Frog Leaps in: *Haiku* and the Struggle For and Against the Natural World in Japanese RPGs

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Abstract

Haiku poetry and the video game genre dubbed JRPGs are two highly successful Japanese cultural exports but are not generally regarded as enjoying much crossover. In this paper, I suggest that a particular moment in the 1995 JRPG *Chrono Trigger* parallels the structure and content of a well-known *haiku*, and that by importing an understanding of *haiku* we can open up new ways of considering how the genre invests players in an environmentally conscientious philosophical mode. I use one of the most influential JRPGs of the 1990s, *Final Fantasy VI*, as a case study to examine how the genre in its present state transmits mixed messages regarding anthropocentrism and responsible action, drawing on research from the fields of science fiction studies, animal studies and literary theory as well as the work of other games studies scholars. Finally, I conclude that both theorists and practitioners can benefit from an approach to transmediality that looks beyond the deliberate media mix strategies of corporate producers, to cultural artefacts that are not necessarily designed to fit into a mix, in order to extend the potential for games and related media to promote socially and environmentally responsible attitudes.

Haiku poetry and Japanese role-playing games – hereafter referred to as JRPGs – are two of the most successful Japanese cultural exports in terms of visibility and worldwide influence, albeit their impact is likely to be appreciated by different audiences. JRPGs are perceived, both in Japan and abroad, as distinct from Western role-playing games (Brückner et al, 2018), with their own unique tropes and attributes. This distinction is partly informed by widespread nostalgia for the era of Japanese role-playing game production in the mid-1990s especially, with the effect that a developer no longer has to be Japanese in order to create a game that fits into the JRPG genre (Mallindine, 2016).

Haiku, which originated in the 17th century as a derivation of the older poetic form of the *renga*, is a compact form which was influential in the rise of Imagism among Western modernist poets at the start of the 20th century (Miner, 1957). It is closely associated with the act of witnessing and generating elusive insight into the natural world, with particular regard to the character of the seasons. As Makoto Ueda explains, "The *haiku* poet often sets two apparently unrelated things side by side and still creates some strange yet harmonious mood out of the combination" (Ueda, 1963, p.428).

Given their shared cultural origins, it is intriguing that *haiku* and JRPGs are regarded as having little to say to and of one another, and indicative of a wider state of affairs where poetry and computer games are rarely seen to mix. The scholarly communities around each, partly as a result of this, are starkly separated. Some games scholars may even prefer it this way; early on in the history of games studies, attempts by literary theorists to regard games as an evolutionary step in narrative media were regarded as "academic colonialism" (Aarseth, 2004, para 13 of 41), an attempt to make games fit into an existing paradigm of narrativism. But poetry is not the same thing as narrative, and Aarseth's concern about games scholars being vastly outnumbered by scholars from other fields no longer holds. We are now in what Astrid Ensslin has referred to as a "second wave" (Ensslin, 2014, p.3) of games scholarship, where literary criticism may be highly relevant to certain artefacts.

But the way needs to be opened up. *Haiku* is a useful entry point in exploring the use of concepts from the study of poetry in games scholarship because, as Ueda argues, "the poetics of *haiku* will interest those who are seeking a

definition of poetry which would transcend all linguistic and cultural differences" (Ueda, 1963, p. 423). What we learn from viewing games in the light of our understanding of *haiku* can be applied more widely to the use of poetics in game studies. In this case, I will be focusing on how *haiku* aids us in analysing the environmentalist agendas of JRPG titles.

Frog as kyara

By far the most famous example of *haiku* is Matsuo Bashō's 'old pond', which in its totality reads:

古池や蛙飛び込む水の音
An old pond – frog leaps in – watersplash

The image of the frog is so strongly associated with the form that it is used as the cover illustration on *The Penguin Book of Haiku*, a modern anthology which seeks to emphasise the playful, sociable side of *haiku* by clustering poems together according to their subject matter, and by including a number of sequences of poems exchanged between *haiku* practitioners. Bashō's poem is generally thought of as recording a moment of altered consciousness or an "advanced state of awakening" (Austin, 2015, p.91) that has the potential to permanently change a person. The physical stimulus of the watersplash is both the trigger and the embodiment of that awakening, so that the poem traces a resonance or intimacy between human consciousness and the natural environment.

Contrast this *haiku* with the scene from Square's 1995 JRPG *Chrono Trigger* where the character of Frog is first introduced to the player. The player's control of their avatar is temporarily suspended, and a scripted scene plays out. The setting is a medieval church – a context that evokes a sense of preserved antiquity. Frog leaps down from off-screen, perhaps from a matroneum, to strike at an ambushing enemy with his sword while Chrono, the player's avatar, is paralysed. The enemy is killed, there is a moment of silence, and then Frog's theme music starts up. It is buoyant and dramatic, shattering the preceding atmosphere of gloom – somewhat, we might say, like a body breaking the surface of a pond. Frog, it later transpires, was originally a human knight, and his been put under a transformation spell. But he is, unmistakably, a frog. His running animation is a two-legged hop, and his vocal sac expands and contracts sometimes when he is speaking, as if to amplify his voice. He contributes water-themed magic

and an extendable tongue to the party's (and the player's) pool of offensive capabilities.

The parallels between the two scenes are evident – the introduction of a lively new element and the subsequent splash, marking a meaningful alteration to the consciousness (of poet, of reader, of player) going forward. We may even choose to infer a connection between their respective frogs, understanding them as varying depictions of the same base character or textual component. Cultural studies supplies us with Itō Gō's term *kyara*, meaning a character who can exist "independent from any particular medium" (Steinberg, 2012, p.83), the stripped-down, iconic, 'proto' version of the character which is then particularised for each medium in which he or she appears. Itō coined the term in reference to manga characters that exist first of all as drawings, or "a bunch of strokes drawn on paper" (Berndt, 2008, p.302), before being shaped and refined by narrative, at which point they become a full-fledged character. The concept has been deployed elsewhere in games studies (for example: Galbraith, 2011) as a way of framing the connections between the content of Japanese games in particular and their adjacent media. It overlaps with the concept of symbolism in literature, where a simple object or thing carries broad and flexible connotations that are narrowed by their specific context so as to be intrinsic to the meaning of the work. A frog, in the tradition of *haiku* writing, is a symbol of spring, and therefore of "merriment, colour, noises, life (sex)" (Takiguchi, 2005).

The idea of a visual outline to be filled in later also echoes definitions of *haiku* that focus on its "semantic indeterminacy" (Kawamoto, 1999, p.710), the fact that the language is deliberately open and permissive of a wide range of interpretations. We have the option, as readers and critics, therefore, to conceive of a frog *kyara*, a rough outline of the frog character, that is then given flesh in the moment it arrives in a poem or a JRPG – the same frog tuned to different media.

Utilising a cultural studies concept in this way creates a pathway between the media of poetry and computer games, the better to allow the traffic of critical perspectives, or as Jon Dovey and Helen Kennedy term it, "interdisciplinary raids" (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006, p.3). In the context of global media culture, Steinberg views the character as one of the "agents of connectivity that tie images, media platforms, things and consumers together" (Steinberg, 2010, p.209), and character is therefore a useful way to bridge the gap between studies of poetry and other

media.

That this gap needs bridging is largely due to the underrepresentation of poetry within the phenomenon of transmediality and what has been termed "convergence culture" (Jenkins, 2006) – where key elements of media franchises span multiple types of media. The study of transmediality and media mixing generally assumes a deliberate and coordinated strategy on the part of content producers: traditional narratives, comics, animation, games, film and toys are therefore commonly regarded as part of the mix. Because poetry is rarely used as part of a franchise or as a substantial part of the construction of a fictional world, it remains an outcast, separately studied.

The critical priorities of literary theorists writing on poetry also play a part: it is unusual to think of poems as containing something akin to a character, or to find critics calling attention to characters in a poem. The elements of a poem are instead regarded as symbols, or personae, or images, and are deemed to be simultaneously resonant with all human experience – universal symbols – and particular to the context in which they are placed. At the extreme end, William Carlos Williams' edict that in poetry there are "no ideas but in things" is taken up as meaning that the content of a poem is non-transferable, not a series of pliant linguistic signs but concrete objects that only speak of themselves (Lambeth-Climaco, 2008).

But by abandoning the idea that transmedial networking must be a deliberate act on the part of producers, and by recognising *kyara* as a concept that links character and symbol, we can explore the possibility of an expressive overlap between *Chrono Trigger* and 'old pond' that gives us a fresh perspective on the ways computer games may embody ecologically and socially responsible themes. One of the strong associations with the JRPG genre is the importance of restoring a natural balance to the world that has been imperiled by the rapid onset of technology, or by human greed and conflict. *Chrono Trigger* uses the character of Lavos, an alien feeding off the energy of the planet, as an emblem of apocalyptic destruction; Lavos not only destroys human civilisation in 1999AD, but is also the cause of a catastrophic climate change event in an earlier time period, after humans attempt to harvest his power using a device called the Mammon Machine. Defeating him is the ultimate goal of the game, and unravelling the story of how technological ambition was a factor in destructive climate events becomes part of the player's journey. The player is able to travel forward in time to 2300AD and explore a near-lifeless post-apocalyptic landscape, ruled by a genocidal artificial intelligence, as well as back in time to a previous ice age. *Chrono Trigger* thereby evinces a clear interest in provoking the player to reflect on the three-way relationship between human beings, their technology and the shifting composition of the landscape around them. In a famous scene, it even has one character leave the player's party in order to spend 400 years planting and maintaining a forest.

The form of *haiku*, as described by literary critics, complements this concern. Ueda quotes Bashō himself drawing the association between poetic spirit and "the creative energy of nature", and describes the principles of *haiku* as related to a kind of transcendence, a leaving behind of the anthropocentric ego: "A flower is beautiful, the moon is beautiful, all objects in nature are beautiful, because they have no egoism, because they do not fight for gain" (p.424). Thus, both the reading and the composition of *haiku* are understood as promoting increased insight into and respect for the natural world (Rillero, 1999). Ueda fixes on the brevity of the *haiku* as an important characteristic, since such suspension of egoism can only ever be brief, and describes how the parts of the poem are designed to relate to one another by "fragrance", rather than logic, forming "an atmospheric harmony" (Ueda, p. 428), in the same way the player of *Chrono Trigger* is attempting to harmonise the elements of the fictional world across time and space.

Where, then, does the more particular parallel between Frog's introductory scene and 'old pond' lead us? Before answering this question, I would like to examine some of the ways in which the JRPG genre struggles to embody themes of environmental responsibility, using a separate title as a case study.

Ludo-philosophical dissonance in *Final Fantasy VI*

In some ways, core features of video games are antithetical to the aim of subverting egoism. Games incorporate the player at the centre of their systems, so that the medium itself can be thought of as "an assemblage that is the *player-and-videogame*" (Keogh, 2018, p.22) – a model of anthropocentrism. They revolve around continuous action and reaction, change and movement, focus the attention of the player on gains and losses, and promote long periods of engagement, rather than brief moments of revelation, with JRPGs sometimes taking more than 50 hours to complete.

These features are all present in Square's *Final Fantasy VI*, which was released a year before *Chrono Trigger* and is arguably the more influential game; it certainly adheres to more of the archetypical or 'classic' features of the JRPG. Its battle system, for instance, based around random encounters that cannot be circumnavigated, is far more commonly emulated than *Chrono Trigger*'s specifically positioned and mostly avoidable battles. It was the final game in the *Final Fantasy* series to be released on the SNES/Super Famicon, and therefore represents the era of JRPGs most often alluded in modern examples of the genre that pursue a retro or nostalgia-driven aesthetic.

That aesthetic includes the division of the game world into three types of space, as analysed by William Huber: "*city/dungeon* scaled space, in which the display screen bounded a scaled region analogous to one or two city blocks; *battle space*, in which the characters would be depicted individually; and *countryside/landscape* space" (Huber, 2013, p.180). *Battle space* is dedicated almost entirely to combat between the player's party of one to four heroes and one or more enemies at a time, and is the major means through which the player is called upon to demonstrate skill at navigating the game's challenges. Outside of battle space, player activity is limited to directing the members of their party to an appropriate point in the game world in order to move the narrative forward, managing the characters' equipment and the composition of the party, and buying items from merchants. There is no opportunity for the player to make any decisions that affect the direction of the over-arcing narrative, although there are points in the second half of the game where certain characters may live or die as a result of the player's actions. David Simkims notes in his analysis of RPG ethics that the game does not adequately prepare the player for the possibility that any such deviation from the scripted storyline is possible:

> At a bridge, followed be hordes of enemies, one of the main characters, Shadow, offers to sacrifice himself so the rest can escape … Only later, after completing the game, did Robert discover that the choice to stand with Shadow on the bridge or let him sacrifice himself was a legitimate one. He had assumed the game would force his hand, as this series tends to do … RPGs usually 'railroad you along a given track', which doesn't give much freedom to the player to determine how the plot or character development will progress." (Simkins, 2010, p.77)

With this in mind, it is worth recounting how *Final Fantasy VI,* like *Chrono Trigger*, delivers a storyline that foregrounds the act of resisting environmental collapse. The plot sees the Gestahl Empire infusing its soldiers and war machines with magic that has been extracted from beings known as 'espers', and using these in an attempt to conquer the planet in pursuit of still greater sources of power, much as the Mammon Machine in *Chrono Trigger* attempts to draw power form Lavos. The magic-and-technology mixture, dubbed 'Magitek', serves as a parallel to real-world weapons of mass destruction, and its method of creation alludes to the exploitation of humans, animals and natural resources in the pursuit of military and commercial dominance. The espers, who are severely weakened and eventually killed by the experiments performed on them, and by their being drained of their essence, are reduced to an ore called 'magicite' upon death, which then grants either the Empire or the player additional powers. These powers are linked to different natural elements, such as fire or lightning.

The setting in the first half of the game is referred to as the World of Balance, and is made up of sub-regions with varying geographies: green grasslands, plains, forest, snowy mountains and small deserts. After arch-antagonist Kefka attempts to unleash the full power of the deities who created the espers, the three continents are split apart and the setting is thereafter referred to as the World of Ruin. The desert regions are expanded, the grasslands become wastelands, forests are blackened, and the sea is coloured a darker hue throughout the world, suggesting oil pollution. The player's job is to reverse this process.

Yet, as Simkins argues, the ethical experience offered by a computer game is centered on "the opportunity to not just witness, but live through and perform the ethical life of another" (p.72). The player is prompted to examine their own ethics chiefly through the mechanism of having the consequences of their actions transmitted to them through their effect on the characters in the game (p.75). Since the player is not able to substantively affect the course of the narrative, the focal point of player action is the battle space, that area of the game where the player's decisions most conspicuously determine whether or not they are able to continue. Taking part in battles is, throughout most of the game, the sole means of raising the combat abilities of the

player's party of characters, as well as the only way to reliably obtain in-game currency, which may be spent on better quality weapons or armour. The player who chooses to continually flee from conflict will quickly find that their party is too weak and too poorly equipped to win a battle that is a scripted and unavoidable part of the narrative. The "other life" that is therefore performed by the player in *Final Fantasy VI* is one of continual violent opposition: kill or be killed.

While a great many of the enemies the player encounters are either human soldiers, machines, or monsters cribbed from the mythologies of various cultures, a considerable number are recognisably animal. The question of animal rights and protections is intrinsically linked with environmentalist philosophy in general, and excessive violence against animals can be reasonably viewed as violence against ecosystems. There is no reason offered within the narrative of the game for why most of these animals would be hostile, or what is achieved by fighting them, beyond the adventuring party gaining battle experience.

The player's party of characters, on the other hand, is made up almost entirely of humans. One of the central characters is individualised, in terms of the game's mechanics, by his 'Tools' ability, which enables him to use increasingly complex projectile weapons, and incentivises the player to try to locate more as the game progresses, the most advanced of which is a highly anachronistic chainsaw.

Viewed according to its procedural rhetoric (Bogost, 2007) – that is, the way it teaches the player through rule-based interactions and embodied processes – *Final Fantasy VI*'s claim to being ecologically responsible, or ethically opposed to military techno-power, is somewhat dubious. The player wins by conquest alone, and by adding to their own arsenal and armoury. They lack the option to genuinely protect any natural habitat. In fact, they gather resources by plundering, much the same as the Empire they are battling.

Frog as intervention

Is it possible for these two apparently disharmonious dimensions of the JRPG – narrative content and core gameplay – to be reconciled without travelling far outside the boundaries of the genre? Here is where the existence of a moment like Frog's introduction in *Chrono Trigger* and its parallels with 'old pond' point to some of the ways the genre has tentatively reached toward – and may continue to reach toward – such a reconciliation. If Bashō is recording

a moment of awakening, a shifting of conscience, then the game is also using the structure of a frog intervention to awaken the player into a different mindset. In the *haiku* the hiragana character や is what is known as a *kireji* or 'cutting word', creating a pause or transition between two moments: the stillness of the pond played against the liveliness of the frog. Frog, similarly, enters the game with a cutting gesture, a decisive swing of his sword.

Up until this point, the player's aims have been limited to saving the female companion of the game's main protagonist, in a manner reminiscent of many kidnapped princess storylines. Frog's appearance signals that the game (and hence the player) has wider concerns; it foreshadows plot developments that lead the player to explore their ability to impact the world more dramatically. This frog is, after all, a symbol of spring, and therefore of life cycles, of birth and renewal – the forces that the player must enjoin with in *Chrono Trigger* if they are to save the world. He is a device, therefore, that causes the player to look beyond the fate of the protagonist and his friends and begin investing in the wider narrative.

In the same stroke, the game introduces Frog as an animal hero, a concept that is disruptive to a philosophy of the world based on human agency alone. Anthropomorphic animals are used in other popular multimedia franchises to model an imaginary fightback against human disregard by agents of the natural world, the most notable examples being early titles in Sega's *Sonic the Hedgehog* franchise, "a slightly radical representation of all humanity and the impact humanity is having on nature" (Naka, 2010).

The inclusion of half-animal characters alongside human protagonists leans toward a more realistic symbolism than that of nature fighting back, where the concept of sympathetic co-existence with the natural world is represented by composite champions or avatars. This combination of animal and human in one virtual body remains open to critique; it can be interpreted as pillaging animals for selected exotic or desirable traits and bolting them on to essentially human actors in order to lend these actors expressive range, resulting in non-human intelligence and autonomy being obscured or denied. All anthropomorphism is subject to this suspicion, even when the animals are quadrupedal and realistically depicted; Felix Salton's *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*, on which the popular Walt Disney film was based, was notably banned in Nazi Germany because it was interpreted as a comment on persecution of Jews (Loy, 2015, p.49).

Equally, however, this fictional device can be regarded as a means by which the audience – or, in this case, the player – starts to envisage and identify with non-human intelligence, or to at least regard it with curiosity, a potential gateway to broader sympathies with the natural world. Writing on cinema, Loredana Loy points out that the main way animals are culturally marginalised in visual media of the post-industrial age is through their lack of visibility. Urbanisation and the attendant focus on towns and cities as the epicentre of all cultural and political activity reduces animal life to a series of utilities (Loy, 2015, pp.41-42). Media that provides a meaningful role for animals in the context of human civilisation remains relatively rare, and the human-animal hybrid is one way of creatively bridging the gap.

Recalling Ueda's remarks on the pairing of apparently unrelated elements in *haiku*, then, just as Frog's introduction signals a change in the game's story emphasis, so does the character himself allude to the idea of a continuity, or harmony, between human and animal intelligence. The fictional human-animal hybrid is a provocation, and the starting point of a process that, when fully realised, works to "interrogate and problematise distinctions that would maintain modernity's separation of nature and culture, animal and human-animal, object and subject" (Yampell, 2008, p. 208).

There are two major types of anthropomorphic animal in the JRPG genre: as with the example of Frog, there are humans who have been transformed into animals, either temporarily or permanently. Then there are so-called beast races, which are communities of animal people who exist alongside humans in the fiction, and who are usually depicted as being as old as – or even older than – the human race. Capcom's *Breath of Fire* series utilises this device prominently. Its first two titles, released in 1993 and 1994 respectively, are set in a world that mostly comprises beast races, and prominently feature a wolf-man, an ox-man, a mole-person and a frog prince, as well as chimera-like female characters with particular animal body parts. What these titles lack, however, when contrasted with the example of *Final Fantasy VI*, is an opposing faction that can be readily associated with the threat posed to the natural world by rapid industrialisation and militarism.

If we were to imagine a version of *Final Fantasy VI* where the player's party were more closely associated with non-human forms of life, and where the enemy roster was not so conspicuously rounded out by members of the animal kingdom, then the disharmony between narrative and procedural rhetoric would, at the very least, not be so blatant. Generally speaking, the more unrealistic a game appears to be, the more it invites the player to interpret it as a non-literal representation of events. The battles in *Final Fantasy VI* are already turn-based, requiring that the player disregard the apparent absurdity of each participant waiting in line to perform an action. The existence of anthropomorphic animals allied to humans and fighting against magic-infused mechanical enemies in an environmentally conscientious narrative might go so far as to suggest to the player that the entire staging is allegorical, representing a broader struggle between alternative visions of our future, with anthropocentrism as a threat to itself as well as everything else.

Returning to the idea of suspension of the ego that is key to the conception of *haiku*, there are other key elements of the JRPG genre that align with that artistic goal – again, readily emphasised in the moment of Frog's intervention. Rather than being centered on a single protagonist, player embodiment is distributed across a party, members of which are exchanged at key points in the game. *Final Fantasy VI* remains the purest expression of this design philosophy, as it was specifically intended that no single character would be present throughout the game or function as the main protagonist (Kitase, 2012). The player therefore lacks a persistent alter-ego or ludic self within the game; they are a somewhat free-floating entity whose sympathies are subject to being forcefully changed.

The game is also designed so that, outside of battle space, control may be removed from the player at any point in a number of ways, largely for the purposes of dramatic moments. The scene sometimes changes, either to show a segment of narrative in flashback, or to highlight a location of importance, or to move the story to another location altogether. Any of the characters in the party, including the character the player is nominally controlling, may react to the narrated events by moving or speaking independently of the player's prompting. This can be regarded as a tool used to momentarily force the player out of their position at the centre of the game's system, the better to cause them to reflect on the way other elements of the game interact with one another – not simply in the manner of an audience member absorbing a story but as one element in a larger machine.

Frog's introduction to *Chrono Trigger* is memorable – and echoes the effect of *haiku* – in part because it takes

place right after a battle, with Frog supplanting the player as the main actor in the scene, forcing the player to bear witness to a shifting in tone, and a surprise contrast of elements. It introduces, dramatically and for the first time, a non-human hero to the cast, and swiftly aligns that hero with the player, literally bonding Frog to the player's own path, and entangling him in their destiny, by having Frog follow closely along as the third in the group. While we can be certain that the game designers did not intend Frog to be a particularisation of Bashō's frog, and may not even have read the *haiku*, the two scenes draw on a shared symbolism and structure in reporting – and provoking – a moment where the ego is temporarily set aside, a revelation of oneness with the wider landscape, embodied in one of its liveliest agents. A YouTube video from 2017 captures the reaction of first-time players to this section of the game over 20 years after the game's initial release, concluding with one player saying, "I love this frog!" (Trash Benn, 2017)

Conclusions

What this reading of one short scene in a single JRPG demonstrates is that resonances between the structure of video games and the structure of poetry can lead us to surprising revelations about the way games tackle dissonances and difficulties between their ludic and narrative expressivity. Theorists looking to poetry for their theoretical tools can advance additional readings of games that add nuance to existing interpretations. For example, the common poetic device of metaphor can be used to ascribe to viscerally violent video games the intention to represent more deeply interred conflicts: violence as symbolism, rather than representation or re-enactment.

Scepticism of techno-militarism and techno-corporatism is an increasingly common feature of contemporary games today, with mainstream titles in a diverse range of genres (for example, *Inside* (Playdead, 2016), a puzzle-platformer; the *Borderlands* (Gearbox, 2009-2019) series of first-person shooters, and the recent *The Outer Worlds* (Obsidian, 2019), an open-world role-playing game) pitting the player against – or in servitude to – morally dubious expansionist corporations. Attention paid to the poetic aspirations of such games, however muted, may help us move beyond the simplistic recognition that these games imbue the player with agency to take on murderous businessmen.

Modern games that adhere to or approximate the JRPG formula, meanwhile, will sometimes aim to subvert player expectations in order to reflexively comment on previously embedded aspects of the genre. Most notably, *Undertale* (Toby Fox, 2015) recasts the player as a murderer if they decide to proceed through the game by killing every enemy, and permits them to proceed without doing so. There are many instances in such games where meaning is conveyed by the poetic positioning of elements, in harmony or sharp contrast with one another.

In combination with these developments, there is room for practitioners and theorists alike to explore the potential for games to promote a deeper and more reflective engagement with challenging and socially responsible topics like environmentalism. The theoretical realms of transmediality and the media mix can be extended so that as well as paying critical attention to deliberate production strategies, theorists seek to yolk together games with other cultural artefacts through flexible concepts such as *kyara*. This in turn provides opportunities for players themselves to look beyond the game, or to locate their play within the context of a wider philosophy.

Practitioners, meanwhile, could do worse than to notice poetry, and to take note of its attendances to particular types of experience and cultural reality that are underprivileged elsewhere. In this way, transmediality can be used to reach and affect a wider audience than that currently engaged in gaming culture.

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