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Playing with the Anthropocene: Human–Animal–Technological Entanglement in the Video Game *Stray*

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Abstract: This study investigates how the video game *Stray* (2022) narrativizes the Anthropocene through a post-human, multi-species lens. By using the perspective of a stray cat navigating a post-apocalyptic, human-absent world, Stray centres a feline protagonist, through which the player embodies and interacts with a decaying technological environment. The non-anthropocentric narrative foregrounds interspecies entanglement, animal agency and technological co-survival challenging the Anthropocene. This paper draws on interdisciplinary frameworks from environmental humanities, animal studies, and post-humanism to analyse how the game reconfigures human-animal-technological relations in a world shaped by ecological collapse.

The analysis is structured around one entanglement mode which is the kinaesthetic embodiment. This examines how feline movement reshapes player experience and disrupts normative human perspectives. The research argues that *Stray* functions as an "eco-narrative, which lets the player embody non-human vulnerability, mobility and relational ethics. This facilitates a unique contribution to Anthropocene storytelling by marking the spatial and affective dimensions of nonhuman experience visible.

By assimilating video game analysis into the environmental humanities, this paper adds to interdisciplinary dialogues on how digital media can actually be useful mediums to discuss the question of animal. In doing so, *Stray* exemplifies how video games, mostly labelled as an anthropocentric medium can contribute to narrating and reimagining the Anthropocene. This paper argues that such games offer compelling pedagogical and imaginative potential within the environmental humanities by modelling speculative, affective, and multi-species futures.

Keywords: *Non-human, Post-humanism, Embodiment, Anthropocene, Video Games, Entanglement*

Introduction

Stray is an adventure game, produced by Blue Twelve Studio and published by Annapurna Interactive. The game was released in July 2022. In the game, the player can play as a stray orange cat, who is trapped in a futuristic, underground walled area when the game starts. The underground city, which seems to be a concrete drainage system with dripping water, is devoid of any human presence, taken over by wild creepers, moss, plants and trees.

Before I engage in the task of critically analysing the game, I understand it is pivotal to clarify my position as a writer and a player working on the video game medium. I will situate my analysis at a converging point of my two interests: 1) to understand the game as a medium to explore entanglement beyond human-centric phenomenological perspective, 2) to explore the ways in which the embedded narrative of *Stray* enables embodiment as an ethical practice.

Though ludological mechanics like rules and structure that governs player interaction, cannot be fully neglected while analysing a game, I want to emphasize that my study focuses on the experiential content of the game, positioning it within the framework of entanglement and extending its tangent to embodiment. In this paper, I focus on how these structures and procedural designs (Bogost 45) would facilitate entangled relationships between the triad—human, non-human-animal and the machine. Thus, by highlighting the embodied-entangled affordances in the game (the interdependent, complex relationships between human, animal and the machine), I argue that the video game *Stray*, by facilitating a feline kinaesthetic embodiment for the player, allows the player to experience entanglement as a corporeal post-human ethic and engagement. In this game, the facility of feline embodiment does not merely serve as a narrative technique, but urges the player to live a non-human animal existence that would dismantle human centric gaming.

The immersive game experience allows the player to experience ethics not just as a conceptual framework, but as an ontological, phenomenological one; as a condition of embodied existence. The game, through its mechanics, the feline movement, interaction with other non-human actors, and movement, incorporate ethics as an emerging framework through their interactions. The player becomes the cat, which would also mean to embody the cat's vulnerability, powers, and dependence to other actors in the game.

This chapter, by grounding on the theoretical concepts of Barad's "Intra-action" (214) and Ingold's "Kinaesthetic way of knowing" (156), thus focuses on the embodied experiences constituted by entanglement, and explores how embodiment enables and is shaped by entanglement. All these concepts highlight the fact that the player is not a detached observer, but an active participant whose actions, choices, bodily engagement are responsible for the emerging ethical significance in the entangled relationship.

Prior to engaging critically and theoretically with the content of the game, I deem it important to provide a detailed game narrative. This establishes a clear textual foundation for the analysis to unfold. This outline will introduce the protagonist(addressed as Orange), other major characters in the game, major events and challenges that emerge within the game's post-human setting (the conditions that contribute to the post-human appeal of the game will be discussed in the following sections) within the game. Another purpose of a detailed summary is to give an in-depth descriptive and performative narrative within the game, whose ludic structure dismantles the player/cat (human/non-human animal) binary.

The summary would also describe the pivotal narrative elements, gameplay mechanics and their interplay in the game. These elements play a fundamental role in fostering the entangled, embodied experience like, depending on the technology, partnerships between animal-machines, which is foundational to this game analysis. I believe, establishing the contextual and textual foundation of the game; a detailed description of the major events in the following section can be used later in the analytical discourse that is to follow. The game *Stray* is divided into 12 chapters, the game has an engaging narrative arc which contributes to the overall gameplay. Since I (the player) get to play as a cat, thus embodying a feline character, in the next section I will use the terms 'I', 'Player' and 'the cat' interchangeably, which would challenge the player-avatar boundaries. This would also suggest the game's potential capacity for adapting feline embodiment. Both these would highlight the non-human perspective essential for examining entanglement from the tangent of trans corporeal post-human ethics.

Living as a Cat: A Narrative Guide to *Stray*

The main cat, whom I will address as Orange for the rest of the paper (I name the cat to serve as an identifier, which simplifies the discourse about the animal discussed here), plays with other cats and then snuggle down for rest. The clowder starts their journey, next morning, on a sunny day. Orange/I travels through broken pipelines, sewages with its other feline friends, throughout the first chapter titled "Inside the Wall". While navigating and jumping above sewage pipelines, Orange loses its footing and slips into a dark, sewer channel. It slides through the channel, losing the grip into an underground concrete debris. As I plummet into the unknown, other cats can only watch helplessly in despair. However, Orange survives the fall and explores the dark. The first chapter ends here, opening the second chapter titled "Dead City". There is piled up plastic, concrete wastes, sewage waters and dark void except for a few flickering neon lights of sign boards. After spending a fair share of exploration or prowling through the dark to find the way forward, Orange sees signs that spell out messages such as 'Help' and 'follow me' or arrows pointed out to give away the directions. Following these signs leads me to a desolated street. The streets are disturbingly quiet. I continue the exploration through the streets to see a damaged robot and a few, strange-bug like creatures hustling around. These

are one-eyed creatures, who attack living and non-living things alike. Orange runs for safety when it is attacked by these creatures. Finally reaching the apartments, Orange is led on by direction signs that appear on the non-functional TV screens.

The third chapter commences here. The chapter is titled “The Flat”. Orange reaches a random apartment on the far side of town. In the apartment, a computer blinks to life and a mysterious message appears on the screen. While Orange plays with the keyboard, Instructions appear on the computer screen. The message read, “ Data corrupted, Need help. Find body inside the room”. An electronic door opens to a secret lab. Orange activates some repaired screens, This further opens another door. In the room, there was a nonfunctional robot, its pod and few computers and notice boards, wired system implying it could have been a lab once. After careful interaction with a few artifacts there at the room, Orange finds a companion old drone. Orange carries it to a repair station, where the drone is activated. The drone introduces itself as a companion drone, who worked for a scientist who owned this apartment. The drone has forgotten its name and announces that it can be addressed as B-12, as written on its exterior.B-12 promises Orange to take the cat from this place, as it may be a dangerous place to live. B-12’s memory is corrupted, yet it decided to accompany Orange to safety. B-12 equips Orange with a backpack, which can be used to store and digitalize key items they collect on the way. They both explore the city, encounter the cycloptic creatures again and continue their journey until they see a functioning robot.

The next chapter, titled “ The Slums” starts here. The robot panics after seeing Orange, slam an alarm button and runs for safety. There are other robots too, who closed their room doors and made me understand that B-12 and Orange are both not welcome there. On moving forward, Orange encounters a robot, who is introduced as the Guardian of the robot lot. The Guardian refers to the cycloptic creatures as ‘Zurks’,The robots have their own language, which is translated by B-12. The Guardian who understands that Orange and B-12 welcome them to their slums. They together explore the market place, interact with other robots named Robin, Vapora, Roshee and more. In this chapter, there are few mysteries awaiting for Orange and B-12, like collecting super detergents, energy drinks, which can be used as a batar item at the marketplace. The slums chapter is a little longer than the preceding ones, with a lot of robots to interact with. B-12 had collected a postcard of a beach on their way, which can hint about the outside world. Guardian suggests that they meet Momo, the robot who might be able to help them out. They set out to find Momo. The interactions with other robots prove pivotal in this task. B12 and Oranges finally finds a deeply troubled and frustrated Momo, who has been trying to locate his fellow outsiders Doc, Clementine and Balthazar who disappeared during their quest to reach the outside world. They were together known as ‘The Outsiders’. Momo laments their absence and blames their pursuit of this dream for his new found loneliness. For a long time he has tried to contact them but cannot, due to his transceiver having no signal. Before setting off on their mission the outsiders had

taken notes about the outside world. Orange and B-12 took up the challenge of finding all the notebooks. They collect all three notebooks and hand them to Momo. He is inspired to continue his work and locate his lost friends after discovering that the transceiver can be repaired. Momo entrusts B-12 and Orange to take the transceiver to the tower. He sets them up a treacherous route through the dead city- a path infested by swarms of hungry Zurk monsters. At the top of this path stands a signal tower and once the transceiver is fixed to this tower, communication outside of the slums will become possible and with it a chance to re-establish connection with momo's lost teammates.

The fifth chapter opens here. The chapter is titled ‘rooftops’. This chapter is Orange’s and B-12 journey towards the tower to place the transceiver. They are encountering constant attack from Zurks. The city seems to be completely infested by Zurks. On their journey, they see a board, “Neco Corporation”.B-12 remembers that Neco Corp was responsible for the waste management. They had created a bacteria to dissolve trash, but when humans disappeared, the bacteria mutated and Zurks were formed. B-12 and Orange succeed in fixing the transceiver at the designated position. B-12 remembers that the city was meant to be a shelter.The lights that look like stars, are actually lights marking the hermetic roof sealing of the city. Humankind had built this shell to protect themselves from the Outside, when the Outside became dangerous for them to live, barren and disastrous. But now that the cat has come from outside, it implies that it is safe for living being again, B-12, then is certain that its purpose is to open the city. Later, they return to Momo, who was waiting for them at the bar.

The next chapter “The Slum Part 2” starts here. With the transmitter completely functional, Momo manages to connect to Zblathazar. Zbalthazar informs that they managed to find a way up through the sewers, which according to Momo is the most dangerous place, infested by Zurks. B-12 and I, find a hidden lab at Seamus’, Doc’s son’s apartment. From the apartment, B-12 and Orange gets to know about Defluxor- a spectrometer developed by Doc. Doc had gone to the outside to run a test of this weapon, but never returned.

The seventh chapter,’Dead End’ involves B-12 and Orange finding DOC.With a tracker that Seamus gives them to track Doc, the team finds Doc at the outside. After helping him fix a generator and charge the Defluxor, they decide to leave for the slum. Doc fixes the defluxor to the drone, as it is more efficient than carrying it in his hands. They finally make it back to the slums. With the Defluxor, now attached to the drone, they start their journey with Momo through the Sewers to find Zbalthazar. Momo had to hold back, as the journey was impossible for him to navigate with so many Zurks around.

Momo takes them in a raft through the sewers in this chapter titled “the Sewers’. After navigating through the sewers and escaping the zurks, we reach another village, called Antvillage,name of the next chapter. They meet Zbalthazar meditating at the Antvillage, Clementine has traveled to

another level,called Midtown. Zbalthazar advises them to reach to the top of the village to reach Midtown, He gives them a photograph of him with Clementine and her address at Midtown.

Midtown is where the middle class humans once lived and their wastes are flowing down from the Neco Corp factory into the slums. hundreds of years later the bots have continued this tradition and the bright neon-lit city streets are full of hustle. A range of different shops from closed doors to eateries are fully functional. There are even bars and a nightclub and overlooking the town is a high security prison. Any suspicious or law-breaking robots find themselves locked away in this creepy establishment. Policing the streets are drones equipped with electroshock rifles known as the sentinels. As B-12 recalls, these were initially designed by the humans to keep the streets safe and for people in line. However over the years as the people of the city rose up against their oppressive lawmakers and corporations, those who controlled these sentinels used them for more nefarious purposes to keep everyone in line and repressed. No matter the circumstance, they are now used by a police unit known as the peacemakers, to make sure no robots step out of line.

Clementine is currently hiding from both the peacemakers and sentinels in an apartment block uptown. Upon sneaking into her apartment Clementine doubts Orange and B-12, but quickly trusts the duo after seeing the photograph from her old friend Balthazar. In order for her plan to reach the outside, Clementine informs us we need to take the subway train to the upper levels. Unfortunately the train is powered down and only an atomic battery found deep within the high security confines of a local necro factory will get it running again. Clementine gives the cat and B-12 a contact on the streets, someone who she trusts to sneak them into the factory. This contact is a bot called Blazer and upon passing him clementine's note, he sneaks the two inside after navigating the sentinel-patrolled factory and snagging one atomic battery the cat and b12 return to clementine's apartment block only to discover she is now missing and the entire place is locked down by local police. A note left by clementine reveals that she has gone to hideout in the local nightclub with Blazer. Upon making it to the club we discover blazer is a snitch and has turned in both Clementine and team cat to make a little money. The sentinels swoop in and stun our cat's companion. Then everything turns black.

The next chapter, “The Jail’ starts here. Awakening inside the local prison, the cat manages to break free from their cage and locate clementine who directs them to a set of nearby keys allowing her to also break free. However, communication is now key as B-12 has been taken and so the cat no longer has a translator to rely on. This prison is a terrible place where disobedient robots are tortured and have their memories slowly wiped until they revert to the soulless creations. While exploring the prison the pair stumble across B-12 contained within an electronic cell where his mind is being probed for answers. Orange cannot leave without a newfound friend and coaxes Clementine into helping break him free and they succeed. Clementine steals a truck and races through the city streets to get B-12 and Orange back to the subway. Before the sentinels track them down she says farewell, remaining hopeful

that the newest found member of the outsiders can complete the mission. She failed a mission to bring the outside world to those trapped within the confines of this city. Speeding off into the distance our duo is left with only one option to power up the subway system and take the train to the surface. B-12 and Orange, have arrived at their destination at the highest point of the underground city where those with money power and control would reside and make choices that affected every living human beneath. Here we see the original companion bot designs, those who never had the chance to evolve into something more. They continue to perform the tasks they were set by the humans in the past. Only one thing now stands in the way of a cat's freedom— a sealed door leading to the surface to open this door.B-12 must override a series of high security computer systems located in the nearby control room. It is in this room that B-12 records exactly why there are no humans left alive and the full circumstances of their tragic demise. Throughout our journey B-12 recalls memories of his past human life and we can piece these together to form a full story. Hundreds of years earlier a catastrophe took place on earth that caused the earth's surface to become unlivable until it had time to heal and become safe. Once more, the humans built a vast underground city to hunker down. They created plants which didn't require sunlight to supply breathable air and recycled water in a vast sewer system to sustain themselves. Life continued on with the lower classes oppressed more and more as resources ran down and panic spread. Eventually a plague broke out and began to wipe out every last denizen of the city, even those hiding away at the top level. The only survivors were the companion bots. The humans had built to help out who grew more and more sentient over time. A certain scientist who had transferred his consciousness into the electric network so that he may pass on human history to those who survived. Now B-12 is the last surviving human existing only inside the body of this droid. As B-12 begins to override the door lock, he is gradually attacked by the network's security protocols. He urges Orange to carry him to the final override so he may complete his work. After doing this B-12 states that he no longer needs to survive as he can now see that the world will be just fine without human influence. The robots continued the work started by the humans and for better or worse have inherited their traits evolving into thinking, feeling beings who can now rebuild the world anew. He thanks me for being such a good companion and faithful friend. Before passing on with his final action B-12 opens both the door leading to the surface as well as the city roof flooding the streets of this once dark civilization with bright sunlight. The robots finally understand there is indeed a world beyond their city and the introduction of sunlight eliminates berserk infestation and brings safety and peace to the residents of this city. A new chapter in a post-human world can now begin. I stayed with B-12 for a while before finally heading to the surface. It's time to say goodbye to this robotic world and reunite with the cat clan. But as I look back at the tunnel leading into the depths of a lost city, a single screen sparks to life as if someone familiar is living on, inside the network.

The detailed description of what happens in the game, serves as my foundation for the analytical discourse in the following sections. The analysis focuses on the game through its feline protagonist and the cat's feline embodiment effect on player experience. But rather than examining embodiment from the perspective of a narrative device and procedural choice, I analyse how the choice would become a material, affective process to shape the human-animal-technology triadic entanglement within the game.

To frame my analysis in this perspective, I use Kinesthetic embodiment which focuses on the feline embodiment and its characteristics that shapes the entangled experience of the player

Leap, Climb and Sneak: Mapping Embodied Kinaesthetics of the Feline

> A Czech story tells of a blind man who asked for the eyes of a young girl and was given instead, in secret substitution, the eyes of various animals. Each time, he saw what the animals saw: when he was given the eyes of fish, he saw fins and scales; when he was given the eyes of birds, he saw the sky and clouds. This story reflects the widespread folk belief that when you see with someone else's eyes, you see what that creature sees; more broadly, when you are given someone else's organs, you take on that person's personality in some way. (Doniger 202)

Drifting away from Stray and analysing this Czech folktale is primarily to return to the video game with a more nuanced understanding of embodiment offered within the game mechanics. The folktale about the man being offered the eyes of various animals and consequently seeing the fins and skies, reflect a profound meaning of looking through these different sets of eyes— to live another's senses is to inhabit their worldview (Doniger 202). This substitution is more ontological than optical as the man's phenomenological sensations and experience is shaped and produced by and through the ontological self of the animals. In the video game *Stray*, the game mechanics are designed to make the player experience the world through feline materiality. The player comprehends the world through feline features, for e.g., paws that cannot grab objects but can observe tactile vibrations, whiskers that act as sensory receptors for touch, heightened movement detection, low-light vision and agility. The player reads the world through the feline materiality, embodiment and the kinaesthetic ways of understanding. The embodied trial and error afforded through the game mechanics offers a dialogue between player's adaptability and materiality of the game world.

The very opening scene made me realise the "kinesthetic way of knowing"(Ingold 156). Ingold's concept of comprehending existence materialises through bodily interactions and movements rather than direct, blunt instructions. The game evolves partly through the tactile engagement of the cat. There are no tutorials at the beginning of the game. Throughout the game, the player is given minimal instructions or guidelines to navigate through the game world. This, I infer, is a technique

offered by the game (unintentionally or intentionally) via which the player comprehends the ways in which meanings evolve through embodied actions. I read this as a procedural design choice which facilitates and demands a conscious effort to understand the different ways of entangled networks. Jumping through the fallen pipelines, navigating under them, running into the lush, covered greens, climbing against gravity, not being able to use the hands (cat's limbs) as a human would, but playing through the more-than-human capacities like heightened sensations, auditory capabilities, heightened olfactory functions, being small and light weighted to navigate through small spaces etc, lets the player acknowledge the limitations and capabilities of the cat. Accordingly, the player adapts to feline embodiment in each passing moment, through visual and physical sensations and the ways in which these feedbacks interact with the environment. Playing as the feline character, the player experiments with tactile, kinaesthetic movements like scratching, cuddling, jumping, prowling, and observing other cats in the clowder. Touch becomes a survival method, what Haraway defines as "multispecies knot", which refers to the material and ethical interdependencies. The cats finding comfort with each other on a rainy night and snuggling together for warmth posits care as a material, interdependent entanglement within a group, rather than care as an abstract concept built on empathy.

The moment a breakthrough happens in the game, is when Orange loses its footing and slips into the dark. This is a reflection of the feline vulnerability for the player. Even though the jump seems a little dangerous, I was not expecting this fall, especially when other cats had already reached the safe grounds. The fall was tragic, especially when Orange's face had exhibited the horror and shock of the moment with little squeaky, fearful cries. Other cats could only watch helplessly. I wasn't sure if the cat would survive the fall. Initially I thought of this as a game mechanic where I would have lost my life and start over again. I thought completing this tricky jump, before the pipeline collapse, would be a challenge inside the game. But to my surprise, in the pitch dark underground Orange wakes up conscious.

This sudden fall; the shock and trauma associated with it also meant an introspection into the precariousness of the feline embodiment. The vulnerability powered by the fall, is a lens to understand the physical limitations and testing of the non-human embodiment in a laborious task. This understanding only increases as we proceed into the other chapters.

From the initial minutes of the game, I adapted into the feline movement, walking through the sewer. Goofing around, tussling with other cats was also an option available for me. I could move toward the other three cats and flick at them using the controller button. I moved around to see if there was any way to continue my journey from the sewer. After too many attempts which failed, I learned that I have to wait, sleep through the rainy night. No on-screen instruction is given to the player regarding this waiting period, the player will search for clues or ways to navigate forward but in vain. I don't remember the number of turns it took before I figured it out. While there is no verbal hint

provided by the game, I found the clue from the other cats. After the interactions, I noticed they all were finally settling in for the night, silently curled up. This was my cue to follow them.

I had to learn the ways of navigating the world through the "attentive waiting" as Haraway calls it (35). Haraway's idea of attentive waiting, calls for slow-paced actions and observation as an effective way to understand the entangled relationships humans have with their environment. She suggests that humans should have patience to "stay with the trouble" and observe the interactions better before looking for solutions. She assures that staying with this trouble will have a positive impact on the way humans think about the undeniable network they are in. Here in the game, even when I was eager to start my journey from the sewers and get completely immersed in the game, the game mechanics required me to slow down, observe other cats in the clowder. This design choice of the game reinforces that observation and patience are ethical choices in an entangled network of many actors. This rest, which is prioritized over progression in the game, is repeated in other chapters too, even in the chapters with quests like the Antvillage or the slums. This importance given for rest, can be seen as a posthuman reorientation towards symbiosis and consideration.

The option to interact with other cats, I understand, is a way to introduce the idea of tactile engagement. This operates as a pedagogical tool for the player. A way for the player to comprehend the process of "thinking through the body"(Ingold 156). The player becomes informed and bounded by a system; an assembled system in which the agency is spread across technologies and actors in the human-animal-technology triadic entanglement.

While the human player might be familiar with the linguistic exchange in the real world, the tactile affordances of the video game facilitates the sociality of the cats within the clowder. The tactile interactions are not limited to other cats, but are also exercised with robots in other chapters. While in other chapters, there are linguistic exchange of information with the help of B-12, the first chapter completely restrains from any source of verbal and linguistic expression, making tactile affordances a potential pedagogy of embodiment. This dislocates human linguistic and cognitive modes of interaction as the most critical way of comprehension and exchanges and offers alternate modes of engagement.

It is in the third chapter that B-12 is introduced to the payer. I navigated through the deserted flats and engaged with the technological ruins in the place like the abandoned computers, lab settings, furniture and explored the cluttered spaces. A pivotal moment in such interactions is when I interacted and played with the keyboard using Orange's paws. This embodied interaction with the keyboard led to an important clue on how to navigate further. The tactile engagement with the objects, especially the computers that needed repair, reflects how I interacted via the cat's body to engage with technology that proved resourceful. For example, Orange, through my gaming controls, repaired the computer

station that finally led to B-12, the drone. The impact of these tactile interaction is conveyed to the player through vibrations in the controller, or through the sound effects which makes it feel more realistic

The procedural design of the game, to provide Orange with a "backpack" containing B-12 is significant for how the game advocates for embodied entanglement. The backpack has B-12 , making it a constant physical presence that is literally affixed to the body of the cat. Here,B-12 is not just an interface or a menu option; rather, it is a co-habitant of the cat's body and therefore an extension of the embodiment aspect of the cat. This design decision holds consequences for how B-12's capabilities (translation, technologically engaged interactivity) are pivotal in Orange's journey. Everything the cat can achieve using B-12 is engaged through the movement of the cat's body, which the player controls. For example, if the cat interacts with a robot or an item of technology that B-12 is able to engage with - the prompt will appear in relation to the cat's literal space within the game. The player must decide on the interaction, but this requires controlling the embodied movement of the cat to approach the engagement object, and then likely pressing the engagement button linked to the presence of the cat, which in turn initiates B-12's function.

The kinaesthetic embodiment is challenged significantly, when the player has to engage with the complete potential of feline agility and movement in a new vertical space—the rooftops. Moving through this high space would demand specific balancing, jumping, and navigation skills. There are specific paths the player can navigate through in the environment. This adds to a higher intensity of the kinaesthetic knowing (Ingold 156). There is a vulnerability and precarity that I felt jumping and running through narrow beams and high rooftops, especially after the fall in the first chapter. But this moving and living with vulnerability afforded by the gaming medium also attunes with Manning's "new ecologies of experience" (64). I am not a passive spectator here in the game, I emerge as a performer, who transforms through embodied experience. As Manning says,

> To simply watch an event—to remain a passive spectator to its inner workings—does not result in experiential transformation. Transformation entails a shift in affective tone such that the participating spectator feels the performance, responding to it through an emphasis as much on its duration—its capacity to create experiential space-times— as through its content—its micro movements in the making. (Manning 64).

Though Manning is saying it in the context of dance, I think this can be applied to my act of playing too. Here, the act of gaming is offering me a transformation, an active, conscious idea of living with the precarity to form new levels of experiential embodiment.

Another important aspect is the continuous attack from Zurks, which has infested the city. They are a constant danger, while I navigate through the city. This demands for a highly engaged mode of

alertness and evasion, different from the intermittent survival quests in the initial chapters. The procedural design of this segment emphasizes rapid but responsive actions; that I strived to stay alive by engaging Orange's speed, agility, and escape skill. But the Zurks can be very quick to slow you down, which would result in the loss of life and I had to restart the chapter several times. My embodied movements in escape mode with Orange, were designed in relation to B-12's potentials. Surviving from Zurks through use of B-12's light, is transforming kinesthetics of survival into a more complex process of coordination that involves timing, space, and combined agency of the animal body with the agency of the machine's action. This illustrates how the entangled embodiment of the animal and the machine enables new ways of kinaesthetic engagement with environmental threats in the post-human world.

The act of fixing the transceiver at the correct location is not just the culmination of a task, but also a corporeal experience I was subjected to in Orange's body. Here the acts of Orange installing the transceiver, though scratches, and touch with wires and the technical system required inputs from me as a player. My tactile inputs interacted with the game codes, to create the desired results which could be read as "agential cuts" (Barad 146). The combined efforts of my tactile inputs, with the machines' codes and Orange's paws creates a posthuman assemblage that facilitates trans-corporeality through the exchange of knowledge and matter.

Traversing through Seamus' apartment demanded me to utilize the metacognitive bodily ability and affordances of the Orange solely developed throughout the former chapters. This was not repetition of tasks in the previous chapter, but a memory rehearsal, a discussion of how material-discursive engagements like jumping onto shelves, or navigating through cluttered spaces. Simply the act of finding the door to the hidden lab depended on the embodied exploration of the environment. This was a cue I learned from the earlier chapters, to look for clues from the environment like scratchable surfaces, objects etc.

Similarly, Zbaltazar's discovery of an escape channel through the sewer reflects Timothy Morton's dark ecological space which is a polluted space formed by human neglect and waste (27). The matter, which is agential here, is also connected with thought, reflecting the notion that humans comprehend spaces and knowledge through inter-actions with non-human actants. When I return to the sewer, which was a dark episode to me; a most dangerous place, invaded by Zurks, I had to adapt a kinaesthetic knowing of embodied action (moving through pipes, water, and verticality). This time, the kinaesthetic embodiment also came with a procedural design of combating and managing the increasing Zurk presence, using the Defluxor. The earlier knowledge of jumping through pipes, climbing and navigating through narrow spaces was combined with the power of Defluxor's technology, a shared ability to survive the Zurks.

The central kinaesthetic task was going through the sewers and escaping the Zurks with the Defluxor. This is where the embodied experience of the Defluxor as an animal-machine comes to action. I needed to manage Orange's agility and movement, while also aiming and firing the beam of the Defluxor to either deter or destroy the Zurks. This represents a complex form of kinaesthetic knowing, integrating feline movements and capabilities with technological interventions. This dynamic, new trans-corporeal collaboration is an example of Haraway's companion species where I had to adapt my choices accordingly for survival.

A major challenge for my kinaesthetic embodiment was to move forward without getting detected . The Sentinels patrolling the city made sure to restrict my freedom to explore by continually patrolling the city. In procedural terms, this surveillance in the environment here required me to have optimal control over Orange's body. I used the Orange's ability of stealth, agility and smallness to hide behind things, squeeze through spaces, to escape Sentinel's gaze. This controlled, frightful and attentive exploration of the city was very different from the carefree experience in the initial chapters, which establishes bodily control and awareness of space and time within the game world.

This change aligns with kinaesthetic knowing which comes from repeated interactions and experiences. While during my first play in Midtown, I was not very cautious, until I was treated with the electroshock. From next time onwards, I became very vigilant. My movement was conditioned by the risk of punishment; I learned about safe zones and patrols through embodied trials-and-errors, mediated by the threat of electroshock. Just like how a saying goes in my native language Malayalam, "*chooduvellathil veena poocha, pacha vellam kandalum pedikkum*" which translates to a cat that once fell into hot water, will always be afraid even of cold water, or an English idiom with the same essence, "once bitten , twice shy", I was afraid of being caught by the sentinels and having to re- play the chapter from starting. The repeated deaths and starting over made me more aware about blind spots, safe routes, and to adapt and learn to escape the sentinels which emphasizes the idea of "disciplining of the body" (Foucault 138). This disciplining occurs through a game design of trial and error offered by the medium, a chance to practice and adapt to the environment. The game becomes layered and pedagogical in instances like this, where the player is forced to become vulnerable with the cat, through the cat of becoming with.

In *Stray*, the policing system had a great impact in my experience of embodied play. By presenting a possibility of threats, obstacles and surveillance, the game demonstrates how networks of power can influence and shape my physical actions and movements in the entangled world. But the feline embodiment also opens up new possibilities of moving around. The possibility of jumping to higher levels or travelling on alternative routes (rooftops, alleys) using feline agency might also become a major kinaesthetic possibility for evading these restrictions. By doing so, the game shows

how embodiment is a powerful tool to combat resistance. This reflects that bodies, human or non-human, actively reshape, enable, negotiate and resist power (Braidotti 60).

Another similar procedural design that reflects the contrast between Orange's natural agility and oppressive surveillance is in the quest to find the atomic battery. The procedural design of the factory space (full of patrolling Sentinels, laser grids and other security systems) presents a challenge to control the body of the cat. I here took advantage of the Orange's agility, small stature and ability to use cover in the environment (hiding spots; the vertical nature of the world) to navigate past these systems, demonstrating kinaesthetic knowledge. To retrieve the atomic battery, I had to engage with a key material object, which involved navigation through dangerous zones and spatial puzzles. This requires an unlearning of human exceptionalism. Orange's features and mobility are the sole resources to overcome the challenges in the situation. This connects an essential narrative development to the complicated kinaesthetic action mediated by the body of the cat. The feline-specific affordances here takes a quest further.

There is a shocking moment of loss of physical agency when B-12 is captured at the end of this chapter. There is a rupture of the human-animal-technology assemblage. There is a blackout. The black out is not literal, but metaphorical. As the Sentinels captured the B-12, I felt disabled. There was a sense of disembodiment, a physical, jarring experience of vulnerability. Without B-12's abilities, the human and animal assemblage of Orange and me, felt inert. But as Butler says, this was a pedagogy of vulnerability (28). This was reflective of the realistic precarity in a posthuman world. With B-12 powerless, and Orange caged, I felt like a spectator, playing outside the game for the first time. To see Orange caged, in front of my screen, made me feel disengaged, but this surrender was also a reminder of how agency is conditioned by material-discursive practices. This episode, according to me is not a failure of the human-animal-technology triad, but a revelation of how posthuman ethics demand response-ability even during vulnerability.

In "The Jail," kinaesthetic embodiment is framed by the feeling of confinement and the need to escape. The first act of managing to break out of the cage is a powerful moment of reasserting kinaesthetic agency after being captured. I used the specific physicality of the cat -Orange was small enough and agile enough to escape the lock or squeeze through a space. After there was an urge to escape from the cage, it was evident that freedom starts with using the body's potential. To navigate the prison, It required an extraordinary form of stealth and agility, to escape the cage. This came from the experiences and a sense of kinaesthetic knowledge built on in earlier chapters, as it was required to evade robotic guards and security systems in a heavily monitored area. Orange's physical exploration and use of the environment relies on finding Clementine and locating the keys to free her, where the process of embodied action becomes active in the relational act of rescue. Running through the city

streets in the stolen truck is both a stark contrast to the previous kinaesthetic experience, and a pivot from feline ground-level agility.

Getting to the top-most layer of the city meant moving through the architectural hierarchy of past human power; the material challenges of climbing to this level indicate that even navigating to the top of the scale, requires moving through material and atmospheric obstacles based on kinaesthetic ability. It is not a spatial objective, but a symbolic one. Here is where the last act of embodied intra-action within the partnership occurs; Orange's body carries the vulnerable machine/consciousness to the point where it can perform the action it was designed to do The ultimate act of opening the closed door, which also symbolises the opening of the sealed world is afforded through the sacrifice of B-12. But the act only materialises because of Orange's presence in the control room, demonstrating the critical relationship between technology and the animal body, suggesting that this entangled relationship and embodiment of the technological agency and animal embodiment helped in achieving the goal.

Conclusion

The game's design affords an animal-machine-human assemblage, which is critical in playing and completing the game. Here agency is not predetermined, but evolves through constant interaction and entanglement. Orange's role and presence in the final act, emphasizes that the ethics of mutual care is materially facilitated through embodied being. The return to the surface and the oncoming reunion with the clowder require one last phase of kinaesthetic navigation, moving out of the enclosed, human-constructed world and back into a natural environment, indicating a switch in the embodied environment & interspecies sociality.

The kinaesthetic embodiment through which the triadic entanglement works in the video game emphasis that the game mechanics allows the player to experience entanglement as a corporeal post-human ethic and engagement.

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