

Playing the Ecocentric Apocalypse: *Endling: Extinction is Forever* and the Animal Perspective of the Post- Apocalypse

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Keywords

Endling: Extinction is Forever, post-apocalypse, ecocentrism, anthropocentrism, perspective

INTRODUCTION

Video games as a medium provide unique affordances, such as gameplay and spatiality, which can be utilised to communicate social and political aspects of specific genres. Texts within the post-apocalypse genre commonly critique anthropocentrism, capitalism and industrialisation, showing how a human-centred perspective leads to the end of the world. The apocalyptic video game *Endling: Extinction is Forever* (Herobeat Studios 2022) explores ecocentrism, an ideology that seeks to de-centre the human perspective, through placing the player into the role of a fox, trying to survive the end of the world. Playing as an animal provides a way to view the apocalypse through an animal lens, thus decentring the human perspective (Woolbright 2017, 98) and mapping the genre's ecocentrism onto the spatial and ludic aspects of the game.

The post-apocalypse genre's critique of anthropocentrism, the belief of human eminence, is present across various media and texts. For example the quintessential post-apocalyptic novel *The Day of the Triffids* (Wyndham 1951) demonstrates how human-centred greed and industrialisation leads to the destruction of civilisation (Matthews 2016, 111). Whilst *The Day of the Triffids* communicates this critique through its plot and description of the post-apocalyptic world, video games can utilise spatial and ludic elements to do so. Once such way is through the portrayal of animals in video games which can either reinforce "anthroponormativity" (Tyler 2022, 35) or de-centre the human perspective through animal embodiment (Caracciolo 2021). Although not a post-apocalyptic game, Tom Tyler's (2022, 35) analysis of *Dog's Life* (Frontier Developments 2003) explores the ways in which video games can model non-human perspectives through gameplay, specifically its mechanic of 'Smellovision'.

Following on from Tyler's conclusion, I argue that *Endling: Extinction is Forever* communicates an ecocentric message through the genre trappings of the post-apocalypse which overlap with the unique affordances of the medium. Space and genre tie into the gameplay as it involves survival mechanics (Chang 2020, 61), meaning players need to keep the fox and her cubs fed, or suffer death. Players have to use animalistic traits to survive, such as the use of smell to track down food which becomes harder as the environment becomes impacted by the rapid growth of industry, making

Proceedings of DiGRA 2024

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food more scarce. The game-space is an ever changing landscape where more and more trees are cut down as the large factory continues to thrive, thus communicating the game's critique of anthropocentrism through this depiction.

Ultimately, my talk will examine the potential video games have for conveying social and political messages that are embedded within certain genres. Specifically showing how the post-apocalypse genre communicates ecocentrism through the unique affordances of video games - space and gameplay.

BIO

I am a PhD student at the University of Auckland, my work often looks at the intersection between video games, genre, post-modernism, psychoanalytic theory and mediation. My past work has focused on how video games “break the fourth wall” and how games such as *Doki Doki Literature Club* (Team Salvato 2017) can exhibit gothic, uncanny and abject affects.

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