terms of trysts with nubile aliens and in terms of preventing other nations (Klingon, Romulan) from interfering with unaligned worlds. It takes little effort to see this as analogous to the 20th century actions of the US involving what was called Development Theory and later would be called Cultural Imperialism.

In the post World War II period the US believed it had the right and duty to help nations develop. This development came from a linear movement away from pre-modern, third world culture to modern, western culture. Elaborated within Wilbur Schramm's plan for national development such cultures chose to receive help from outside countries in the form of monetary aid, education reforms, and infrastructure changes [8]. We will sidestep the ideas of 'choice,' 'ethnocentrism,' and 'domination' here and simply note that such intervention through 'development' happened regularly. However, as noted by Herbert Schiller, the US did not care in most instances whether or not the country developed. Rather, what was at stake was to prevent the communist Second World from expanding [7]. Development was simply one level of the cold war where influence (the idea of Cultural Imperialism) was intentionally spread.

What became termed the Cultural Imperialism thesis was problematic in many ways, but is useful enough for some of our purposes that unpacking it and justifying its inclusion is necessary here. The main problems of the Cultural Imperialism thesis are that it oversimplifies the situation and idea of influence. John Tomlinson argues that Cultural Imperialism cannot be seen as a concrete thesis, but must be understood as a discourse that contains four different, semi-legitimate threads: cultural imperialism as media imperialism, cultural imperialism as a discourse of nationality, cultural imperialism as the critique of global capitalism, and cultural imperialism as the critique of modernity [10]. Tomlinson proceeds to defuse the first three and highlight the truth of the last. In contrast, we will be

highlighting the first three as those, despite their actual efficacy, are the ones that can be read within the Kingdom Hearts franchise.

Media Imperialism, the idea that cultures influence through media does not give enough credence to the audience's ability to interpret and gives too much credence to the ability of creators to insert propaganda messages into their work [2]. In the case of games it is even more necessary to complicate this issue as there is no single authorial entity. The text comes from a diverse source. That said, it does come from a culturally particular place and in the case of the Disney and Square-Enix created Kingdom Hearts franchise there are in fact two originating places, Japan and the United States.

The discourse of nationality implies that there is a homogenization of cultures that occurs through cultural imperialism. While Schramm's belief in teleological development certainly hoped for this eventuality it is not quite so simple. Not only is culture difficult to pin point (what exactly it is) and impossible to pin down (culture is never static), but rebuttals hold that what is coming out of the homogenization (as there are certain transnational similarities emerging) is not a Western culture, but a global culture: as Curran and Park quote Anthony Giddens, "its effects are felt as much in Western countries as elsewhere" [6]. However, it must be noted that in the case of Kingdom Hearts, this global homogenization is posited in one main place: the Heartless. Not only does the player attempt to stop the homogenizing influence of the Heartless, but the player does this by sealing worlds, stopping the mixing. Because of this it is important to reiterate that while Cultural Imperialism is critiquable in its overly simplistic applications and support, it is certainly visible within the game.

The third element of the cultural imperialism discourse is the critique of global capitalism. Again, the original thesis indicates the forcing of such capitalism on unwitting and unwanted recipients, but the reality of the matter indicates a certain amount of desire for such capitalist development. Who's to say what was forced and what wasn't. However, again, like with the concept of homogenization, the issues of money, trade and mobility are issues within the Kingdom Hearts world that will be touched on later.

From here we return to Kingdom Hearts' use of interventionism and the prime directive. Various moments within the games talk about this. Initially there is an exchange between Donald and Goofy about protecting the world border/order (there is an interesting and telling malapropism that happens). This idea of the world order (border) effects what Sora can and cannot do in certain worlds from the necessity to hide their place of origin, to fit in through costumes, and to never bring people out or bring things into the worlds. However, while they supposedly must obey the prime directive not intervene, or as the game states, meddle, in the affairs of worlds, their actions are one

instance of meddling after another. This idea of meddling/interventionism and its opposition of protectionism comes to a head in the Atlantica world that represents the story of *The Little Mermaid*.

Atlantica's king, Triton, holds a special position as one of five monarchs (the other four are the slighted Queen of Hearts of *Alice in Wonderland*, the passive Emperor of *Mulan's China*², Simba, who needs your help to overthrow Scar, and the ever present, ever absent King Mickey). All other nominal rulers of the individual worlds are either lesser officials, absent powers or the like (the Sultan of Agrabah is absent, Halloween Town's mayor is an 'elected official,' Maleficent stole power from the previous non-ruler Ansem the Wise, Tron needs your help to beat the evil MCP, etc). In a game with 'kingdom' in the title these five powers must be understood as important for an analysis.

We already know what happens in Wonderland. The Queen of Hearts accuses Alice of something; she dupes the queen, escapes punishment and makes a mockery of the monarchy. Within the *Kingdom Hearts* rendition Alice is accused of attempted theft of the Queen's heart, Sora comes to her defense, but she is kidnapped by Maleficent. In *Chain of Memories* Alice and Sora explicitly dupes the Queen into creating false memories of her actions. *Mulan's* emperor is shown as impotent even with the help of his guards, and Mulan helps little without Sora, Donald and Goofy, proving, again, that intervention is necessary. Simba is at first an exile and then a weakling, and both roles result in ample help from Sora and company.

Finally we come to Triton, the King of the Sea. Within the film *The Little Mermaid* Triton sacrifices himself to save Ariel.³ Within the first game he recognizes Sora as not only an outsider, but as the Keybearer, one who brings trouble and destruction wherever he goes. Initially, Triton desires Sora to leave. However, he does two things explicitly: he destroys the icon that would reveal the keyhole and he requests that Sora rescue Ariel. The former is meant to prevent the opening of the door (that this door is already open is somehow missed by Triton; that it is Sora's goal to close this door is also missed). Triton acts out of the fear that Sora, as the keybearer, will interfere with his rule, however he then proves that he is unable to rule

² The status of Land of the Dragons as being China is explicit in the English version, but implicit in the Japanese. In the English translation the Emperor refers to Mulan as "China's bravest woman." In contrast, the original Japanese is "国一番の娘."

³ Interestingly enough this happens within the second game, something that is much confounding in its temporality: Instead of a linear progression as happens with the other worlds that are visited twice the Little Mermaid story is told multiple times with slight variations, but always with the single main story.

individually, that he requires the assistance of Sora and company. Like the Queen of Hearts, Triton attempts to claim Westphalian independence, but eventually needs to fall back on the necessity of intervention to save his own rule.

BEING, MEMORY, AND HEART – ON THE COSMOLOGY OF KINGDOM HEARTS

Kingdom Hearts resembles other Square-Enix role-playing games in its elaboration of a complex fantastic cosmology and metaphysics, revealed through exposition and discovery, provided both a framework for the narrative and underpinning much of the games mechanics. There are two higher-level systems at work in Kingdom Hearts: the elemental system, upon which the magic and item synthesis systems are created and upon which the "rock-paper-scissors" mechanics of combat vulnerabilities is based, and the true cosmological system of hearts, souls and bodies, which gives the franchise its name and provides the context for the conflicts between the characters.

According to Kingdom Hearts, beings consist of three components: hearts, which makes empathy and emotion possible and are also repositories of memory; souls, which are an animating force that exists, and bodies. Hearts are vulnerable to corruption ("darkness,") and a corrupted heart will leave the body of the subject and become a Heartless (ハートレス). The body and soul that are left behind can become Nobodies (ノーバディ) if the individual possessed a "strong heart. Heartless are creatures driven by desire and instinct, seeking out the hearts of whole beings to consume; before a Heartless has consumed another heart, it is a "shadow," a miasmic, almost feral figure of darkness. Once it consumes a heart, it becomes what is called (in the Ansem reports, the expository mechanism for the game's metaphysics) an Emblem, which has more distinctive characteristics, include clothing, facial features, organized battle tactics (including an apparent hierarchical order of battle), etc.

The cosmology of the franchise has been revised and expanded over the course of its publication history; according to the director Tetsuya Nomura (the individual who, at least publicly, seems to have been vested with the most creative authority for the series), the upcoming *Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep* title on the PSP will introduce a new category of opponent called the Unversed (アンヴァース).

TRAVEL BETWEEN WORLDS IN DIFFERENT GAMES

Mobility, travel between worlds, is a key element both within the Kingdom Hearts story and how it relates to ideas of power in the real world. Mobility as a form of power is not limited to the game world. Rather, it relates directly to the idea of a mobile, capitalist upper class in the current late 20th and early 21st centuries and how that class is opposed both in the real world and in the game world by the under-

classes that are bound to a world (in the game) or a country (in life).

In addition to the basic idea of mobility, there are different forms of mobility that are either depicted as acceptable or unacceptable throughout the games. The Heartless travel through dark routes (回廊) that are somehow connected by keyholes. Other characters are able to tap into darkness (Riku and Ansem) to travel along these same pathways with some danger. The Nobodies employ similar pathways, but whether they are exactly the same or not is unresolved.

The Heartless travel, of connecting worlds to move between them, is from the start seen as negative. It comes from the expansion of darkness, but also specifically from Riku's desire to escape his island, to travel. By him inviting darkness and homogeneity he can travel, but it is what is then combated for the remainder of the game. Mobility is both desired and feared, good and bad, just as are connections. Destiny Islands loses its innocence, but then again, Sora and Riku are able to then save the expansive world through that necessary loss of innocence. Like Japan's entrance to modernity, the opening of the borders and the Meiji restoration, Destiny Islands' path must be read as bittersweet, but necessary.

The second mode of travel is through Gummi Ships, space ships made from recovered pieces of shattered world borders. All of the main characters use this form of travel and it takes the form of a space action mini-game. Within the first game Gummi Ship travel involves simply going from one place to another and opening up warp holes that expand your range. Before you get your warp drive you have to fly to each world you want to visit even if it's a second or third trip. In contrast, *Kingdom Hearts II* changes the specifics of the travel takes by opening up new worlds through a process resembling modern trade routes. *Kingdom Hearts II* makes explicit the link between mobility and capitalism.

Your actions at the end of *Kingdom Hearts* close the original pathways between worlds, but as Yen Sid explains in the beginning of *Kingdom Hearts II*, the worlds have prepared new routes for you to travel as long as you can open them. These new pathways take the form of commodity connections. One can travel between places as soon as the world's appropriate commodity is located. Specifically, commodities allow travel from the world to others and not to the world itself. Thus, the order of mobility is that one finds a world's commodity, activates it, and then is granted access to the trade routes that connect to the nearby worlds, which one must travel through once in order to open a route to the new world.

ALLEGORIES AND ALLEGORICAL MAPPINGS IN A MULTI-AUTHORED FRANCHISE

The reading of a game-franchise as an open system of allegories and allusions introduces news problems of interpretation and criticism. A franchise produces signs and

representations that remain available for re-deployment after their initial inscription; when authorship is distributed across teams and individuals, and the elements of a narrative franchise re-used for sequels and derivative works, the allegorizing and allusive functions become open and set into play.

Our reading of Kingdom Hearts as allegorical is based on two premises: first, that the franchise in general consistently produces allusions which support the reading we make of it, while not producing allusions that contradict them. These allusions are to a state of affairs best understood in the framework of globalization. The second premise is one that might require further elaboration in other work: that the Japanese role-playing game genre is an allegorical form. Square-Enix has consistently in its interviews aided and abetted highly speculative readings of its works: in one interview, Nomura observed that fans enjoyed discussing and speculating on the meaning and interpretation of their work, and that the producers wanted to give them material for just such speculation. [8] More recently, Nomura noted that Square-Enix's Disney partners were perplexed by the allegorical and reflective nature that the franchise was taking, observing that it must be "an Eastern way of thinking."⁴

The most straightforward allegorical mappings in Kingdom Hearts involve the idea of Japan. The worlds of Kingdom Hearts which are open to readings as multiple Japans are those worlds which were conceived by Square-Enix, rather than being Disney properties; the broadest reading maps . We can read Destiny Islands as the Japanese archipelago, the non-national "local" Japan of everyday experience in which Sora and his initial friends are found in an apparently timeless (ahistorical) idyll, before the wanderlust of his friend Riku is satisfied by an invasion of the Heartless, opening access to other worlds. The allusion to the arrival of Commodore Perry's black ships in Tokyo Bay in 1853, an iconic episode which triggered and stood as a sign for the creation of a Japanese nation-state as a global actor, is straightforward enough. After the initial displacement and exile, Destiny Island becomes an object of longing for Sora, like the "authentic Japan" sought by ethnologist Yanagita Kunio in the early 20th century. There are other spaces that can be read as alluding to some conceptualization of Japan: the Hollow Bastion, original home of the characters taken

⁴ The division of cultural and signifying work that is taken for granted in the US and Europe between "art" works and work created for mass-markets may not be identical to that within Japanese popular culture. Melodrama is a component of films and novels set at very high aesthetic-cultural registers, and the categories which distinguish fine (美術) and popular arts (芸術) in Japan operate differently than they do in the West, with the latter being a broader character that can include the former, which is restricted to more "traditional" media and forms.

from the original Final Fantasy games (Leon Squallheart, from *Final Fantasy VIII*; Aerith, Cloud, Yuffie and Tifa, from *Final Fantasy VII*; and Cid, a character that is re-created and re-visited in a number of Final Fantasy titles, although this representation resembles the *Final Fantasy VII* edition). Hollow Bastion is a complex case: in the pre-history of the games, it was called Radiant Garden, and was ruled by Ansem the Wise; his identity was usurped by a his apprentice, Xenahort, whose Heartless is the final opponents of the first game and whose Nobody rules Organization XIII. Only in *Kingdom Hearts II* do we learn that the final enemy of the first game was not Ansem. This exculpation of a royal figure for the activities committed in his name recalls the rehabilitation of Emperor Hirohito during the American occupation of Japan after the Pacific War. That Hollow Bastion is marked by a temporal transition (a past under another name, like the change from Edo to Tokyo) and an occupation by a foreign power (Malificent) compounds the allusion. Finally, the reclamation of Hollow Bastion's original name, Radiant Garden, points to a desire to reclaim timeless/lost pre-modern Japan—or a pre-occupation one.

We sense ambivalence from Square-Enix regarding the state of affairs to which the franchise seems to allude. Clearly, a company whose livelihood depends on the export of its media artifacts to markets around the world is not likely to be simply critical of globalization. Yet we repeatedly see expressions of bittersweet regret over that which is lost when the relationships between worlds change.

Other original Square-Enix places in the series merit mention: Traverse Town is the first site of exile for both classes of characters (the Square characters and the Disney characters) when their worlds are destroyed or conquered. It is only available in the first game; *Kingdom Hearts II* instead features Twilight Town, which can tentatively be read as that residual "authentic" in the wake of modernity, that which remains of the sense of the local and of everyday life after the traumatic opening of globalization. While Traverse Town is apparently a place of perpetual night, Twilight Town is in perpetual dusk, a "land of the setting sun." It is the place where new Nobodies appear; it is also an initial place of refuge, but only as a digital simulation created by an incognito Ansem. Its inhabitants are also characters from Final Fantasy games, including Setzer (from *Final Fantasy VI*), Seifer, Fuu and Rai (from *Final Fantasy VIII*), and Vivi (*Final Fantasy IX*). When worlds are populated by Final Fantasy characters, we read them as standing for some aspect of Japan.

READINGS OF CERTAIN WORLDS: AS SITES OF TRANSLATION AND TRANSMEDIATION

Translation, on its most rudimentarily understood level, is the act of moving a text from one language into another. Theorists have greatly expanded the definition so that it overlaps in many ways with ideas of adaptation, repetition,

more problematically with localization, and finally with the idea of transmediation.

The individual world stories are translations, adaptations, iterations or transmediations. Because all of the Disney worlds were previously in Disney movies or cartoons, and these usually came from some previous source material the idea of translation is important; as there is the obvious difference between myth, story, cartoon, movie and video game the idea of transmediation is also important.

Port Royal / Pirates of the Caribbean

Port Royal is a world created and only appearing in *Kingdom Hearts II*. It is a translation of *Pirates of the Caribbean* the film, which was of course an adaptation of the Disneyland ride *Pirates of the Caribbean*. The ride takes you through the idealized Caribbean tale of pirates attacking a town, taking gold, chasing women, auctioning off women, and going back to their booty cave. The film was a translation of the ride and adds the themes of 802 coins of cursed Aztec gold, a cursed, undead crew of the *Black Pearl* with its exiled captain, Jack Sparrow, while transmediating the elements of the attack on the walled city, scenes of piratical debauch, the jailing of captured pirates, and so on. The film also adds entire sections about British Imperialism and the East India Trading Company, and then Davy Jones' Locker, the Flying Dutchman and the global network of pirates as resisting modernity in the sequels. This is translation from a narrativized navigable space -- the theme park ride attraction -- to a narrative system of representation in the film, is then retranslated as a narrative interactive space configured as an explorable and playable world in *Kingdom Hearts II*.

The film's basic plot is of the rescue of Elizabeth Swann by William Taylor with the help of Captain Jack Sparrow and the eventual raising of the curse of the Aztec Gold. This basic plot is adapted to fit to the *Kingdom Hearts II* world, but the imperialist and globalization elements are all avoided, as is the idea of pirates as good, freedom loving individuals. Instead, they are depicted as untrustworthy and generally negative. The elements that were transferred directly are the places and characters to provide a setting, and the curse and gold to provide an interesting battle mechanic (ghosts that are invincible outside of moonlight and a boss that is invincible unless all of the gold is in the chest).

The translation is somewhat odd in various ways: unlike the costume changes necessitated by Goofy in the beginning and followed in most worlds, Sora, Donald and Goofy maintain their normal clothes and cartoonish appearance despite the pseudo naturalistic representation of the Port Royal characters. Port Royal is, in many ways, a poor translation precisely because it is too close to the themes of capitalism, globalization and individualism, all of which are at stake within the *Kingdom Hearts* franchise. As those elements must remain hidden in the game there becomes little meat to use from an already limited story.

100 Acre Wood / Winnie-The-Pooh

Sora is asked by Cid to bring a book to an old man living in District III; the man is Merlin (from Disney's version of the Arthur legend, *The Sword and the Stone*) by opening a book in Merlin's room, he enters Hundred Acre Woods and meets Winnie-the-Pooh, who is sitting on a log, contemplating how one can say goodbye to oneself.

The world of Hundred Acre Wood is a series of mini-games, set in different areas which become accessible after the player discovers "Torn Pages" in other worlds. There are no Heartless in 100 Acre Wood; however, the world can be "closed" by finishing all the mini-games. Closing 100 Acre Wood is a prerequisite for unlocking the preview short-film, but it isn't required to reach the end of the game.

The history of Pooh as an intellectual property, as a franchise, and as a license, aptly illustrates the vicissitudes of popular culture products since the mid-20th century. While almost all the worlds visited by Sora are taken from Disney properties which, themselves, are appropriations and retellings of existing narratives, the relationship between Disney and the estate of A.A. Milne is more complicated than most. Winnie-the-Pooh was among the earliest licensed cultural properties in the contemporary sense: the rights to publish, merchandise and broadcast Pooh material in the United States and Canada was first licensed to media producer Stephen Slesinger in 1930, only 4 years after the publication of the original book. Slesinger and his associates added iconic elements to E.H. Shephard's depictions of Winnie-the-Pooh (the red shirt, in particular), and they would begin producing non-Disney Pooh films in the 1940s. After Slesinger's death in 1953, his widow continued to manage the brand, re-licensing it to Disney in 1961; the Milne family would also license global rights to Disney later the same year. After a series of complicated lawsuits, Disney has more recently allied itself with the Milne family to secure all rights from the Slesinger family; the franchise will go into the public domain in 2026.

Winnie-the-Pooh is Disney's most successful franchise, producing over \$1 billion in revenues per year, surpassing the revenues brought in by the nominal flagship characters. The first Disney film to feature Pooh was *Winnie the Pooh and the Honey Tree* (1966). The visual depiction of Pooh as a Disney character has been relatively stable since that time; Pooh is often depicted wearing Slesinger's red-shirt, is given a portly and awkward style, and speaks slowly and amiably: the original voice work by Sterling Holloway became the model for future vocal characterizations.

As Disney acquired broader rights to the Milne estate, they also managed to create a new line of merchandise and depictions that harkened back to the original Shephard illustrations. Called "Classic Pooh," the style is meant to evoke the original; however, Disney still does not own the rights to the original prints themselves, which are currently held by Egmont, a British publishing firm which took the rights to the illustrations in their acquisition of Reed's

Children's Books, which had acquired them from the original publisher, Methuen, in the mid 1990s. The "Classic Pooh" line of merchandise also evokes that static and prosaic style of the original stuffed animals (owned by his son, Christopher) which inspired Milne's stories. (The original toy animals are on display at the New York Public Library). Winnie-the-Pooh is a bifurcated franchise managed by Disney, which successfully markets the tension between them. Consumers who wary of the overtly animated style of the post-Slesinger Disney versions of the characters can instead collect merchandise with of the more illustrative, Edwardian style. The "pure" Disney version is the one which continues to produce new narrative configurations (Disney is planning a new film with a girl, Daphne, taking over the role of Christopher Robin,) while the classic version connotes its own historicity, appealing to a nostalgia that is made all the more pronounced by this bifurcation.

In Kingdom Hearts, the World of Pooh is encountered in both forms. The "classic" style is used in the interface by which the player, as Sora, accesses the various mini-games that constitute the Hundred Acre Woods, depicted as the pages of an open book, upon which Sora walks. The mini-games become available in a specified order as each new Torn Page is found in different worlds. The first, the "Hunny Hunt," is a game based on the first Pooh short created by Disney: *Winnie-the-Pooh and the Honey Tree* (1966). Completing all the mini-games closes the Hundred Acre Wood; winning each mini-game superlatively, by accomplishing more difficult tasks, wins Sora an additional power.

100 Acre Wood reappears in *Chain of Memories* and *Kingdom Hearts II*. In all cases, the world is played as a collection of mini-games, with no fighting (except for swatting at bees - an activity which also appears in *Kingdom Hearts II* as a minigame in Twilight Town). Nonetheless, when first encountered by Sora, the world has suffered a kind of oblivion of its own: only Pooh remains, as the other characters have disappeared, only to slowly return as new Torn Pages are discovered. The association of the Pooh franchise with the innocence of childhood suggests both that the prerequisite darkness does not exist in the hearts of the denizens of the 100 Acre Wood to produce Heartless. The near-oblivion also is consistent with the concept of Sora as someone on the cusp of adolescence, forgetting of the things of childhood.

Peter Pan is another Disney story that deals with adolescence and memory. Adults cannot see Peter Pan, the eternal child. In *Chain of Memories*, Peter Pan indicates his desire to learn whether Sora will be able to remember him

when he has grown into an adult. This amnesia is reversed in the return to 100 Acre Woods in the sequel, wherein Pooh forgets Sora and his other friends, and slowly recovers his memories.

CONCLUSION

This work is preliminary in a number of ways. It signals our initial efforts to analyze this particular textual object, the Kingdom Hearts franchise. However, it is also preliminary in the efforts to see digital games in various ways under studied in the field: as historical/allegorical due to company bases, as transmediations and adaptations with other media texts, as related to linguistic translation in a global world. All of these areas have some work done in them, but not much.

Like the franchise under question, our work, a coproduced analysis in various forms and from various approaches is not over. This is not a conclusion so much as it is to be continued....

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