Lost in a Dream: Queering Time and Space in *Yume Nikki*

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Abstract

This article investigates the opportunities for queer play in *Yume Nikki* (KIKIYAMA, 2004) by examining the spatial and temporal dimensions of the game's "Dream World" alongside its narrative. Using surreal visuals and counterintuitive layouts, *Yume Nikki*'s game maps evoke queer experiences of space, movement, and wandering. In addition, the game encourages wandering through the absence of temporally ordered events and the game's general lack of interest in timekeeping. The game's construction promotes a play style that highlights aspects of queer experiences including disorientation and failure. The player's aimless roaming through time and space are not a failure to master the game, but another way *Yume Nikki* celebrates queerness and rejects the values of mainstream success, fun, and play.

Keywords

Introduction

The video game *Yume Nikki* (KIKIYAMA, 2004) opens with a girl named Madotsuki standing in her bedroom. The room is simple: there is a bed, a television, a game system, a desk, and two doors - one that leads to a balcony and one that Madotsuki refuses to open. The player can explore the room and the balcony; but, beyond a simple jumping game that can be played on the television, there is little to do. The game *truly* begins once the player guides Madotsuki to her bed where she falls asleep and then wakes up in the Dream World. *Yume Nikki*, which means "Dream Diary" in Japanese, is unlike traditional Japanese role-playing games (JRPGs). The game has no combat, no dialogue, and does not present the player with any plot or goals to achieve. It is an RPG game that is unusually frustrating to play and difficult to understand. In this paper, I conduct a queer reading of *Yume Nikki* and examine its position within the broad umbrella of queer games. To begin, Adrienne Shaw and Bo Ruberg (2017) maintain that a specific definition of queer games and queer games studies is difficult to provide, which is what allows queer games to be so successful at challenging the limits of more dominant intellectual and design frameworks. The general relationship between queer games and the idea of pushing boundaries can serve as a critique of mainstream mechanics, design, and normative ways of being.

In "What Is Queerness in Games, Anyway?," Naomi Clark (2017) discusses the two main movements of queerness in games, with the first focusing mainly on representation and the process of diversifying the content of games by including LGBTQ+ storylines and characters, and the second being more interested in how game structures can be made queer. Engaging with her second movement, Clark describes the focus on queering game structures as "what happens when we question norms and conventions about how games, or specific game genres, are expected to function" (2017, p. 4). Clark argues that this process is more like applications of queer theory to history or economic analyses, wherein the genres operate to locate unspoken norms, find points of rupture, and open fields to more liberating possibilities. Shaw and Ruberg (2017) and Clark present queerness in games as a flexible concept that is better characterized by its potential to disrupt systems than its ability to be categorized and defined.

When discussing queer games, we must also recognize the types of play styles used by queer gamers. Edmond Chang's (2017) concept of "queergaming" outlines how it would look to make and play games in a way that acknowledges and outwits the rigid boundaries of technology and straight gaming culture. For Chang, "queergaming dances with the possibilities of noncompetitive, nonproductive, nonjudgmental play" and "the desire for queer worlds as opportunities for exploration, for different rules and goals, and even for the radical potential of failure" (p. 17). Queergaming challenges the cisgender, straight, white, male, able-bodied, and difficulty-focused interests of gaming. This explicit

challenge is necessary to establish queer games (and nontraditional games in general) as legitimate. As gaming culture is largely dominated by the voices of these "hardcore" and predominantly white male gamers, the nontraditional design practices of these "fake games" are seen as a reason to reject them (Kagen, 2017).

Queer worlds and opportunities in games offer more than just queer spaces: they also offer queer ways of moving and existing *within* them. In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Sara Ahmed writes that "queer is, after all, a spatial term, which then gets translated into a sexual term, a term for a twisted sexuality that does not follow a 'straight line,' a sexuality that is bent and crooked" (p. 67). In games, travelling through space reveals an expression of straight or queer movement. Game paths, whether they are predetermined tracks, gentle suggestions, or even self-constructed routes, reveal how orientation is understood by designers and players. Like many non-linear games, *Yume Nikki*'s paths are designed *by* the player and unique to each player's journey. Players are free to discover hidden items, learn about the world, or simply meander along and take in the scenery. There is no one path that players must follow, nor can their queer movement be "straightened" by restricting or realigning their movement with an intended course.

Whit Pow (2018) writes that queer games "highlight the tenuous experience of frustration, impossibility, and uncertainty: the experience of being a queer body and subject in the world" (p. 44). Navigating the surreal landscape of *Yume Nikki*'s Dream World is frustrating. The player struggles to orient themselves in the game's maze-like maps and its bizarre narrative. Through this frustration, I argue that the player is placed into the role of a queer subject whose very existence undermines the logic of "natural" bodies, sexualities, and lifestyles. Without the opportunity to orient ourselves, we become powerless, and success or mainstream expectations of success are pushed further out of reach. In the "Queer Art of Failure" (2011), Jack Halberstam suggests that failure can also be recognized "as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique" (p. 88). When queerness is seen as a failure to adhere to the standards of heterosexuality, then queerness and failure become inseparable. However, for queer people and for *Yume Nikki*, failure is not the absence of success, but an opportunity to experience and live outside the boundaries of mainstream, heterosexual, and cisgender structures of life.

In this article, I examine *Yume Nikki* through the lens of queer theory and queer games studies, with an emphasis on its spatial and temporal dimensions. I am primarily interested in how design practices explore or challenge how we think about games. I will examine *Yume Nikki*'s representation of queerness, though subtle and unexplicit, in its narrative. *Yume Nikki* presents players with the opportunity to escape from the everyday into a world of dreams and nightmares. Madotsuki's

dreams take her from grotesque voids filled with reaching hands (see Figure 1) to dense woods and ordinary looking streets. Unnatural environments prompt the player to question what they need to know to navigate these spaces. The Dream World's queerness is rooted in its opposition to the rigid structure of the game's real world. Players find opportunities to explore in the Dream World because of its uncharted and undefined maps, which are at odds with the restrictive maps of the real world. *Yume Nikki*'s narrative, as told through its spatial and temporal construction of the Dream World, offers unique opportunities for queer play and reimagining failure in games, serving as a strong example of how games can operate queerly in their design practices as well as their narratives.
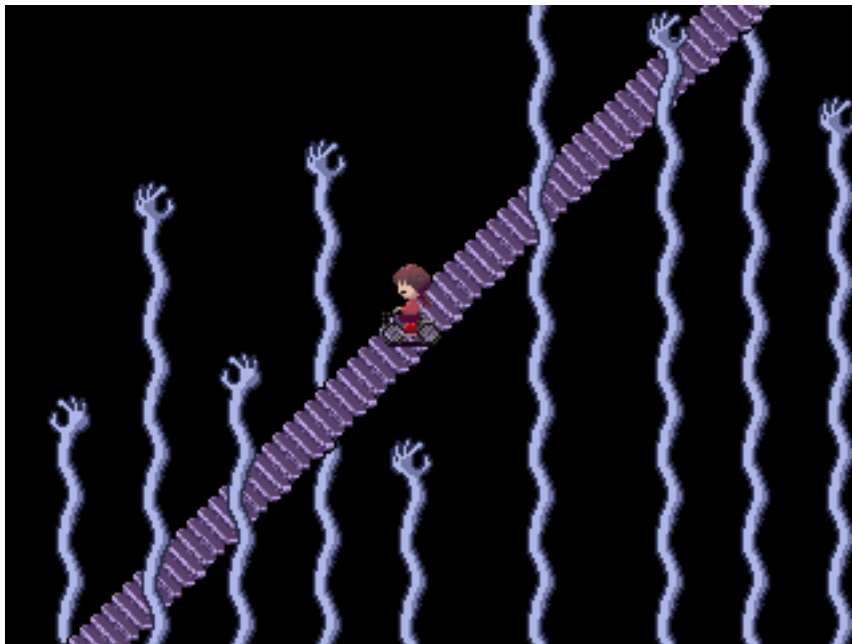

Figure 1. The Staircase of Hands. Screenshot by the author.

Making Space Queer

The absence of clear paths and directions in *Yume Nikki*'s Dream World forces the player to move through the game queerly—off the beaten path and outside of an explicit temporal order. Upon launching the game, very little gameplay information is supplied, and the player is left to discover the world on their own. The only information conveyed to them is that they can enter the Dream World by getting into Madotuski's bed and exit it by waking Madotsuki up (by pressing the number 9 key). Once in the Dream World, the player experiences a range of landscapes, some of which are bizarre (see Figure 2) and some that are seemingly ordinary (see Figure 3), but all of these in-game locations lack traditional paths for the player to follow, like colored walkways, directional cues, or narrative hints. The lack of guidance embedded in the designs of *Yume Nikki*'s game maps allows the player to experience what Chang (2017) conceptualizes as "queergaming," by promoting exploration through extensive wandering. The Dream World reproduces

the feeling of disorientation experienced by many queer people. Through traversing this space, players come to experience an echo of what navigating entails for people who explore ways of life outside of mainstream sexuality, gender, and success, and who must balance the risks and rewards that come with veering off into uncharted territory.
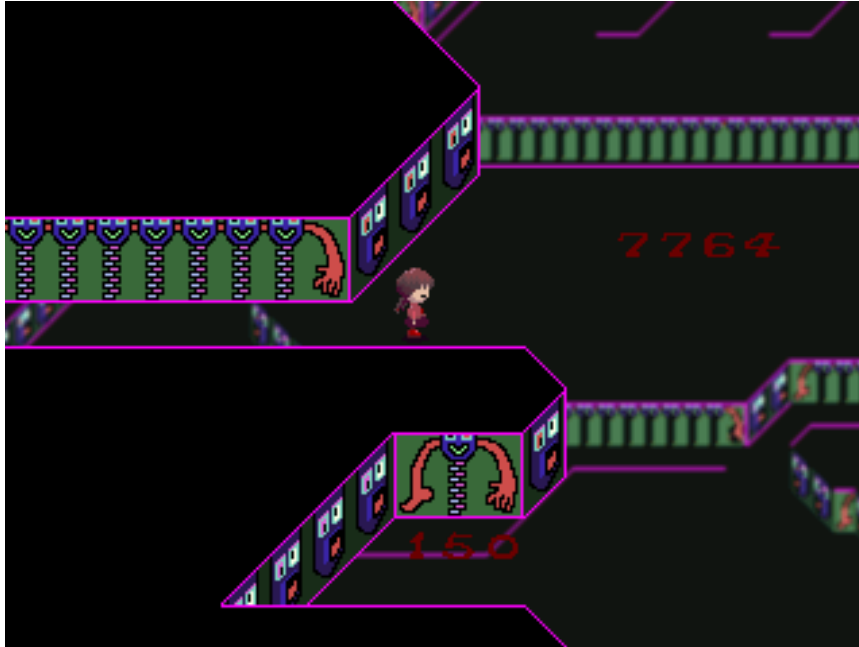

Figure 2. Number World. Screenshot by the author.

Figure 3. Dense Woods. Screenshot by the author.

The uncharted territory of the Dream World encourages players to explore, but also forces them to consider the disadvantages to unguided wandering. Expanding on Ahmed's (2006) understanding of "queer" as a spatial term and Doris Rusch's (2017) argument that "games are

predominantly spatial" (p. 61), Ruberg (2019) argues that "video games, with their constructed environments and designed player paths, make these metaphors of spatial orientation strikingly literal," which allows player movement in games to be understood from a position of queer or straight orientation (p. 635). In most games, level design is intended to guide the player to their end goal, and space becomes a way that game designers communicate directions to the player. This collaboration between the player and the game is often taken as evidence of "good" game design. Steve Swink (2004) explains that good game feel (i.e., the kinesthetic sensation of control) will go unnoticed, enabling players to act effortlessly in a world that is straightforward, with simple motivations and rewards. Working with the idea of "game feel," designers can encourage affective responses to simulated game spaces during the gameplay process (Jagoda, 2020, p. 91). However, instead of operating in the background, *Yume Nikki*'s game feel is a constant reminder to players that the world is not simple or easy to navigate. Players cannot rely on traditional expectations of space or spatial logic to navigate the Dream World's environments. Mouths can be doors, knives can be keys, and recognizable patterns might be meaningless. This lack of collaboration between the game and the player creates a tension in gameplay that forces the player to discover new ways to orient themselves without the game's assistance.

Yume Nikki's spatial design can be further understood through its game engine, RPG Maker 2003. In the RPG Maker engine, game maps are constructed from individual tiles that hold images, behaviors, and denote environments. Tiles are meant to be legible information markers that extend a player's understanding of the real world into the game. Consider one of RPG Maker's default tilesets (see Figure 4), which represents many real-world objects like chairs, books, curtains, and importantly floors, walls, and doors. The player can recognize what these game objects are, and then reason how we might interact with them (e.g., sitting in a chair, pulling books off shelves, not being able to pass through walls, etc.). Unlike RPG Maker's default tilesets, the Dream World's tilesets in *Yume Nikki* are mostly illegible. The tilesets in the Dream World's Graffiti World map (see Figure 5), for example, are everything except the background and Madotsuki's sprite. It is difficult to orient oneself among the landscape, and applying real world logic to the Graffiti World's tileset (see Figure 6) seems like a waste of time. The player cannot derive use from these tilesets, and there is nothing familiar that they can use to help them navigate this space. Instead of guiding players, they challenge them to reimagine how space is represented, traveled, and occupied. Where we might expect an arrow or a well-lit hallway to guide the player in a specific direction, there is nothing. Often, there are not even floors to be walked on, just a parallax image (an image whose placement changes with the observer's point of view) for the player to float over.

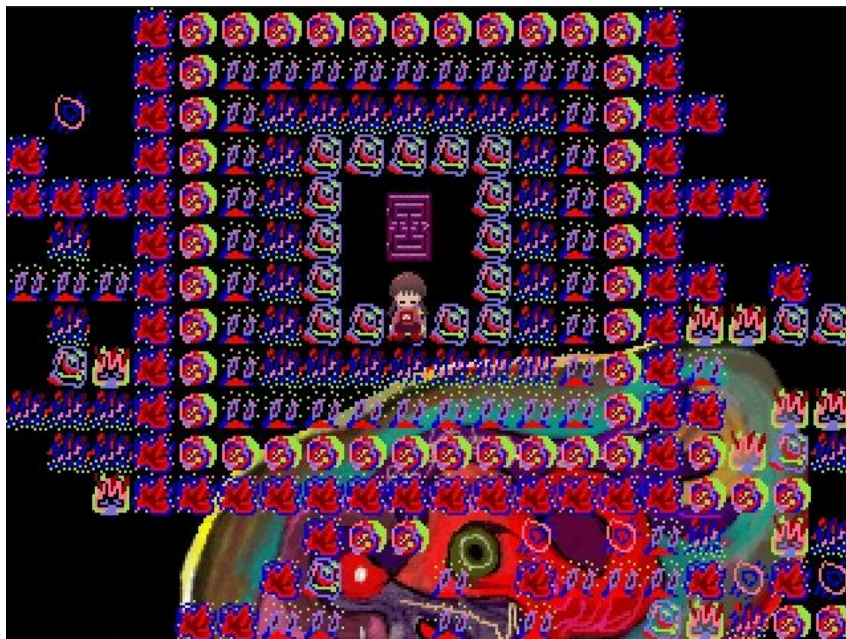Figure 4. *RPG Maker 2003* Default Tileset, uploaded by Davias.

Figure 5. Graffiti World. Screenshot by author.

Figure 6. *Yume Nikki* Shield-Folk World and Graffiti World Tileset,
uploaded by PixelDough.

Players fumble around, combing through maps and trying to carve out a
path where one has not been provided, and through this process, a

queer sense of space and movement begins to emerge. Gaspard Pelurson (2018), in his queer reading of *The Path* (Tale of Tales, 2009), positions the gamer as a modern *flâneur* who the game rewards for straying from the established trail. The *flâneur*, defined by Walter Benjamin (1968/1999) as a male figure originating in the modern city, has been understood by many queer scholars as an explorer or wanderer, "a witness to his times, . . . a rigorous observer, an amateur geographer and historian" (Ivanchikova, 2007, p. 20). Malcom Ryan and Brigid Costello (2012) argue that, as the *flâneur*, the player is rewarded for exploration instead of competition, presenting a new type of contract between the player and the game that focuses less on challenges and more on discovery. The relationship between the player-as-*flâneur* and *The Path* shows how games can recognize and encourage wandering and resistance against the "straightness" of traditional paths. Similarly to Pelurson's reading of *The Path*, I argue that the player's wandering in *Yume Nikki* can be understood as more than just exploration, but as an expression of queer movement and a performance of the *flâneur*. In *Yume Nikki*, the player takes on the role of the *flâneur* not because following the established path is boring or predictable, but because there is no path to follow—there is no way for players to be rewarded for their obedience or ability to conform to the game's paths. Wandering, meandering, and winding, all specialties of the *flâneur*, are necessary tools in navigating through the Dream World. It is only once players embrace this queer movement that they are rewarded by collectable items, bizarre creatures, and the beauty of *Yume Nikki*'s strange and surreal landscapes.

In *Yume Nikki*, the absence of paths and the unconventional representations of space transform the game's landscapes into a critique of "straight" movement and a celebration of queer wandering. *Yume Nikki* breaks the paradox of paths where "lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 16), instead encouraging the player to "make do" with being directionless. Players are invited to reflect on what it means to follow, to deviate, and to move in spaces where direction is sparse. There is joy and mystery to be unearthed in the undiscovered corners of the game, and there is also a considerable amount of trepidation and frustration encountered when turning to those unexplored borders. Queer wandering involves a recognition of both the positive and negative aspects of departing from established paths, and in *Yume Nikki*, the Dream World becomes a stage for this process to take place on, providing a space where players can explore queer movement.

Wandering Through Time

Traveling through the queer space of the Dream World requires a dedication to wandering, but wandering is not just exploration through space, it is also the process of slowing down, idling, and disrupting the rhythm of time. Unlike *Yume Nikki*'s few real-world locations, which are

areas not explored through dreaming, the majority of the game has no ticking clock or timed sequences to keep track of. Timekeeping in *Yume Nikki* is nonexistent. Matt Knutson (2018) suggests that queer temporalities can be recognized as a play style that runs counter to mainstream fascination with perfect timing, fast reflexes, and quick decision-making. Knutson introduces his argument borrowing from Elizabeth Freeman's (2010) concept of "chrononormativity," where timekeeping serves as "a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts" (p. 3). Knutson positions the leisurely exploration of *Life Is Strange* (Dontnod Entertainment, 2015) against the regulated, capitalist time of esports, to examine how removing the pressure of time allows queer playstyles to flourish. Much like *Life Is Strange*, and the previous discussion of *The Path*, in *Yume Nikki*, the player embodying the queer *flâneur* is a threat to fast-paced, capitalist, and heteronormative society.

Time functions as an agent of expectations, milestones, and success, and through wandering, players disregard attempts to be realigned with temporal paths in addition to spatial ones. As a wanderer, "engaging in the act of flanerie is in itself a firm statement of outsidership, a refusal to conform to the pace and direction of mainstream society" (Carlaw, 2008, p. 323). Queer temporality is at odds with heteronormative society's expectations for happiness, with queer people "wasting time" by not achieving milestones like getting married or having children (Ahmed, 2010, p. 6). In *Yume Nikki*, time is not made queer through time-altering mechanics like in *Life Is Strange*, but is instead characterized by its "slowness," time wasting, and disregard for the importance of time as a measure of productivity or success. Time in the Dream World is a poor match for chrononormativity and heteronormative expectations, existing somewhere outside of the ordinary methods of timekeeping and labor that both Freeman (2010) and Knutson (2018) discuss. In the Dream World, time is not just fluid or generous, but seems missing altogether. There are no clocks or schedules, and even in maps like the Dense Woods, one of the few non-abstract locations of the game, there are no changing day cycles or weather patterns. The only in-game recognition of time is found in the balcony map from the real world, where the sky outside of Madotuski's bedroom changes from night to day depending on how long the player stays in the Dream World. Though this is still only a vague marker of time, it is a surprising and noticeable change in scenery for the player after the timeless nature of the Dream World. This brief acknowledgment of time makes wandering something difficult to do in the real-world maps, both because of their limited size and the fact that time here can be observed and "wasted."

Once the player transitions from the real world to the Dream World, the player literally loses track of time because *Yume Nikki*'s saving mechanic does not log game information in the Dream World (the player can only

save their game in Madotsuki's bedroom and must leave the Dream World to do this). Saving the game will keep any items that the player has collected in their inventory, but it will not save their location in the Dream World or keep track of any game events the player may have triggered while playing. Due to this mechanic, when the player opens a save file, they start back at Madotsuki's desk. If the player wants to return to where they were in the Dream World, they must direct Madotsuki to her bed, go to the Dream World again, and retrace their steps. *Yume Nikki*'s saving mechanic, much like the presence of a day and night cycle, suggests that time is an element exclusive to the real world. The recognition of time conflicts with what makes the Dream World an ideal place for carefree and unguided wandering.

Events in *Yume Nikki* are not ordered linearly, encouraging instead an unstructured form of play that allows players to wander through the temporal dimensions of the game, in addition to its spatial dimensions. Ruberg (2019) writes about the limited potential for queer play in games that rely on "straight" game logic or mechanics. Ruberg is specifically discussing "gating" in the video game *Gone Home* (Fullbright, 2013), a design technique used to prevent players from accessing game events out of order. In *Gone Home*, Ruberg argues, gating acts as a straightening device, limiting the potential for queer play in a game that is primarily concerned with LGBTQ+ characters and themes. The sprawling interior of *Gone Home*'s house is restricted by locked doors that can be opened only once the player has completed game events in their intended order. According to Ruberg, gating makes *Gone Home* less of a queer wandering experience and more of an exploration game focused on finding a singular correct path forward on a linear and predetermined track.

While the queerness of wandering in *Gone Home* is straightened by the game's chrononormativity, wandering in *Yume Nikki* is encouraged by its lack of temporally ordered game events. The primary starting location in the Dream World, The Nexus, presents the player with 12 different doors, meaning 12 different potential worlds that are available to explore (none of these doors are locked). In addition, 23 out of the 24 collectable "effects" (special abilities) hidden throughout the Dream World can be gathered in any order. Some effects are more helpful if collected earlier, like the Lamp effect, which improves visibility, or the Bicycle effect, which doubles player speed. However, none of these effects are considered mandatory during gameplay and are mostly used to trigger the ending sequence. The absence of chrononormativity in the Dream World's construction, both in the literal sense that timekeeping is not present and in the flexible order of game events, allows players to decide where they want to explore on their own terms.

Failure, Fun, and Unhappiness

In video games, failure is expected, and as mentioned earlier in this article, failure is an important part of queer gaming. Halberstam (2011) writes that, in the heteronormative and capitalist context, "failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well" (p. 3). However, failure is not a strictly negative element, and repeated failure (or succeeding at failing) can lead to positive experiences, motivating players by showing them what went wrong and how they can do better. In *Experimental Games* (2020), Patrick Jagoda argues that failure is "a crucial element of analysis that enables greater understanding of a designed system and its expressed values" (p. 222). Failure in *Yume Nikki* is not about losing but focuses, instead, on the endless struggle associated with trying, and falling short, of doing what is right. Players find themselves close to, but never quite crossing the finish line. As the game progresses, failure and all the unhappy, unfun experiences that come with the experience offer the player an opportunity to reflect. Failure in *Yume Nikki* can then be read as a suggested counter strategy to "straight" concepts of happiness.

Before delving into the failure mechanics in *Yume Nikki*, it is important to take a moment to ask what Madotuski's journey is about, and what sort of values *Yume Nikki* imparts upon us. *Yume Nikki* is about exploring the dreams of a young girl named Madotsuki, but symbolically, the exploration of the Dream World can be read as a critique of the constraints placed on us in the real world. In *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), Halberstam sets out to investigate what the alternatives are to success and failure in hegemonic structures and theorizes how we might break out of those binary structures. In *Yume Nikki*, the player is undertaking a similar mission to Halberstam: dissecting the systems of success and failure that influence our every action. A desire to escape into the Dream World is a rejection of normative values, and, in a sense, the player is already failing to live a mainstream lifestyle the moment Madotsuki decides to go to sleep. Erik Fredner (2014) writes that unlike traditional games, which use achievements and challenges to facilitate success, "anti-games suggest [and] . . . afford opportunities, but never demand. You can't fail an anti-game, but you can fail yourself in it" (para. 2). If *Yume Nikki* prompts the player to fail at mainstream conformity and search for new ways of being, then to fail in *Yume Nikki* would be to abandon the search and return home to the systems that bind us.

Yume Nikki's overall relationship with in-game failure can be understood through Ruberg's (2017) concept of "permalife." Ruberg introduced permalife as a game mechanic that is primarily concerned with continued living, unlike permadeath, a game mechanic where the player dies only once and loses their progress for good. Permadeath exists within a tradition of predominantly heteronormative and masculine game values, as an extension of "hardcore" game mechanics (Ruberg,

2017). In contrast, permalife allows players to play without fear of failure. There are no formal "game over" screens in *Yume Nikki*, and players cannot be attacked, injured, or killed by Non-Playable Characters (NPCs) nor by environment-based hazards. The closest element to a failure state in *Yume Nikki* is more of a minor setback: Certain NPCs can teleport Madotsuki to inescapable areas. This essentially traps the player on a map where their only two options are to either wake up from the Dream World or, if they have it, use the Medamaude effect to return to The Nexus. These inescapable areas are often sectioned off portions of other maps, programmed with one way arrival points. There is no way to conquer these rooms. All the player can do is accept these complications, move on, and start over. In their discussion of permalife in the game *Mainichi* (Brice, 2012), Ruberg notes that the absence of events that could kill the main character, a Black transgender woman, creates a revolutionary queer world where the real-life violence against transgender women cannot hurt her. However, the world in *Mainichi* is not without harassment or the threat of violence, and the game's time looping feature establishes these concerns as a permanent aspect of queer life (Ruberg, 2017). In *Yume Nikki*, a lack of death implies a certain degree of safety, but much like permalife in *Mainichi*, life is made to go on in ways that are often frustrating or repetitive, with the threat of failure and the tediousness of starting over lingering.

These setbacks are unpredictable, and while the absence of a game over screen might seem to alleviate anxiety around failure, it is instead more foreboding than freeing. During my playthrough of the game, I spent hours wandering through rooms trying to progress, but without in-game failures to prevent me from going in the "wrong" direction, I often found myself lost and turned to a walkthrough. The walkthrough I consulted, posted by Scutilla (2008) on GameFaq, addresses the many complaints about *Yume Nikki*'s difficulty. In the "About" section of the guide, Scutilla writes:

> My biggest bit of advice regarding this guide would be: don't use it. This game is infinitely more enjoyable if you discover things for yourself and discovering the weird events and effects on your own is more rewarding than simply following a guide" (2008, para. 2).

I searched for a walkthrough because playing *Yume Nikki* felt hard and I, thus, assumed that I was playing it wrong—as such, bringing heteronormative practice to the game, myself. For Ruberg (2015), the goal of no-fun is not to educate, but to feel deeply and painfully, serving as "a type of queer worldmaking built on the liberating logic of masochism" (p. 115). Players may not view the type of interest or enjoyment they receive from *Yume Nikki* as fun—I certainly did not—but the satisfaction derived from the game's strangeness persists regardless of traditional entertainment labels. By making the player struggle to

progress in the game, *Yume Nikki* cultivates feelings of uncertainty and frustration but also curiosity and exploration. The Dream World is a set of unexplored opportunities, and if players want to live and play queerly, then they must grow comfortable with disorientation, wandering, and failure.

Yume Nikki's ending offers a strange closure to the events of the game, cementing the significance of failure and no-fun as a central component of its gameplay. At first, placing all the effects in The Nexus seems to do nothing, though once the player returns to the real world and moves outside onto the balcony, they notice a set of stairs has appeared. Madotsuki will then climb the stairs, jumping off the side of the building and out of frame. The screen fades to black while the sound of something hitting the ground echoes in the darkness. Soon after, three objects fade into view: two jellyfish creatures, which come from the Dense Woods, and a pool of blood (see Figure 7). The mournful ending theme accompanies the credits as they flash on the screen. Fans are divided on how to interpret the ending, with some wishing for something more uplifting and others defending the final scene as it (Imcoffeecake, 2018). Earlier in this section, I compared *Yume Nikki*'s restarting mechanic to permalife in *Mainichi*. Unlike *Mainichi* though, *Yume Nikki*'s ending contradicts the idea of permalife and the endlessness of its wandering. I would argue, however, that its final moments serve a different purpose. To expand off Ruberg's (2015) discussion of no-fun, I see *Yume Nikki*'s ending as one last opportunity for queer play in the game, allowing the player to sit with and reflect on emotions that are not typically considered appropriate in video games (Ruberg, 2015). Through Madotuski's final moments, the player is allowed to feel sad, disappointed, confused, and frustrated that they failed to keep her safe.

Figure 7. The ending/credits sequence. Screenshot by the author.

At the end of *Yume Nikki*, instead of being gifted safety and success, we celebrate queer unhappiness. In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Ahmed writes about "unhappy queers," arguing that for queer people, happiness cannot always be guaranteed when queer ways of life are seen by others to be intrinsically unhappy (p. 93). Instead of seeing unhappiness as negative, Ahmed suggests that it is worse to hide behind "happy heterosexuality" in the interest of peace, as the shared feeling of misery is a significant part of queer bonding and life (p. 101). When happiness (and success) is located in straightness, then queer endings can only be happy if queerness is sacrificed (i.e., when queer endings stop being queer). The tragedy of *Yume Nikki*'s ending is not just about acknowledging the unhappiness or violence that is commonly experienced by queer people, but also about positioning queer endings against straight endings. Madotsuki's jump from the rooftop is painful to witness after being able to escape into the vibrant environments offered by the Dream World, but as Ahmed expresses "the risk of promoting the happy queer is that the unhappiness of this world could disappear from view. We must stay unhappy with this world" (2010, p. 105). In this case, unhappiness is more than just a "bad" ending, but a reminder that queer ways of life are not yet able to be happy in the same way as heteronormative ways of life.

Conclusion

Yume Nikki contributes to the movement of queer games showcasing that unintuitive, unfun, and intrinsically queer methods of play are not only possible in video games, but constitute major critiques of normative values that are not possible with conventional design practices. The sprawling landscapes of the Dream World provide unexplored territory for the player to chart themselves, discovering possibilities for movement that exist outside the restrictions of linear paths. The player wanders, not just through the physical environment, but also through the game's temporal dimensions. The fluid organization of time in *Yume Nikki* transforms the player from traveler to *flâneur* and disregards the systems of time that rule our everyday experiences of labor and success. The aimless roaming through time and space is not a failure to master the game, but an encouragement to explore alternatives to success and grow comfortable with the satisfaction that can be found in unhappiness. Reading *Yume Nikki* queerly highlights the role of space and time in its gameplay and allows for a continued investigation of queer game design beyond relying strictly on the representation of queer characters. Further study of *Yume Nikki* could examine the substantial library of fan games the original game inspired, most notably *.flow* (lolrust, 2009) and *Yume 2kki* (Yume 2kki Team, 2007), and investigate how these games embody or expand upon *Yume Nikki*'s original design practices in order to cultivate similar experiences of disorientation, wandering, and failure. *Yume Nikki* exposes and unsettles player expectations about space, time, and narrative, resulting in an adversarial relationship between player and game instead of a

collaborative effort. These design practices acknowledge the fundamental out-of-placeness that characterizes many queer experiences and showcases how queerness can operate beyond sexuality and gender in games.

Acknowledgements

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