

Framing Agency and Hope in the Struggle Against Corporate Power and Climate Change in *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (2020) and *Final Fantasy VII Rebirth* (2024)

Gianluca Calio
University of Frankfurt
calio@em.uni-frankfurt.de

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This paper explores how video games could represent a fruitful territory for conceptualising hope in relation to our current climate crisis. Specifically, it will analyse Square Enix's remake of the 1997 J-RPG (Japanese Role-Playing Game) *Final Fantasy VII*, namely *Final Fantasy VII Remake* (2020) and its direct sequel *Final Fantasy VII Rebirth* (2024), framing both games as pieces of media that understand hope as the ultimate catalyst for agency and activism in a struggle against corporate power and exploitation of natural resources through extractivism. The paper departs from the premises that video games, much more than other kinds of media, rely on the complicity between the player and the digital media to foster "the sense that players have a responsibility for what happens on-screen, since they often have direct control over on-screen events and a vested interest in keeping the protagonist alive" (Craps and Smethurst 2017, 277). For this reason, it argues that video games, besides stimulating a certain sense of empathetic affinity between player and character, can also emotionally affect the player and thus potentially foster feelings like hope. It will also be considered how video games frame agency in terms of game design (Bódi 2023).

Using this framework of reference, the following section of the paper will explore how *Final Fantasy VII Remake*, as well as *Final Fantasy VII Rebirth*, could be considered as pieces of media that explore issues of climate change through both gameplay and narrative. Through the analysis of exemplary sections from the two video games, I will argue that, in terms of plot, both stage a struggle between climate activists, represented in the games by the eco-terrorist group AVALANCHE, and corporate power, symbolised by the industrial enterprise ShinRa Inc. and its extractivist practices responsible for altering the environmental stability of the planet Gaya. I will contend that the entire plot fosters a conceptualisation of hope as a feeling which can be cultivated in the battle against extractivism, desertification, and climate change in general. Lastly, I will also argue that several choices of game design sustain the framework of hope that *Final Fantasy VII Remake* and *Rebirth* nurture, analysing gameplay features and world-building elements that, although inserted in the dark cyberpunk context of a planet on the edge of a climate crisis, nevertheless points at the possibility of a future of hope and restoration.

References

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