Posthumanist, post-apocalyptic, and post-anthropocentric possibilities: Kantian morals and posthuman ethics in My Friend is a Raven

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Abstract

This paper analyses My Friend is A Raven *(Two Star Games, 2019), a short post-apocalyptic game with four potential endings. Playing as the lone survivor of the world, Lutum, we unlock different endings through our exchange with the titular Raven. Depending on the navigation through the game, I argue Lutum either demonstrates an anthropocentric disregard for the Raven, or a posthumanist ethic of viewing the Raven as an equal, and even a friend. I explore how the game echoes either humanist or posthumanist ideologies. On the one hand, morality tales are often centred around ideas of individuality, responsibility, choice, and self-reflection. These all align with humanist ideals of the 'rational self', rather than questioning wider structures, environments and affects. However, there are still examples in the game of how the different endings suggest right and wrong ways to act that move beyond the human. Drawing on wider discourses around humanistic, Kantian understandings of morality versus posthumanist ethics, I consider how 'the good ending' offers a potential for an ethico-onto-epistemological way of being. Through my analysis I therefore demonstrate that the gameplay offers a range of perspectives on the response-ability of humans when confronted with post-apocalyptic scenarios, with the labelled endings suggesting lessons for a post-anthropocentric future. I also explore how material meaning-making occurs through the intra-action between player and game, allowing different material configurations of the world to emerge.*

Introduction

This paper analyses *My Friend is A Raven* (Two Star Games, 2019, henceforth *MFIAR*), a short post-apocalyptic game with four potential endings. Playing as Lutum, a lanky individu-

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al wearing a plague doctor mask and accompanying trench coat, we arrive at our apartment with the intent of speaking with "the Raven." In this side scrolling game, players interact through point-and-click mechanics with the minimal environment, which is a small flat, rendered in black and white as though sketched in pen. Players uncover items to offer the Raven, causing different dialogues to be unlocked and alternative endings uncovered, as well as flashbacks of the past. The four endings each suggest different ways that Lutum faces the end of the world as they know it.

Depending on the players' navigation through the game, I argue Lutum either demonstrates anthropocentric disregard for the Raven, or a critical posthumanist ethic of viewing the Raven as a friend and equal. While there is a significant amount of games research on themes such as morality in games (Holl et al., 2020), post-apocalyptic videogames (Wintle, 2023), games and animals (Bianchi, 2017), and posthumanism in games (Boulter, 2015; Wilde, 2023), a close reading of *MFIAR* enables us to engage with all of these topics in one specific, short videogame. The game deals with multiple choices at the end of the world through human/non-human relations, and offers different potential outcomes dependent on the actions the player takes. I then bring this analysis together with a critical consideration of the game's navigation between humanistic and posthumanistic expressions of morality and ethics. On the one hand, morality tales are often centred around ideas of individuality, responsibility, choice, and self-reflection. These all align with humanist ideals of the 'rational self,' rather than questioning wider structures, environments and affects. However, there are still examples in the game of how the different endings suggest right and wrong ways to act that move beyond the human, demonstrating post-anthropocentric worldviews. Through my analysis I therefore demonstrate that the gameplay offers a potentially posthuman perspective on post-apocalyptic scenarios, which we might deem lessons for a post-anthropocentric future. This brings me to ask, (how) can we have posthumanist, post-anthropocentric morality/ethical tales in videogames? In doing so, I argue that *MFIAR* in some ways echoes humanistic morality, but in other ways opens up a posthuman perspective through posthuman ethics. Further, for critical posthumanism, the game embodies a demonstration of how (sometimes) abstract principles such as ethico-onto-epistemological work might be enacted and performed. This argument sheds further light on the ways in which games can be used not only for 'morality play' but also for disrupting humanistic understandings of 'correct' or

normative behaviours. This can operate through a more complex arrangement of possibilities, some of which speak to ethico-onto-epistemological entanglements (understanding the inseparability of ethics, ontology, and epistemology). This analysis also considers how concepts such as morality can, and perhaps should, be problematised through posthumanism for more complex understandings of our behaviours and their consequences, beyond acting in the 'right' way (moralistically) for fear of punishment.

Playing the posts and morality play

A variety of research in game studies explores posthumanism in games, post-apocalyptic games, and post-anthropocentric games. Posthumanism has been considered through games as posthuman systems (Boulter, 2015), the avatar-gamer as posthuman subjectivity (Wilde, 2023), and issues of posthuman agency in videogames (McKeown, 2019; Janik, 2021). Stone (2019) argues that viewing the videogame player as a posthuman assemblage allows for "de-anthropocentricization of the popular notions of player agency" (p. 78), and increasingly game studies research does take into account the affordances of videogames in shaping agency (see Bódi, 2022). Meanwhile, Wallin (2022) writes about post-anthropocenic videogames that use companion species as a way to comment on the tentative state of animal- and human-kind, using the subordination of pets and the killing of mutant animals as a way to re-establish the dominance of humankind, even in the face of an ecocrisis. Scholars also explore games that not only have a post-anthropocentric theme, but also themselves displace the centrality of the human. Ruffino (2018), for example, argues that the increasing presence of non-human processes and agents means that "human beings are becoming peripheral in the act of playing games," while Ruberg (2022, p. 413) explores the "queer potential" of games that refuse humans' control.

Posthumanism has been defined along a variety of different lines with sometimes competing agendas. I specifically use critical posthumanism, which disrupts assumptions of the (liberal) humanist agenda including anthropocentrism, dualistic and hierarchical binaries (human/machine, human/animal, self/other, subject/object, mind/body, etc.), and the subject-centred worldview wherein humans are considered as individual, autonomous, and fully 'in control.' Instead, critical posthumanism argues that we are entangled with 'others,' including human and non-human 'others,' environments, media, and technologies. By entering into postdualistic understandings, we understand our capacity to act as emergent from the assemblages we are a part of. Agency from a posthuman perspective is not seen as individually owned, but as different configurations of the world (see Barad, 2007) dependent on different intra-acting phenomena. I have argued elsewhere in my work (Wilde, 2023) that the avatar-gamer is an embodiment of posthuman subjectivity where entities intra-act, and through their entanglement produce new modes of being and agential configurations of the world. Others have also made further links between posthuman agency and gaming, with Janik (2021) suggesting that the "the game object and the player not only influence each other, but become partners in creating meanings" (p. 33-34). In considering the game and player

as not being ontologically distinct, we can understand how the implications for playing videogames goes beyond fictitious experiments of play, and instead feeds into posthuman subjectivities entangled with other 'others.' The experiments, relations, and entanglements we engage with when playing games do not 'end' when we put down the controller, but become part of our continued intra-actions and entanglements that allow our subject positions, and meaning-makings, to emerge.

Just as critical posthumanism offers a rethinking of many taken-for-granted norms and assumptions around the 'rational' liberal human subject and societal hierarchies, an apocalypse signifies a shift that draws into question these same supposedly inherent qualities. I further argue that the post-apocalyptic setting of certain texts can open up arenas for critical posthumanism to thrive. The post-apocalypse is ripe for imaginative interpretations, and by disrupting normative, capitalist and neoliberal structures—which the apocalypse forces—it allows alternative possibilities of ways of being (behaviours, lifestyles, etc.) to emerge (Wilde, 2022, p. 20). I therefore suggest that, in a post-apocalyptic world, we have the potential to embrace a much more posthumanist world. Indeed, many post-apocalyptic scenarios position machines or nature as the driving factors of change: a humbling experience for a humanity which sees itself as all-powerful.

When specifically considering post-apocalyptic *play*, McDowell (2012) argues that when the player engages with the post-apocalypse as a way to consider a time and place outside of their own, "the post-apocalypse expands rather than contracts horizons" (p. 191). Kemmer (2014, p. 102) points out that, in post-apocalyptic texts, protagonists are repeatedly exposed to moral dilemmas; and so it is in this space of expanded possibility and exposure that I find the way in which morality is drawn through post-apocalyptic texts fascinating.

Nevertheless, despite posthuman potentials, we often see the re-inscription of humanist values and worldviews—the heroic human, a return to normalised capitalistic structures—in these texts. Sometimes, as I argue later, the use of moral decision-making as a narrative or ludic device is at odds with openness to posthuman possibilities.

It is from this perspective that I offer the following analysis, to consider how morality and ethicality might meaningfully be explored in videogames, particularly when faced with times of crisis. *MFIAR* unlocks rich areas for exploration in terms of post/humanist discourses, as apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic worlds open up new avenues for reflection and action. The choices that Lutum/the player encounters in *MFIAR* speak to different ways to understand and process a world in ruins. From asking for forgiveness to acting with aggression, the player is introduced to different ways to process this trauma. Further, through the use of the rhetoric of the 'good' ending and the 'bad' ending, I suggest the game implies specific understandings of correct and incorrect actions, which enhance a sense of the morals and ethics being taught and the consequences of our choices.

Tensions between morality tales and posthumanist ideologies

Some game researchers believe that moral decision making in games allows players to practise making sound decisions and to experience consequences for their actions (Schulzke, 2009), and Sicart (2013) argues that "games also can use the context of play to create moral experiences," drawing on "our values, as players and as human beings" (p. 136). Elsewhere, Sicart (2009) argues that videogames allow us to explore the meaning of being a player. He suggests that "our actions within a game are evaluated precisely from our nature as moral players" (p. 62), and that game playing is a process of subjectivization wherein the game creates a particular subject that is responsive to the game environment but simultaneously reflective of the gamer's own subject position. These arguments align productively with explorations of the avatar-gamer as a posthuman subjectivity (Wilde, 2023); this subjectivization that Sicart argues occurs is one that, I would extend, is posthuman in its emergence through intra-action and entanglement.

The ability to decide what one will do and making choices based on principles, are all at the heart of much interactive, narrative game design and games have principles that guide the production of avatar capital and win/lose scenarios. Yet morality itself has deep connections to Western humanism. Morality has often been understood from a religious perspective: abiding by laws of good and evil, securing one's place in the heavenly afterlife, and obeying the commandments of God. In light of a secular humanism, then, morality has been questioned. Can one have a morality, outside of a God? Law (2011) argues that humans are naturally and instinctively disposed to a basic, universal morality but, as Graham (2002, p. 37) points out, the idea of 'human nature' is artifice, invented by humans.

Nevertheless, there have been a number of ways in which humanism has historically considered the role of morals. Given Kant's foundational significance to secular humanism (Hiorth, 1992), it is his consideration of morals and moral philosophy I draw on in this article. Kant's work offers a ripe opportunity to consider how the humanism of morality is enacted in gameplay through potentially posthumanist narratives. As Altman (2011, p. 1-2) explains, for Kant humans have wills, (ethical) principles, and choice, and animals only have natural desires and impulses. Kant (1996) argued that "[p]ure reason is practical of itself alone and gives (to man) a universal law which we call the moral law" (p. 165, original emphasis). Kant also proposed the 'Categorical Imperative' (CI) as the supreme principle of morality, which mandates actions based on practical rationality as objective and necessary, therefore immoral actions are accordingly irrational as they contradict the CI. He argued that a rational will, inherently autonomous, creates the law it follows, making the CI synonymous with the law of autonomy (Johnson and Cureton, 2022). Further, Kant's moral philosophy is based in a specific humanist privilege. His moral philosophy has come under criticism both for its exclusivity amongst humans (for example, focusing only on those humans who have full cognitive abilities, and ignoring those with cognitive impairments or disabilities), as well as its exclusivity of humans (with no considerations of the moral status of non-human ani-

mals). Much of Kant's (1996) moral theory relies on the idea of freedom, choice, rationality, and free will, as he argues "the moral law expresses nothing other than the autonomy of the pure practical reason" (p. 166). As such, it again aligns with humanist philosophies of the self-contained individual—even whilst Kant suggests that part of human morality lies in our connected humanity. His understanding of morality is also foregrounded by a sense of the good citizenry that again emphasises self-regulation and responsibility, without considering the diversity of different power relations and political identities.

However, from a posthumanist perspective the notion of individual rational autonomy is complicated. As Nayar (2014) argues, posthumanist thinking "refuses a centralised mechanism of consciousness that has been the foundation of liberal humanism" (p. 38). Kant's emphasis on individuality and self-regulation is in direct tension, then, with posthumanist understandings of selfhood, including intra-action and entanglement. Barad's (2007) notion of intra-action explores how we are not ontologically distinct subjects (as the concept of 'inter'action might suggest) but our actions and behaviours emerge through our relations to everything around us. As such, rather than strict binary divisions of 'self' and 'other' or 'subject' and 'object', critical posthumanism sees humans as deeply entangled with, and emerging from, their entanglements with both human and non-human others.

From this perspective, Kant's morals have been derived in terms that do not take into account the diverse ways our subjectivities are formed intra-actively through and with human and non-human others. In *MFIAR*, then, if we accept that the four endings are indicative of morality tales, designed to impart an understanding of 'right' and 'wrong' behaviour, we would also accept that *MFIAR*—and indeed any games coded with morality tales—are humanistic in nature. *MFIAR*, however, as I show in my analysis, offers a potential complication of this understanding, as its morals might also be considered post-anthropocentric and therefore posthumanist. As such, in taking Flanagan et al.'s (2007) premise that "games carry values and beliefs within their representation systems and mechanics" (p. 752), I next question what these values are in *MFIAR* and how they embody a posthuman ethics.

Game Analysis

When exploring posthumanism—a philosophy rooted in the entanglement of all 'things', and exploring the agency and inseparability of those 'things' such that subject/object and self/other borders are brought into question through a postdualistic lens—it can be problematic to draw the boundaries of the research enquiry. If the game and player are entangled, this entanglement spreads through all other networks each are part of—social, technological, ecological, political and so on. A full analysis, therefore, of a game/players' entanglement would inherently be formed of endless multiplicities and possibilities—reconfigurations of subjectivities and materialities along a spectrum of diffracting lenses. I deliberately focus on the narrative elements of the game and the ways in which different endings speak to different themes of posthumanism, humanism, and post-anthropocentrism, with some consid-

eration too of the choices in the game that allow certain actions to be taken. In considering how the digital matter of the game (including text, mechanics, and in-game objects) come to matter (through making new material configurations of the world, and thus through making meaning), I reflect on the different encounters and endings made possible by the game, and the ways the player is implicated and directed.

MFIAR offers a multifaceted consideration of how humankind faces the end of the world, and its existence. Through Lutum's interactions with the contents of his home, and his conversations with the Raven, we discover that it is due to a past altercation with Lutum that the Raven has brought down a deadly plague, leaving Lutum the last man alive.

When the game begins, the first thing Lutum 'says' in the text appearing at the bottom of the screen is "I fear that this city will soon fall," which is our first introduction to the post-apocalyptic scenario we are in. Lutum says to the Raven "your kind have descended upon the earth, and spread a mortal plague among its people. You have left our homes barren, and our cities in ruins. Not a single person lives to share my grief." Elsewhere, the Raven describes this as "the punishment I have brought upon you," contextualising the extent of the apocalypse.

The four possible endings—labelled as "the bad ending" (titled Extinction), "the good ending" (titled Friends), "the passive ending" (titled Unforgiven), and "the aggressive ending" (titled Venomous)—each suggest different ways that Lutum (and, by proxy, all humans) faces their demise. The Raven can save us from "crumbling into the soil of the earth," we can bring the Raven down into it, or else we become extinct with either ignorance or insight into the past deeds that brought the plague upon us.

The way the game ends is determined by the different objects that are found by the player and therefore used by Lutum. Each time the game ends, text appears stating "you unlocked 'the X ending' – TITLE" and these are numbered at the bottom right of the screen (e.g. "ending 2/4"). As such there is an immediate indication that there are other ways to complete the game, therefore implicitly encouraging the player to continue to play to unlock the other endings. Whilst it is, of course, possible to play only one ending of the game, this implicit encouragement speaks to how, "[a]gency is designed" (Sicart, 2013, p. 50) by developers who deliberately mediate player interaction through game mechanics. To view agency from a posthuman perspective means understanding, as Barad (2007) states, that it is "not about choice in the liberal humanist sense; agency is about the possibilities and accountability entailed in reconfiguring material-discursive apparatuses" (p. 218). Thus, agency emerges from and through the game and player intra-action with the game, which problematises Sicart's understanding of the player as "agent." Given that "[a]gency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world" (Barad, 2007, p. 141), the posthumanist view would be of the game mechanics and player intra-action as material reconfigurations of the (game)world.

As such, in *MFIAR*, certain things must be completed to unlock different endings; we can also articulate this as different material interventions in the game need to be made to unlock the presentation of specific parts of the game matter, allowing different assets—scenes, dialogue, imagery—to appear. Depending on which ending you unlock first, you might need to not do something you did before to unlock a different ending or you might need to do something new. Thus, our actions in unlocking different endings—finding different material assets—demonstrates how gaming matters, as matter is "not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity" (Barad, 2003, p. 822). There is a lack of 'choice' beyond initial encounter in the game, because certain early actions set in motion further actions/narrative journeys that cannot be undone. As such, this problematises the primacy of 'player agency' (and therefore of 'rational will' over moral decision-making) but instead views these actions as part of an intra-active becoming, and each discovery of an ending as a "congealing of agency".

It is also worth noting that depending on the order the endings are encountered, more careful negotiation of the limited possibilities within the game might be required to deduce what actions to take, or not to take, to unlock further endings. The order that I present the endings in below is for ease of transitioning between the different narratives, but they may be uncovered in any sequence.

The four endings

The game takes place in Lutum's small flat, which has a living room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, and small corridor room with a storage cupboard off it, as well as a balcony, which is the site of the encounters with the Raven.

PASSIVE – UNFORGIVEN: *Unlock a puzzle and view a previous encounter with the Raven where you left them when they requested aid – lure the Raven to the balcony with seeds – state your regret – remain unforgiven*

"The passive ending" (Unforgiven) seems to place blame on the human for the events that have unfolded. To activate this end, once we have explored the flat and found a bag of seeds the player must unlock a cutscene vision of a previous encounter we had with the Raven, where the Raven says "Sir, I am sickened and in need of aid, would you spare the time to help an ill soul?" to which Lutum replies "if you are sickened, begone! I want nothing to do with your pathetic plea. Save yourself the effort of disrupting a human."

The memory then ends and when we stand upon the balcony Lutum gives the Raven the seeds in return to speak "of our past meeting" and tries to express his regret. Yet, the Raven replies "the only reason you regret anything, is because of the punishment I have brought upon you [...] Why should I grant you anything more than dirt? You left me ill, and in the same way I shall leave you." After these words the Raven flies away, and we, as Lutum, can

only re-enter the flat, then triggering a cutscene showing Lutum lying on a sofa with a clock-face whirring by him, indicating the passage of time, with the screen fading from sepia into greyscale, signifying the ultimate demise of Lutum, and humanity. This aligns to an extent with McKeown's (2019) analysis of agency within on The Return of the Obra Dinn, where he argues that players are "asked to see themselves and their actions as a powerless but essential part of wider phenomena. [...] player actions are refigured as entangled in the production of the meaningful materiality" (p. 67). Although we are limited in the actions we can take in the game, these actions undoubtedly shape the narrative, and the morals and ethics implicated in each ending.

GOOD – FRIENDS: *Catch a rat in a trap – lure the Raven to the balcony with seeds – when the Raven offers the friendship offer the rat as a gift – leave (transcended into a raven) with the Raven as friends*

This turn of events immediately suggests culpability of the human for the events that have unfolded. In this ending we understand that the Raven is liable for the plague that has consumed the world, but equally that Lutum is ultimately responsible for this as his 'punishment' for having not previously helped the Raven in their time of need. In the passive ending, then, the Raven suggests that Lutum is merely "morally accountable as a consequence of fear and terror" (Butler, 2005, p. 11). This does not embody or enact a real sense of change: the Raven does not see Lutum as worthy of better treatment just for having apologised, and dismisses this apology as potentially disingenuous ("the only reason you regret anything is..."). Butler (2005) demonstrates how morality is linked to an idea of a code of conduct, and the need to follow a prescriptive set of ideas in order to conduct themselves in moral ways. This can be seen if we consider Kant's (2018 [1788]) emphasis on laws and duties: "the autonomy of the will is the sole principle of all moral laws and of all duties which conform to them". However, Butler (2005) continues, "one might arrive at a fully cynical view of morality and conclude that human conduct that seeks to follow norms of prescriptive value is motivated less by any desire to do good than by a terrorized fear of punishment and its injurious effects" (p. 16). Thus, the passive ending earns its name through a restricted sense of any transformative effects or, indeed, emotions. It therefore feels somewhat unsatisfactory to the player, urging a desire for an alternative outcome and implicitly encouraging the player to explore other possibilities and endings.

Through "the good ending" (Friends) in which the Raven is seen not as an adversary, but as a potential friend, there is recognition in the equality of the Raven and, implicitly, their survival, which I consider to be indicative of a posthuman ethics. In order to unlock this scenario, the player needs to 'interact' with other elements of the game assets. There is a rat trap on the kitchen table, and clicking it prompts Lutum to say "I thought this rat trap to be unusable, but I believe it may still function properly," upon which the trap resets without further player intervention. On leaving the kitchen, the sound of the trap going off is heard, and returning to the kitchen the trap now has a visible catch—clicking this adds "dead rat" to

your inventory.

Lutum gives the seeds to the Raven, questioning their "destructive manner", and the Raven offers their friendship in return for a gift. Offering the rat, the Raven then responds positively, remarking "We may discover some similarities between ourselves. [...] I will be your friend, and keep you from crumbling into the soil of the Earth. [...] let us go. There is so much to show you, my friend." In this ending, the view pans out and zooms over the horizon, but it is two, not one, birds that fly off into the distance. This ending elicits both a sense of achievement and contentment—it is an ending that speaks of kindness, hope, and forgiveness.

I argue that the good ending demonstrates posthuman ethics at play. Braidotti (2013) argues that posthuman ethics are embodied through "an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others, by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism" (p. 49-50). Here, then, as Lutum moves beyond his own sorrow at the ending of the world and instead gives the Raven the gift of the rat, he moves towards a hopeful future of resolution. This might be considered, therefore, to be "ethics based on the primacy of the relation, of interdependence" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 95), valuing non-human and vital life forces. Ferrando (2020) argues that "[p]ost-dualistic ethics, for instance, allows humans to partake in the existential quest with different species and beings, including nonhuman animals." I explore these issues of ethics below.

BAD – EXTINCTION: *Lure the Raven to the balcony with seeds – question the Raven's destructive manner – when offered friendship have nothing to give – face the Raven's wrath*

To experience "the bad ending" (Extinction), we must not catch the rat, and so when the Raven offers his friendship in return for a gift, Lutum replies that he has no gift. The exchange continues:

> Raven: Pathetic. Even now you have no heart to help another being. Do you truly pity yourself as the last human alive? You should be happy you'll never encounter another man like yourself. [...] Do you believe that will give you dominance over me? I have power over you, human, in masses that you cannot fathom. Look at your city. I will do the same to you.
>
> Lutum: Please wait I must know why you have chosen such a path as this.
>
> Raven: If you do not know by now your blindness shall serve you a deserving platter.

The Raven departs and Lutum is left, head bowed, and the screen fades from sepia into greyscale.

The terming of Lutum as "pathetic" could also been seen as a commentary on the player, who, to unlock this ending, takes the least action: only picking up the seeds, not adding rat, needle, or poisoned rat to their inventory, and not engaging in the puzzle that unlocks the flashback vision.

In the bad ending, Lutum fails—we fail—to take accountability for his actions. He is/we are ignorant of his past misdeeds and is punished for this: "your blindness shall serve you a deserving platter." This ending demonstrates a post-anthropocentric twist as the Raven asserts their dominance over humanity.

AGGRESSIVE – VENOMOUS: *Catch a rat in a trap – find poisonous ink – find a needle – inject ink into dead rat – lure the Raven to the balcony with seeds – when the Raven offers the friendship offer the rat as a gift – poison the Raven and antagonise them – get left behind*

The "aggression" of this ending lies, I suggest, in the humanistic assertion of control and power— a violence we have seen exerted over human and non-human others throughout time. To unlock "the aggressive ending" (Venomous), after catching the dead rat the player must go to the store cupboard and discover there the bottle of ink. Upon clicking it, Lutum will originally say "a small vat of ink. Before the newspapers stopped printing, some articles, described people poisoning each other with this." When we encounter the ink when we already have the rat and the needle we find in the bathroom cabinet in our inventory, Lutum then says "this ink is poisonous… when I speak to the Raven, he may demand that I give him the rat. I could use the ink and need to poison the rodent." "Poisoned rat" is then added to our inventory. Again, the encounter follows Lutum luring the Raven with seeds, asking to speak to them of their destructive manner, and then offering the rat (now poisoned) as a gift. There is no choice, after having clicked the ink with these other possessions in our inventory, for us to not poison the rat, nor is there an option not to give the poisoned rat to the Raven. Shortly after, the Raven is clearly affected. They state:

> Raven: I thought you had changed. You are nothing but an actor just like the rest of your kind. I would think a plague like this would make a man more sympathetic. Yet still you have no hesitancy to bring a creature down into the soil of the Earth. The world will soon be yours but I refuse to give you the pleasure of watching me perish.

And the Raven flies into the distance, gradually falling from the sky and the image fades to black.

Wallin (2022), discussing *Fallout*, argues that "the game re-enacts the anthropic aspiration of control and mastery, resuscitating fundamental antagonisms and exploitative attitudes towards the animal and their mutated world" (p. 106). Again, this aligns with humanism's anthropocentric qualities, viewing non-humans as subordinate. Wallin (2022) further suggests that this allows a rehabilitation of "an order of life intimate to the ontological orders

of colonial humanism in which the human figures as the ultimate arbiter of animal significance" (p. 106). In *MFIAR*, we can see how the killing of the Raven serves ultimately the same purpose—that of putting the Raven in their place: their place being of lower significance to, and controlled by, humans. This ending is therefore arguably also the most anthropocentric of the endings: regarding the Raven as 'less than' the human and worth less than the human lives that have been lost in the apocalyptic plague.

In this ending, then, Lutum embodies a sense of separateness from the Raven, refusing to accept that the Raven's actions are entangled with Lutum's own. Geerts and Carstens (2019) argue that "fictions" of separability from our environment prevent us "from forming ethical responses that are adequate" (p. 920) to addressing the complex entanglements we are a part of. Instead, then, "[t]he task of ethics, ontology, and epistemology, following their praxis, is to aid in the generation of new sensorial, affective domains of possibility" (Geerts and Carstens, 2019, p. 920)—arguably, as we saw through the good ending.

Humanist vs. Posthumanist Ideologies in Gameplay

Material meaning-making

As previously mentioned, *MFIAR* is a simple point-and-click game with very limited mechanically interactive possibilities. This means there are limited opportunities for new material configurations of and in the game to emerge, yet, as McKeown (2019) states, as we play games "we engage in the reconfiguration of reality" (p. 80). As we explore these endings, as our intra-actions create more and different material configurations of the world both in the gameplay that unfolds and our perception of these materials, we explore too how we are implicated in and with and through Lutum, the Raven, and the apocalypse. I therefore suggest that the different material configurations of the game elicit a range of insights into how making-matter makes-meanings and allows us to explore the morality of choices in games and beyond.

In each playthrough, when we enter the bedroom and walk towards the balcony, Lutum's speech appears: "The Raven may come if I show myself atop the balcony." This acts as a warning in the gameplay, implicitly saying "do not proceed unless you are ready for this encounter." This is apt, as, once we reach the balcony and begin dialogue with the Raven—no matter which ending—we are unable to make any choices about the conversation or our actions there.

Through various narrative devices (such as the Raven's reference to the reasoning behind their actions—"if you do not know by now" —in "the bad ending") the player themselves is also implicated in a search for answers. This is where the order of the encounter of the endings makes a difference to the player experience of such an ending: although the game itself does not change at all depending on the previous endings that have been unlocked, if

the passive ending (including the past encounter) has already been unlocked, the player is complicit with the Raven in knowing of Lutum's prior failing. If they have not, they are just as ignorant as Lutum is—perhaps encouraging a further desire to engage with the other possibilities the game offers. From the above breakdown of the four different endings, we can see how the game is predicated on specific requirements for exploration (to unlock all four endings), choice (to ensure the sequence of events and collection of objects in a particular order), and engagement (as the player also has the option to simply unlock one ending and not play again). Thus our material encounters with the game further embody the specific ways in which each ending shapes and configures our passage through the game and our understanding of the pasts and futures we understand as being performed. As Janik (2021) writes, "meanings are something that emerge from the intra-actions between the player and the game, and we cannot pinpoint one definite source of them" (p. 34). We might also consider the material-discursive elements of play in how these endings are titled. The words "good," "bad," "passive," and "aggressive" each have clear value judgments attached to them, which further shapes our perception of the game. The "bad" ending is ignorance, the "good" ending is enlightenment, and our dissatisfaction and labelling as "pathetic" contrasts sharply with the hopeful open-endedness of flight and our categorisation as "friend." In offering these different options the game allows different ways of engaging with the end of humans, through either remorse, making amends, ignorance, or aggression. In doing so, the game does suggest moral codes of right or wrong behaviours.

Working through morality and ethicality

It could be argued that as the aggressive ending (Venomous) requires the most 'work' in the game—literally collecting and combining more items than in any other ending. It is the most 'rational,' as it requires reflection on the acts being undertaken, such as understanding that the ink is poisonous and still fetching the needle to combine it with the rat. Further, killing the Raven can be 'rationalised' from a human morality perspective, as the Raven has "spread a mortal plague" that has killed all of humanity, apart from Lutum, and therefore the Raven must be punished for their actions as, "[a]ccording to Kant, we have moral duties to all people by virtue of the fact that they are rational moral agents" (Altman, 2011, p. 4).

In other endings, *MFIAR* allows an alternative reading—embracing not humanistic morals but a posthuman ethics of care and praxis that allows, ultimately, a transcendence of the humanistic mode of being. Where Kantian morality "must be rational" and is understood in scientific ways as "universal laws that govern the natural world" (Kranak, 2019) that are centred around the human experience, the different endings suggest alternative ways of being response-able. These are less through an individualistic sense of choice but more through an enlarged sense of connectivity to wider life beyond humanity, where response-ability "aims at the multiplication and dissemination of differential powers in order to produce other, unexpected, and (hopefully) less violent interference patterns" (Thiele, 2018, p. 40). In the passive ending, we are taught that human apology is not enough for the former misdeeds

it has committed against the Raven. From an ethical perspective, we can also view this as a wider lesson that might be applied to the Anthropocene—human apology is not enough to make amends for the destructive actions that have been taken against nature.

Although the naming of the "good ending" suggests a moral coding, I argue that the choices made in this play-through are not necessarily about humanistic ideals of morals as owned and self-aggrandising values of the rational mind. Instead, the choices are about accounting for oneself and one's actions towards an understanding that, although our subjectivities are entangled with actions and others, we still owe it to ourselves and the world to be accountable. The good ending teaches us to accurately answer for our past actions we must move beyond mere apology and be involved in a form of posthuman praxis—going out of our way to atone for our wrongdoings. It is here the game transcends human-centric perspectives and introduces posthuman ethics.

In Lutum's actions, we see what Barad (2019) signifies as a "practice of radical hospitality [...] rejecting practices of a-void-ance, taking responsibility for injustices, activating and aligning with forces of justice, and welcoming the other in an undoing of the colonizing notion of selfhood rather than as a marker of not us, not me." In this way we are troubling the human-animal/self-other divide of the Lutum/Raven relationship (and, of course, our role in it), as well as understanding how each constitutes the other and how their interactions are actually intra-actions—each guided by and made possible through their constitution with each "other."

The 'reward' for such action is the transcendence of Lutum into another being—one that is equal with the Raven, and so, transformed. Here we might argue that we see a "becoming-with" through the Raven and Lutum—specifically signified by the ontological transformation of Lutum at the end, as seen through his apparent becoming-Raven—where "becoming-with is a process that acknowledges alternative ontologies while also reinventing notions about kinship" (Bianchi 2017, p. 140). Bianchi (2017) argues that kinship "partnerships necessarily cultivate multispecies response-ability in the face of ecological trouble. Haraway defines 'response-ability' as 'collective knowing and doing, an ecology of practices' (34)" (p. 140). This allows the player to ask: how am I able to respond—what options for response are there, and how does responding in a particular way shape and affect 'others' around me? It is the good ending that specifically looks at responding in a way that understands the implications for Lutum's/humanity's responses to situations on 'others'/the Raven. Through the Raven's assertion in the good ending they will "keep [Lutum] from crumbling into the soil of the Earth" along with Lutum feeding the Raven both seeds and the rat, we see this mutual dependence. This suggests, I argue, ethico-onto-epistemological ways of being: "an appreciation of the intertwining of ethics, knowing, and being" (Barad, 2007, p. 185).

In this way, the options that are opened up move away from merely moralistic practices to those that are posthuman, as Kowalcze (2022), interpreting Barad, argues that "human eth-

icality is not to rely on searching for ethical instruction by means of purely rational inquiry [...] but rather is supposed to be based on the acknowledgement of our 'intramaterial' connection with other entities." (p. 21). If, as Kowalcze (2022) posits, we should seek "a kind of intimate connection and mutual material sensitivity, which motivates ethical behaviour" (p. 21), then the "good ending" of *MFIAR* allows us the possibility of exploring that motivation, whilst alternative endings offer us insights into the limits of more individualistic and humanistic understandings of morality.

I have demonstrated the ways in which meaning-making occurs through our material configurations of, with, and through the game to show how *MFIAR* integrates different agentic capacities to its storymaking. Further, I have shown how the different narrative endings in *MFIAR* embody different understandings of morals and ethics that span human and non-human others. Ultimately, this research therefore extends notions of morality in post-apocalyptic, post-Anthropocenic, and posthumanist constructions, considering the tensions between morality play and ethico-onto-epistemological ways of being.

Conclusion

In analysing *MFIAR*, I have drawn on wider literature to discuss the significance of morality games and the choices players make in games, specifically as they relate to post-apocalyptic worlds and how these frame our relationship with non-human others. As I have shown through this article, the opportunity to make choices that have 'meaningful consequences' enables a way of looking at game narratives through moralistic philosophy. These choices, and consequences, involve interventions in the game, and making-meaning with the materials unlocked. In order to extend research already in the field, I have considered what Kantian morality looks like as a humanistic endeavour, and conceived of as rational actions. This view of rationality has historically been premised on the idea of an anthropocentric worldview. Examining morals through videogames set in a post-apocalyptic world with multiple endings, I argue, allows alternative considerations that critique the humanistic tendencies of moral choices. In doing so, I have also addressed a gap in the use of a more ethics-based approach to a Baradian analysis of digital games. This analysis has therefore demonstrated how videogames have the potential to compare problematically humanistic understandings of 'morality play'—aligned with 'rational' choices of 'right' and 'wrong' for the avoidance of punishment—with more nuanced possibilities embracing a posthuman ethics of care. This is particularly relevant when considering the post-Anthropocene, and how humanity, through this game, is offered different ways to respond to its role in the downfall of the Earth. Where the Raven signifies the power of nature, humanity can choose to be humbled into a new ontological mode of kinship, or can employ anthropocentrically moral choices to bring further destruction to the world. Whilst, as Kowalcze (2022) argues, "[t]he way we treat other entities cannot depend only on whether we perceive ourselves as connected with them or not" (p. 22), I have nevertheless argued that the good ending in *MFIAR* shows how "[p]osthuman feminist ethics offer the means to embrace an ethical life that is aware of its respon-

sibilities in the era of the Anthropocene, that is mindful of the risks of dichotomic habits" (Ferrando, 2020). For game studies, this suggests more interesting possibilities for multiple modes of exploration. Perhaps by thinking and playing in more posthuman ways, we might become more posthumanist, or more 'posthuman' as the embodiment of critical posthumanist ideologies. As Curtis (2015) argues, "if readers can see the emergence of just communities based on interdependence and the recognition of vulnerability in these texts, which are premised on apocalyptic change, then the opportunity to live justly together should seem both attractive and possible" (p. 13). *MFIAR* has offered an opportunity to demonstrate just such an interdependence between animal, human, and environment, and my analysis has shown how a posthuman ethics of living justly together is presented through an ending wherein the human recognises their mutual vulnerability. This ending, the 'good' ending, is certainly presented as the most attractive of the options, highlighting some of the potential issues in humanistic morals and their limits. For the field of posthumanism, then, games continue to offer a critical lens through which to explore posthuman ideologies and critique outdated models of understanding the self.

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