

Slow Gaming: Applying Slow Movement to Post-anthropocentric Play

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of ‘slow gaming’ by situating it within the broader slow movement, which advocates mindful and sustainable alternatives to fast-paced, consumption-driven lifestyles (Honoré 2004; Rauch 2018). Within this framework, slow gaming emerges as a form of play that questions dominant cultural expectations of speed, efficiency, and constant progression, which appears to reflect Scully-Blaker’s (2019) notion of “radical slowness,” a form of play that may function as a site of resistance by encouraging players to move, observe, and interact at a pace that disrupts the acceleration characteristic of contemporary media ecologies. Drawing on research on the slow movement (Honoré 2004), as well as studies of stillness (Scully-Blaker 2018) and coziness in digital games (Bell and Hollows 2005; Palmer 2004; Raisborough 2011; Waszkiewicz and Bahun 2020; Bódi 2024), the study investigates how these principles manifest in digital play and how they may shape post-anthropocentric perspectives on the human–environment relationship.

Through comparative analysis of *Journey* (2012) and *Stray* (2022), the paper explores how mindfulness, slowness, and coziness inform each game’s aesthetic and gameplay design while portraying a world after humanity. *Journey* (2012) offers a minimalist pilgrimage through vast desert landscapes, emphasizing fluid movement, meditative pacing, and soft musical cues to cultivate a meditative form of slowness.

Meanwhile, *Stray* (2022) invites players to inhabit the perspective of a small cat navigating an abandoned cybercity, where danger and stillness interweave. The game was widely advertised and visually framed as cozy, featuring a cute animal protagonist, warm neon lighting, domestic micro-spaces, and tactile interactions. However, upon entering the game’s world, these expectations are swiftly complicated. Idyllic play is interrupted by scenes of grotesque decay and violence. This abrupt confrontation with a threat destabilizes the promise of coziness that surrounds the game’s marketing and opening sequences.

Although both games may appear slow and “cozy” at first sight, *Stray* uses slow gaming techniques to complicate and ultimately subvert its aesthetic of coziness, emphasizing the hidden grotesque of its post-humanist world instead. Building on Waszkiewicz and Bakun’s (2020) categories of coherent, dissonant, and situational coziness, the paper situates *Journey* (2012) as an example of coherent coziness: its

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visual harmony, smooth movement, and minimal conflict consistently reinforce an atmosphere of near-meditative experience.

Stray (2022), however, mobilizes dissonant coziness. It introduces soft, charming, and cat-centered interactions while simultaneously exposing the grotesque decay of its post-humanist world. The player oscillates between comfort and unease, as stillness, such as curling up to rest or playing with robots, is set against environmental ruin, infestation, and infrastructural collapse. Stillness, slowness, and repulsion interact, echoing Nixon's (2011) concept of slow violence, suggesting that the remnants of human presence continue to exert destructive force even in their absence. Through this juxtaposition, the game reveals an unsettling critique of post-anthropocentric worlds, exposing layers of destruction and violence that linger long after humanity has vanished.

Through the interplay of slowness, stillness, and coziness or dissonant coziness aesthetics, both *Journey* (2012) and *Stray* (2022) illuminate how digital worlds can shape cultural perspectives on environmental awareness and foster deeper engagement with post-humanist imaginaries. By aligning gaming with the ethics of slow culture, the paper argues that slow gaming not only enriches player experience but may also serve as a critical tool for interrogating ecological dimensions of play while shaping cultural perspectives on environmental awareness.

Keywords

slow gaming, slow movement, slow violence, coziness, stillness

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