

Cross-media Gaming or Where Toys and Video Games Collide: The Pedestrian Dynamics of Level 5's Snack World

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Abstract

With the current diversification of the “transmedia” practices within video game franchises like Pokémon, Yokai Watch or Starlink, industrial models of game production tend to converge with toys and other collectibles. However, as the diversification of video game-based commodities is becoming an obvious part of cultural consumption in Japan, the space envisioned by the circulation of these merchandises tends to be taken for granted. Where, then, does gaming intersect with merchandising? How does the distribution of game paraphernalia influence the design, game mechanics and consumption of video games? What space emerges when games and toys collide? This article proposes some points to study and problematize the daily invasion of everyday life space by game franchises in Japan with the example of the Snack World series. In light of Level 5's recent revival of the term “cross-media”, I propose to explore the real and imagined geographies mobilized by Snack World's production model centered on transportable toys. As such, this examination of cross-media gestures towards a need to acknowledge the convergence of gaming histories with urban cultures: Level 5's practices testify of the gamification of a wide range of daily consumption acts. As walking the streets, eating snack food and playing Snack World becomes part of a pedestrian and casual experience monitored by cross-media franchises we must question how games are producing the very space of the everyday life.

In recent years an impressive number of academic concepts have been coined to describe media franchises and inter-media relations within Fan Studies (transmedia storytelling, Jenkins 2006), Anime Studies (anime's media mix, Steinberg 2012) and Communication Studies (crossmedia publishing Azémard 2013). However, and probably because of the entanglement of anime media ecologies (Lamarre 2018) with video games industries in Japan, little work has focused on the specificities of the “transmedia” migration of Japanese video game franchises across toys, merchandise and promotional events. Despite each concept focusing on very narrow aspects of “what is transmitted” from a media to another (be it narratives, images, or consumer's data), there is a tendency in academic writing to use transmedia, media mix or cross-media with little precision of how these terms actually translate into concrete marketing strategies, video game design and player's experience.

What, then, can we call video games' “media mix” in Japan? While broad, this question asks us to focus on certain trends, genres and institutions in order to distinguish different models. For example, so called cross-media gaming bringing toy collectibles with video games together

in Level 5's model represents a rather different approach from Girl's Game or Otome Games's Media Mix (Kim 2009) often focusing on CDs and concerts (Ernest dit Alban 2016). I here gesture to the difference between the concepts describing inter-media relations, not for the sake of finding multiple jargon, but to map the space of cultural circulation they reveal. As such, multiple approaches to game merchandise and its relation to the core product of video games shape the gaming environments within players' life. Looking at cross-media gaming as “a project of space” (Lefebvre 1974), I want to understand how gaming emerge from the fabrication of a milieu of commodities that impact both the production and reception of video games. In other words, Transmedia, Media Mix and Cross-media rely on different strategies to mobilize fan territories in cities by facilitating the creation of content, media and consumer mobility (Steinberg and Ernest dit Alban 2018). Here, I will demonstrate how Japanese so-called cross-media gaming relies on toys as the basics for designing games and their inscription inside urban space. But why should we coin cross-media as a specific term?

In 2015, former Shôgakukan editor Nogami Akira wrote about the emergence of a hybrid ludo-subculture



called “hobby” cultures during the late 1980s. The vast spectrum of “hobby” resulted from the convergence of children’s and adult subcultures of anime, Table Role Playing Games, toys, arcade and console gaming inside of monthly magazines like *Coro-Coro* and *Computik* as well as in the urban landscape of game centers, toys and pro-model retail shops and trading card game stores. As such, Nogami suggests that hobby magazines actualized an older production model known as “cross-media”: the term “cross-media” dates back to the early 70s, a period marked both by the collaboration between Tokusatsu Studios (e.g. Sentai series) with children’s magazines to sell rubber toys as the monsters from the *Kaettekita Ultraman Series* (1971) and the urban expansion of game centers from 1972. While TV shows and magazines expended new narrative episodes, toys mobilized consumer’s attention through their daily dispersion and served as a tool to unify the conjoined efforts of toy companies, anime studios, manga publishers, game developers and TV stations into a coherent media milieu.

This urban ecology of small toys distributed in between magazines, game centers and toyshops could be the origin of more recent well-known *Coro-Coro* game series such as Game Freak’s *Pokémon* (1996), or Level 5’s *Yokai-Watch* (2011) and *Snack World* (2017). As such, Game Company Level 5 recently revived the term of cross-media to describe their industrial partnership with anime studios, broadcasting channels and toy companies. Because of its focus on toy production as a method to unify game franchises, the potential of the term “cross-media” is, I argue, twofold. First, it opens multiple histories of video gaming crossing toys and TV franchises, and second, it reveals the importance of the production of urban networks of players, toys and video games circulation in Japan’s game industry.

In previous works, I have situated the succession of media mix strategies within their urban context in Tokyo to illustrate how media mix theories and practices were influenced by local media ecologies often sustained by second-hand shops and fan communities. In doing so, I highlight a historical evolution from the simple diversification of image-based commodities (anime’s media mix, multimedia) to the inclusion of fan works and social spaces within franchises (world media mix, event media mix). If multiple strategies often work together, and the term media mix may probably be used as a general term for “transmedia” in Japan, the urban inscription of each individual media mix strategy helps us understand different tactics to mobilize consumer’s participation. Although all media mix strategies could be reduced to the idea of the

production of multiple products affiliated to a single manga or anime franchise, dismissing the history of the various existing models cuts the medium specificities as well as sociocultural stakes of fan’s mobilization in Japan’s “transmedia” franchises.

Within my revisit of media mix history, one strategy in particular stresses the importance of another media origin, this time specific to photorealistic images: since the 70s tokusatsu cross-media revolved around another materiality of moving images, one that is not the flat image of anime and video games, that is to say, real plastic toys and special effects. The focus on toys as a center of media production is significant not only in the techniques used to produce narratives, but also in the organization of industrial production, the urban circulation and consumption of cross-media franchises. Where anime’s media mix was mostly infiltrating paper-based ecologies in local bookstores, cross-media focused on the unification of TV and magazine series through the plastic ecology of toy shops. When focusing on cross-media alone, my goal is to start a conversation about the central role of toys in certain subcultural markets originating in Japan from tokusatsu and evolving into video game cultures mostly made for children. Level 5’s games in particular demonstrate the colliding of several gaming logics using toys as a medium in between the creation of narratives, gameplay, and networked products. This model is furthermore different from the current mode of event’s media mix relying on limited edition images to attract consumers and question the potential origins of a game-centric media mix model.

While more well-known series like Disney Infinity (Avalanche Software 2013) or *Skylanders* (Toys for Bob, 2011) may come first to mind, the creation of the early 2000’s Nintendo e-reader (a device which could scan trading cards to unlock special content for games) was accompanied by multiple TV and manga series, from *Pokémon* to *Animal Crossing*, *F-Zero* and *Megaman*. At the same time, trading card games became popular in game center’s arcade with famous series as toymaker Takara-Tomy’s *Pokémon Battrio* and Square Enix’s *Dragon Quest Battle Lord*, both released in 2007. The growing economy of tradable collectibles became affiliated with certain media and location that acted as the center for the expansion of gaming audiences exchanging, battling and collaborating in and out of games through toy circulation. Gaming practices and hardware also evolved to support the convergence of collectibles with video games: QR codes reading devices or touch screens appeared in arcades or were sold separately as an extension for consoles. As such, Level 5’s recent cross-media strategies have inherited and revised both

legacies by combining the different aspects of Nintendo's and Game Center's cross-media legacies. *Snack World* in particular emerged from collectibles featured in TV and manga series, producing in-game content both at home on consoles and within the arcade.

Following *Snack World*'s mild success in the late 2010s, this paper aims to identify and problematize the specificities of video game's cross-media strategies in Japan as a production of players' pedestrian milieu, in which players transport toys in order to interact with multiple location-specific versions of a game series. To do so, I will explore the notions, toys and geographies mobilized after the *Snack World* series, stressing the pedestrian practices and imaginaries of everyday life consumed both within and outside of the game. Transporting *Snack World*'s toys brings the game's adventure into "real" pedestrian motion. The urban circulation of toys therefore acts as the materialization of a portal between fiction and reality and leads players from one media incarnation of the series to another: cross-media gaming re-enacts pedestrian quotidian activities of players when they literally cross media commodities on their way home. With *Snack World*, cities become a ground to play; the franchise recycles already existing products (mostly snack food) in real life to transpose them inside the game (as healing items), while the game's logics of looting rare treasures from dungeons is transposed to the real-world consumption of toys distributed in real life convenience stores, electric shops and toy stores.

In sum, because it summarizes the recent turn of Japanese game developers to urban space, *Snack World* gives us the opportunity to 1) start filling the gap for historical research on the various industrial gaming media mix models in Japan, and 2) propose one possible reading of their specificity in terms of spatial dynamics with the example of cross-media strategies as location specific gaming. *Snack World* is a game designed to fit into Japan's everyday life and mobilize players' attention inside of urban networks of pedestrian circulation.

The Theoretical and Practical Stakes of Cross-Media: What is the Relationship Between Gaming and Pedestrian Space?

When released on transportable Nintendo devices in Japan, the game was labeled as a "hyper-casual fantasy" video game franchise, which brings a game-like world of adventure into player's everyday life. Designed as a classic

dungeon crawler role-playing game, players create their avatars to dive into randomized dungeons and defeat monsters to obtain rare treasures. Despite a level-up system to boost a player's stats, the key to *Snack World*'s progression is to repeat certain bosses to craft powerful items and pieces of equipment, which players can in turn use to challenge even deadlier enemies. However, *Snack World*'s fans mostly count on the franchise's toys "Snacks and Jaras" to gain in game loot and progress through dungeons. Jaras are key-holders shaped as pieces of equipment including shields, swords and magic wands, while Snacks are transparent photos of monsters and supporting characters. Both are sold in video game and toyshops, supermarkets, convenience stores, or game centers in blind packages taking the form of treasure chests. Jara and Snacks can be scanned daily by players on consoles and arcades in exchange for in-game loot, power ups or currency. Jaras and Snacks activate a lottery in the game resulting in the acquisition of multiple treasure chests (potentially) featuring the artifact or creature figured on the toy as well as many other crafting materials. Moreover, as players scan toys on different versions of the game scattered across cities, they will obtain more of these bonuses: conjointly using 3DS, Switch, arcade game *Jarasuta* (Takara-Tomy 2017), as well as store mini-games like "Fairyon" provide more in-game items.¹

Snack World exemplifies how walking in the city becomes an adventure as cross-media game mechanics invite players to "cross" the use of toys between specific locations and different version of the game, as well as experience multiple mangas, TV series and novels advertising the game's scenario. Toys therefore operate in three ways: 1) as a tool to communicate data from a game to another, 2) as an incentive to consume multiple products, and 3) as a key to interact with urban entertainment networks. The circulation of toys demonstrated by *Level 5*'s "cross-media" model infiltrates well-established practices, imaginaries and territories of everyday hobby consumption to create narratives around them. *Snack World* mobilizes the full specter of hobby locations, including toy retail stores, video game shops, game centers, supermarkets, convenience stores and trading collectibles secondhand shops. Each type of store proposes either limited editions of toy collections or a local version of the game.

With this first succinct description of *Snack World*'s looting system and urban landscape, I wish to highlight the

¹ The Fairyon is a smartphone within *Snack World*, plastic replicas are available in many toy stores. If a player scans a toy, special bonuses can be obtained after beating a mini-game or "paper rock scissors".



importance of the urban geographies and economies of toy circulation within the cross-media gaming milieu. In most studies of Japanese video games, the space occupied by the circulation of portable consoles, mobile games and toys tends to be taken for granted. For these reasons, and although Morikawa Ka'ichirô's (2003) and Patrick Galbraith's (2012) works may represent noticeable exceptions in the case of media mix space in general, very little academic work has been done to explore the spatial stakes of the gamification of Japanese everyday life.

What kind of space, then, emerges from cross-media strategies? In *The Production of Space* (1974) Henry Lefebvre points to the ideological transparency of space. Because our perception of space relies on the synchronicity of practices, imaginaries and power structures, it tends to appear as a "pedestrian" matter (e.g. something not worth noticing). Space simply disappears into the background of everyday life. Extending this insight to studies of game space plays a crucial role in the construction of given media franchises yet it similarly disappears within unnoticed studies of franchise circulations. *Snack World* in particular calls attention to this circulation, and the quotidian spatial relations on which franchises depend. *Snack world* is a parody of everyday life consumption transposed onto a dungeon crawler RPG, which plays on the pervasiveness of gaming habitus in real life and quotidian mythos in video games.

Toys become portals (Hartzeim 2016) between these practices as they infiltrate the "transparent" skins of the cultural landscape of everyday life in Japan. *Snack* and *Jaras* are present across the multiple institutions one encounters when walking in cities. Cross-media strategies function as a set of under-determinations on consumer's navigation habitus in a media milieu already driven by moving images (Lamarre 2004, 2009): merchandise tends to be sold in very specific places and therefore repeat particular paths through the city (Steinberg and Ernest dit Alban 2018).

In his article on the *Yôkai-watch* series, another Level 5 game franchise, Marc Steinberg (2017) explored the notion of mobilization. Steinberg highlights how Level 5's video game project mobilizes consumer attention and participation through the production of a media environment including interactive toys, TV series and dances. Here, I would like to take his conceptualization one step further by emphasizing the spatial effects of this mobilization performed by so-called "cross-media toys." Cross-media, I argue, mobilize consumer interest to move through specific geographies of retail, gaming and second-hand locations. I aim to analyze the transparent production

of space (Lefebvre 1974) of the everyday life depicted in Level 5's series. That is to say, an urban milieu identified as an obvious part of the everyday life consumption of TV shows, games and snack food, and integrated into a marketing strategy capitalizing on consumer mobility through toy dispersion.

In sum, this will facilitate a broader understanding of how media franchises participate in a transparent production of space by making the pursuit and carrying of merchandise and gaming logics a "pedestrian" (e.g. obvious and mobile) part of everyday life. This suggests the need to rethink about the material impact and design of cross-media products as objects made to be transportable and be a part of quotidian experience. The production of a pedestrian space of gaming moreover reveals the daily emprise of media conglomerate on the quotidian as well as the urban territories where consumers can build communities and exercise a certain social agency.

The Meaning of "Crossing" Media: From Industrial Cooperation to Crossing Streets

Cross-media, as it is defined by Nogami (2015) and Level 5, designates a model of industrial cooperation usually formed between toy makers, hobby magazines, animation studios and broadcasting channels. Cross-media is heavily characterized by the production of toys as a mean to unify the sporadic distribution of multiple episodes produced by partners. In the case of Level 5's cross-media franchises, the idea of narrative unity comes after the consumption of toys and its interaction to game's mechanics and worldview. *Snack World* tells a generic revenge plot featuring the main character Chup's adventures while he trains to defeat the vile (and capitalist) *Vinegarr* who destroyed his village "because it makes the economy run." In the 3DS (2017) and Switch (2018) versions, the player's avatar also happens to be (conveniently) from the same village and joins the ride. In other words, very few stakes hold in the story and the different series mostly illustrate how to play the game, use the toys, and buy affiliated products.

For this reason, *Snack World*'s milieu mostly grew through the circulation of a new brand of toys. So-called *Snacks* (crystal clear plastic plates representing a picture of a summon) and *Jara* (key-holders designed as miniature weapons and pieces of equipment like shields) were advertised as the main novelty of the series from an early stage (Izumirobo, 2017). The series subsequently invaded territories and gaming logics surrounding hobby cultures in toy and video game stores, arcade games and secondhand collectible shops. Touching trading toys on game screens

or controllers to unlock in game contents is indeed an old concept reminiscent of Nintendo's card e-reader (2001-2003), which used trading cards to expend gaming experiences in *F-Zero Falcon no densetsu* (2003) and the *Megaman eguze* series for Game Boy Advance (2003-2005). But *Snack World* also inherits of the spatial practices (Lefebvre 1974) affiliated with game centers and hobby magazines in the mid-2000s (Yamanaka 2013): the action of collecting cards and toys interacting with arcade games is inscribed into specific geographies and economies of secondhand goods like Akihabara or Ikebukuro in Tokyo.

An interesting hypothesis is that cross-media game mechanics could result from the convergence of crossed industrial cooperation to produce multiple products within the same franchise, with urban practices emerging as players transported toys across the streets from a game location to another. This Japanese milieu of games interconnected by toys and pedestrian players could be the origin of specific tropes in game design, marketing and merchandise. In *Snack World*, the central role of touching transportable toys on screens or controllers summons teammates, while also providing key equipment and increasing craft material. Slight changes in console and arcade gameplay can also highlight these dynamics: when scanned on consoles, toys will have a random drop within a certain pool of items fixed for each toy model. The repetition of scans will however increase the player's in-game resources to craft stronger equipment daily. On *Jarasuta* arcade games, toys place more emphasis on the combat system (shared with 3DS and Switch). Because each toy has specific strength and weaknesses, transporting the most efficient team is crucial: equipment, skills and teams will be granted each game by the toys the players bring with them. Each game of *Jarasuta* therefore asks players to scan toys to choose their equipment for the next battle depending on the monsters to defeat.

The "situatedness" of toy-like equipment therefore transpires both in and out of the game. Despite *Snack World*'s resemblance to other dungeon crawler games usually focusing on a fixed set of skills and attacks, players have to change of weapons all the time: avatars are equipped with two key chains (similar to the one sold with the toys) allowing them to quickly switch in between up to twelve weapons with their own skills and attacks. *Snack World*'s combat system therefore focuses on a wide range of equipment provided by toys. Changing weapons, clothes and toys from one dungeon to another is crucial to success when facing waves of enemies with specific weaknesses. These aspects of pedestrian transport and situational adaptation functions with the branding of *Snack World* as

a "hyper casual fantasy" world imagined as the mix of real-life institutions present in Japanese cities (like convenience stores, railways, department stores) and meta-jokes about Role Playing Games (RPG). Characters casually present the gameplay mechanics of quests, level up or loot as an ordinary part of their everyday routine. In other words, players are invited to a kingdom of "Smartphones and Dragons" where the rhythm of the everyday life is punctuated by the action of changing gears, that is to say change the toys they are transporting. Thus, we must take *Level-5* seriously when it uses the term "cross-media" rather than "media mix" or "transmedia"; it refers, I suggest, to the physical act of crossing a street, crossing a city, crossing the paths of other consumer-users, and crossing media platforms. Crossing is a literal, spatially-located act shaping people's rhythms of everyday life and extending its logics to gaming experiences.

This conceptualization of "gaming as crossing" reflects on the industrial level of the game as well because the relationship between products and institutions rely on toy distribution. Depending on promotional events and releases, each one of the partner institutions like Takara-Tomy propose a limited-edition of a *Snack*, a *Jara* or a QR code collectible card to play the Nintendo game, arcade games or (future) smartphone games. As such, when promoting *Snack World* on their YouTube channel, *Level 5* announced a partnership with Takara-Tomy (toys), *Shôgakukan* (Hobby magazines), *Tôei* (Theatrical animation), *TV-Tokyo* (Broadcasting Channel), *Avex* (music and opening themes). These industrial relations participate to the multiplication of products, creating both an environment of commodities and a calendar of shared media production between partners unified by the association of each product with *Snacks* and *Jaras*. Hence, in addition to the toys, *Level 5*'s cross-media approach emphasizes physical circulation through urban spaces in order to collect all the required goods needed to effectively play the game and enjoy the television series.

Techniques and Technologies of Cross-Media: Mobilizing Consumers, Content and Toys Across "the Real Zone"

Like many items obtained in a classic RPG game, *Snacks* and *Jaras* are found in random treasure chests during dungeons. Toys reproduce this encounter in various shops when sold in paper chests mimicking their apparition in the game. Although this randomized strategy does not vary much from other marketing strategies, the real technical innovation of *Snack World* consists of the introduction of NFC chips placed inside of the toys: the



previous QR code based cross-media until Level 5's Yôkai-Watch franchise was limited to a single scan because most media platforms of the series environment memorized which QR codes had already been used. NFC (Near Field Communication) technologies are common in multiple devices such as contactless payment. By evolving from tiny medals with a fixed code on a sticker to a transmitting device, the technology of Snacks and Jara allow them to be used daily to obtain in-game items and operate across multiple platforms. The design of these toys helped actualize the player's daily experience of the game and follow his or her steps. As such I would like to think about the notion of "real zone," coined by Level 5 to promote the game at an early stage, as a way of conceptualizing how toys make the real world and the game world collide through pedestrian motion. "Real zone" was a concept used by the developing team to express the way game logics would penetrate inside of the everyday life of gamers.

In his article on the Pretty Cure anime series, Hartzheim (2016) developed a similar concept of the "product portal" as a means of explaining the function of toys onscreen and off-screen within Japanese cartoon series for children. Hartzheim writes:

As portals can provide organized gateways into diverse amounts of information and connect gaps in different registers of media, anime products can connect characters to viewers, and fantasy spaces to spaces of everyday reality. (1076)

Hartzheim highlights how specific scenes and CGI effects position toys as devices used to enter the series' world. Snack World's anime, manga and games also feature similar product portal scenes, marking each episode with a demonstration of how toys work. For instance, Chup will take his Fairybon (a Smartphone made by fairies) out of his pocket and scan a toy on it, summoning a creature in the case of Snacks (Snacks are "pictures" of monsters) or transforming miniature accessories and weapons into human size objects with Jaras. This key scene also reenacts the basic notion of Snack World's battle system switching between multiple keyholder weapon. We can therefore investigate what type of space is produced by the cross-media product portal in order to reveal how Snack World's "hyper casual fantasy" unravels patterns of materialization of the series world inside of quotidian urban space of gaming.

The commercials used to promote Snack World in Japan are useful materials to investigate how the franchise represents adventures bumping into everyday consumption.

The first series of TV commercials by toymaker Takara Tomy entitled "Our world is now Snack World" present a boy waking up to an exciting world where everyone uses Jara and Snacks to accomplish everyday chores.² The commercial emphasizes the reunion of "real" people transforming toys into CGI weapons and monsters in the same shots to demonstrate how Snack World's gameplay invades reality. Another episode features a group of boys fighting a boss monster that appeared in a park nearby their house. These graphic gestures demonstrate how the series' gameplay is marketed as a casual activity: when walking with Snacks and Jaras the world around the players connects to the game's various incarnations and materializes their adventures "for real."

A second series of commercials released by Level 5 feature the misadventures of grown-up adventurers who are defeated over and over by monsters, before stopping by a convenience store to purchase power-ups.³ Specific snack foods and toys are presented as key items to defeat the opponent, with clear shots of Jaras opening and closing the video. These real-life inspired locations also play an important role in the game: eating snack food provides temporary stats bonuses and the only place to purchase such items is restricted both in and out of the game to convenience stores. Indeed, Snack World tends to transform supermarket and convenience store food into "portal products." Various real brands including Kellogg's Frosties cereal, drinks like Donboinka's Ramune, Tonboshanmeri silver, Kyûsai's Aojiru, snacks like Oyatsu company's Baby star ramen, Calbee's Kosomepanchi and even school Shôwa notes were added to the game as power ups, clearly defining the series' primary audience as middle-school children. The spatial aspect of the series consequently emerges from the conjunction of action gameplay with the pedestrian activities of stopping by a store to buy food. By focusing both on children and their daily environment, Snack World represents a casual take on dungeon crawler RPGs: the vital cycle of entering a dungeon and stopping by cities to sell and buy items transforms into everyday life shopping. In sum, while presenting different protagonists, both commercials establish cross-media gameplay and toys as the portal between fiction and reality by emphasizing on their inscription within specific imaginaries and territories of liminal spots inside daily consumption and leisure. As early advertising made it clear (Izumirobo 2017), "the concept of The Snack World is a "real zone" using toys unifies the values (*kachikan*) between reality and fantasy." In what

² The commercial is available on the following link. August 8 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3unFOr3AJM>

³ The commercial is available on the following link. August 8 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-az1PkNmngA>

follows, I will explore how the game logics of this so-called “real zone” establish themselves inside a transparent and pedestrian space by describing how NFC technologies fit in the quotidian urban geographies and imaginaries of hobby cultures.

Snack World’s main merchandise productions are Snacks and Jaras, randomly distributed in paper treasure chests. Various collections of blind boxes give the consumer a vague idea of which items are available, and the randomization of such collectibles mirrors a similar gamble logic present in (most) Level 5’s cross-media games: the Gacha-Gacha or capsule vending-machine. Although most toys represent creatures and items obtainable in-game, rarer Snack and Jara gives access to extremely powerful limited-edition power-ups. Playing the Gacha-Gacha in real life subsequently gives a certain amount of daily in-game capital to players: when scanning toys every day one can obtain random loot including craft material, power-ups or virtual versions of the toys. The technologies of NFC chips specifically transcend platform-specificities to assure the (trans)portability of toys across retail distribution, a phenomenon quite similar in logic to what Lamarre called platformativity (2017) or a distributive field of information (2004).

In other words, these toys re-articulate the meaning of cross-media as both multiplying toy usage across media platforms and crossing the streets. Even the toy’s name highlights a certain pedestrian logic accompanying customer. If the etymological origin of Snacks is obviously represented by the franchises’ emphasis on convenient store snack food as power-ups, Jara’s meaning comes from the onomatopoeia *jarajara*, or the sound made by metallic items colliding like money coins in a pocket. Although the Snacks design remains less suggestive than the Jara’s form as key-holders, Snack World’s toys are depicted by commercials as transportable items made to transform consumer’s casual circulation as an adventure. However, playing Snack World requires gamers to move only across certain urban locations. The reunion of NFC technologies with transportable toys therefore mobilizes pedestrian movement to create exchanges in between the various iterations of the game series. When scanning a toy on a platform, NFC chips will inscribe an in-game currency called “mana charges.” Toys therefore become the medium to transport and accumulate mana-charges from a game to another and exchange it against rare items. Indeed, the product portal (Hartzeim 2016) aspect of Snacks and Jaras are not limited to the reproduction of key scenes of the anime series, they also transferring location-specific data from one medium to another when playing the Jarasuta

arcade game, visiting toy stores and hobby conventions or even using the Fairybon toy at home. Scanning the toys on media on each platform gives a certain type of “mana charge” that can be exchanged inside the game against items. Because very rare “in game items” can only be exchanged for mana-charges, the transportation of toys across the so-called “real zone” of Snack World’s merchandise distribution sites becomes a vital element for players to experience the game—for Level 5 to mobilize their consumer’s interest. Snacks and Jaras nonetheless allow pedestrians to play different versions of the game, enjoy the anime and manga series, and also capitalize and reunify this investment in the series at large by gaining always more in game objects. In sum, the cross-media terminology of Level 5 might refer to the strategy (and milieu) which emerges when toys guide consumers in between media. As the TV series and manga serializations teach how to use the toys, games become the space of practice of Snack and Jara logics.

Geographies of the everyday life in and out of The Snack World: Urban spots, weapon brands and trade partners for your hyper-casual adventures

As explained in regard to mana-charges, Snack World’s toys are at the center of pedestrian logics of consumer mobilization. Transportable collections support consumer investment in the franchise by capitalizing on cross-platform interactions across location specific game infrastructures. Snacks, Jaras organize repetitive daily tasks of scanning toys on media platforms and transmitting mana-charges to other devices. Gamers may gain more in-game capital by stopping at certain spots already featured in their everyday hobby environment. This logic of transporting toys to experience the game “in real life” is also featured in Snack World’s merchandise that accentuates the pedestrian dimension of toys key holders with suitcases and other items helping to carry collections and make your Jaras “*jara-jara*” (collide and ring) on your way to the next cross-media spot. But what institutions are networked by the routes of cross-media consumer circulation?

Official distribution locations mostly include convenience stores like 7/11 and Lawson, supermarkets, or electronics stores like Softmap or Yodobashi Camera. At these sites, toys are randomly distributed inside various collections of location specific treasure chests (*torejara bokkusu* for electronics stores), Gacha-Gacha capsule machines (*torejara bokkusu gacha* in Game Centers) and candy boxes (*torejara bokkusu gamu* at convenience stores



and supermarkets). Each series of chests has multiple collections featuring different items with specific rarity rates from Petit Rare to Legendary Rare. New series were available approximately every two months. In other words, the serialization of treasure boxes periodically reactivates circuits of pedestrian circulation, but also follows the appearance of key items in the anime or the game's DLC. Most of these shops also participate to mana-charge circuits with Jara-touch stands and to promotional events of *Jaragahoshiinjara* ("I want Jara") events wherein there is free distribution of limited-edition toys. Because Snack World's "hyper-casual" game design emphasizes several random modes of distribution in blind packages, lotteries, Gacha-Gacha and other vending machines, "irochigai" (color swap) or "secret" limited edition items, which appear as location-specific merchandise for a certain time.

The "real zone" logic from the games therefore expands across urban retail landscapes: we may witness here the gamification of the production of space (Lefebvre 1974) and the transposition of everyday life as ground for play; the lottery systems of both virtual and real toys purchase unify the imagined and material territories of the so-called "real zone."

Conclusion: Are crossing streets and games enough?

Mapping the places of Snack World's cross-media circulation highlights how game developers act as ethnographers following the urban life of consumers in order to produce pedestrian merchandise and gaming practices. That is to say, toys and games that can easily be transported to fit inside of pre-existing routes of consumer circulation. In light of Lefebvre's work, the stakes of the production of gaming spaces lie in the power dialectics of pedestrian logics to potentially invisibly determine consumer agency. Snack World's toys in particular define the core of cross-media game series through a strategy inscribing gaming in the background of the transparent triviality emerging from daily consumption trends. This extends to other examples like the Pokémon, Digimon or Medarot series that are often dismissed as a media mix model. While remaining a niche game, Snack World exemplifies the importance of a study of games in their urban context. In retrospect, Yokai Watch was also a success because of the short life of medals: they could be scanned only one time. Once used, players had to resell them or exchange them. In contrast, Snack World's mild success might point to an important direction in the study of cross-media gaming: media obsolescence and hardware compatibility (see Acland 2006).

After 2018, Snack World struggled to keep the interest of its audience. The series still paradoxically had the potential to improve Level 5's model: with reusable objects players could expand their routes of gaming and reuse data from a platform to another. The lack of obsolescence however did not create many secondhand exchanges typical to hobby cultures and their urban ecology. Newer Level 5 cross-media toys went back to cheaper forms and interactions. This highlights the following dilemma; if new toys do not appear, the hardware will become obsolete; however, if toys cannot be applied in multiple games, consumers tend to lose interest. Crossing media, pedestrians and streets are not sufficient to build up media empires; there is a need of balance between collectibles and video games, a balance that Level 5 decided to handle with cheap toys with a wide pedestrian circulation.

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Bio

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