

Gaming as *Everything*. Challenging the Anthropocene through Nomadic Performativity

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ABSTRACT

In this article I will discuss David O'Reilly's video game *Everything* (2017), suggesting that its unique dramaturgy portrays an ecology in which the human is seen as forging alliances and interconnections with the non-human. Set in a seemingly infinite open-world environment, the game revolves around the player exploring vast digital landscapes from the vantage point of multiple non-human avatars. Wandering about with no defined goal or direction, I played as animals, plants, rocks, continents, and even galaxies, shifting from one state to the next and making unexpected alliances along the way. Employing Audronė Žukauskaitė's concept of "nomadic performativity" (2015), I will suggest that the game's dramaturgy invites the player to imagine the human as deeply embedded in a wide system of interaction with non-human others, as an immanent part of an ecosystem, rather than a transcendental being outside of it. In articulating this idea, *Everything* puts forward a theatrical critique of the human domination and othering of the natural environment that underpins and drives the Anthropocene.

KEYWORDS

Nomadic theatre, performance, ecology, video game, gaming, *Everything*, Anthropocene, Deleuze, Braidotti, immanence, dramaturgy

Gaming as *Everything*. Challenging the Anthropocene through Nomadic Performativity

*Everything*¹ is an open-world computer game created and released by David O'Reilly in 2017. The sole aim of the game is to travel vast digital landscapes, whilst observing the world from the vantage point of multiple non-human avatars. Moving about with no defined goal or direction, the player can take the shape of animals, plants, rocks, continents, and even galaxies, shifting from one state to the next. In this article, I will argue that, through its unique dramaturgy, the game incites a way of thinking about the world in which the human is seen as forging alliances and interconnections with the non-human. As such, it uses what Audronė Žukauskaitė describes as “nomadic performativity”² to invite the player to imagine the human as deeply embedded in a wide system of interaction with non-human others, as an immanent part of an ecosystem, rather than a transcendental being outside of it. In articulating this idea, *Everything* puts forward a theatrical critique of the human domination and othering of the natural environment that underpins and drives the Anthropocene.

Nomadism and the Anthropocene

I will use nomadic theory as a backdrop for this analysis, referring to the theoretical groundwork introduced in a previous edition of *Nordic Theatre Studies* which focused on “Theatre and the Nomadic Subject.”³ In her contribution to the issue, Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink suggests that although the meaning of the word “nomadic” points towards physical movement, “wandering”, and a degree of “rootless existence”, the term gains new valence when read through the nomadic philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.⁴ Within their theoretical framework, nomadism is a more abstract “attitude [...], a specific mode of relating to the ground”⁵ in which “ground” does not stand for neatly organized,

1 *Everything*. 2017.

2 Žukauskaitė 2015, 10-21.

3 Wilmer (ed.) 2015.

4 Nibbelink 2015, 24.

5 Nibbelink 2019, 13.

bordered, and mappable territories to be settled by humans, but rather for planes of immanence and borderless domains (real or metaphoric) that escape strict regulation. Nibbelink summarizes the nomadic as “the exception to the rule, the counter-force to order, regulation, legislation, to conceptions of normality, standardization, or convention.”⁶ Nomadism is therefore an attitude towards the world, a political stance that challenges the systems of regulation that govern societies, bodies and territories.

In a similar vein, Rosi Braidotti suggests that nomadism is not necessarily about physical movement, but about instilling “movement and mobility at the heart of thinking.”⁷ It implies a certain level of conceptual fluidity; it is an invitation to give up on static, rigid, binary categories and to imagine a philosophy without fixed concepts, and the systems of regulation they create. One of the aims of her “feminist philosophical nomadism”⁸ is to challenge transcendental, phallogocentric, binary, dualistic ways of thought that put very specific subjects at the centre of representation while negatively assigning everything else to the margins. This is important because, as Donna Haraway has argued, such binaries “have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers, animals,”⁹ and have come to underpin Western language, discourse, philosophy and, by extension, life. Nomadism is a desire to challenge such dualisms and, with them, the dominance of one category (the majority subject, also known in Deleuze and Guattari’s work as the Molar¹⁰) over everything else. It is a quest to undo the systems of power in which some transcends other, man transcends woman, white transcends black, but also human transcends nature.

It is here that nomadism becomes relevant to the understanding of the Anthropocene. Defined as a geological age in which the “growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere”¹¹ has led to irreversible ecological deterioration, the Anthropocene is an era rooted in a transcendental attitude of human over nature. “Ocean acidification, deforestation, the loss of species diversity through extinction, changes to the earth’s surface due to population migration and alterations to geomorphology, global warming”¹² are just a few of the results of invasive human activity over nature. The Anthropocene presupposes a system of organization in which the human interest (particularly of Western, industrialized, advanced capitalist societies) transcends, it is put above the interest of the planet. A binary distinction is actualized in which human transcends nature, in which the natural environment and other species are sacrificed for the benefit of some humans. I say ‘some humans’ because the Anthropocene is, as Figueroa¹³ observes, closely related to capitalist economic growth, growth whose benefits are unequally spread on a global level.

6 Nibbelink 2019, 13-14.

7 Braidotti 2011, 1.

8 Braidotti 2002, 63.

9 Haraway 1991, 177.

10 Deleuze & Guattari 1987, Chapters 3 and 9.

11 Crutzen & Stoermer 2000, 17.

12 Saldanha & Stark 2016, 428.

13 Figueroa 2017, ix.

The Anthropocene therefore is an othering of the natural environment for the benefit of some humans. As Braidotti notes, this leads to a separation between “*bios*, as exclusively human life” and “*zoe*, the life of animals and nonhuman entities.”¹⁴ A nomadic attitude towards the world is needed to undo this binary, in order to challenge the transcendental system in which *bios* exerts power, to catastrophic effects, over *zoe*.

Braidotti proposes in this sense a “species egalitarianism, which opens up productive possibilities of relations, alliances, and mutual specification. This position starts from the pragmatic fact that, as embodied and embedded entities, we are all part of something we used to call ‘nature’, despite transcendental claims made for human consciousness. Resting on a monistic ontology drawn from neo-Spinozist vital materialist philosophy, I have proposed cross-species alliances with the productive and immanent force of *zoe*, or life in its nonhuman aspects.”¹⁵

This nomadic view stresses the embedded position of the human within nature. The human, as the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty¹⁶ has long suggested, is not separate from its surrounding environment. On the contrary, bodies are tangled up with the world, emerging on the “chiasm”,¹⁷ on the surface of contact between self and other. As such, bodies do not *exist in* nature, in as much as they *emerge within* it. The human does not transcend the non-human, on the contrary, it is part of it, it is immanent within *zoe*. Imagining the human as deeply interconnected with the natural environment is in itself a critique of anthropocentrism, which is a system of thought and organization that reproduces the centrality and transcendence of the human over everything else. But beyond critique, there is also an immediate political scope to such imaginaries: Donna Haraway suggests that the present dictates that we must “learn to live and die well with each other,” human or otherwise. Doing so demands “making oddkin,” coming together “in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles.”¹⁸ Haraway suggests that imagination and fabulation are an important first step towards making oddkin, as they reveal alternative scenarios and possibilities for living better together in the present – I will argue later that *Everything* could be considered one such fabulation.

The challenge that nomadism brings to the Anthropocene is therefore in turning “animals, insects, plants, cells, bacteria, in fact the planet and the cosmos [...] into a political arena”¹⁹ prompting new ways of thinking about life, about nature, about the impact of human activity and about the positionality and embeddedness of the human in the natural environment. It can provide imaginaries of better presents and futures, based on visions of kinship and cooperation with other species and materialities.

Nomadic thought, in this sense, proposes “a nonunitary vision of the subject,”

14 Braidotti 2017a, 32.

15 Ibid., 32.

16 Merleau-Ponty 1945.

17 Merleau-Ponty 1968, Chapter 4.

18 Haraway 2016, 1-4.

19 Braidotti 2017a, 26.

a subject always stretching outward, seeking assemblages, kinship, and affinities with human and non-human others, a subject immersed in “relations and negotiations with multiple others and with multi-layered social structures.”²⁰ The emphasis is shifted from *being* understood as a fixed, atomized, self-sufficient self, towards *becoming* as an open to others, in process with others, ever shifting state. Becoming implies a positive relationship of interconnectedness with multiple others. If phallogocentricism, unveiled by Derrida as a “system of metaphysical oppositions,”²¹ frames the self through negative binary distinctions to others - white is that which is not black, man is that which is not woman, human is that which is not nature - nomadism seeks a way out of this dualistic way of thought. It aims instead for the horizontal, rhizomatic, immanent connections that can be forged between different things, living or not, in an attempt to imagine life outside transcendental systems of thought, language, organization.

I would argue that *Everything* offers a theatrical nod to these ideas, proposing a vision of the world in which things, living or not, are interconnected, part of the same ecology, the same environment, emerging on the same plane of immanence, working together towards unspecified goals, becoming together, rather than being in isolation. It portrays a nomadic attitude which, as “a particular way of doing and thinking”²² can challenge the taken for granted systems of power that regulate everyday life – including the transcendence of the Molar human over nature that drives the Anthropocene.

Nomadic Performativity

Everything also highlights the potential of theatre and performance - in this case digital performance, defined by Dixon “to include all performance works where computer technologies play a key role [...] in content, techniques, aesthetics, or delivery forms”²³ - to engage with nomadism. In discussing the game, I will employ the concept of “nomadic performativity”²⁴ introduced by Audronė Žukauskaitė in the same edition of *Nordic Theatre Studies*²⁵ mentioned above, and I will reflect upon the ways in which the nomadic is used in *Everything* as a theatrical tool for critiquing anthropocentrism.

Žukauskaitė describes three levels where nomadism meets performance: in the undoing of theatrical “forms, bonds, organized hierarchies,” in the presentation of “multiplicities [over] self-identical subjects,” and in the “potential for change” that may arise as theatre is “becoming-minor.”²⁶

To arrive at this imagining of theatre, she turns towards Deleuze and Guattari and their metaphoric conceptualizations of space, namely the “nomadic versus the sedentary distribution of space, the smooth versus the striated, the organism versus the body without organs.”²⁷ The sedentary is described

20 Braidotti 2011, 3-4.

21 Derrida 1978, 20.

22 Nibbelink 2015, 26.

23 Dixon 2007, 3.

24 Žukauskaitė 2015, 10-21.

25 Wilmer (ed.) 2015.

26 Žukauskaitė 2015, 15.

27 Ibid., 11.

as that which “implies measurement, division and calculation”, and opposes the nomadic which is “without property, enclosure or measure.”²⁸ Similarly, striated space is legislated by language, whereas smooth space is the realm of liberated affectivity, “occupied by intensities, wind and noise, forces, and sonorous and tactile qualities.”²⁹ The distinction between the organism and the body without organs (BWO) follows in the same vein: the first emerges within well-defined boundaries, categories and moulds, while the latter escapes easy categorization. Not necessarily denoting physical bodies, the BWO “is opposed less to organs than to the organization of organs we call an organism.”³⁰ In short, one side of this conceptual divide refers to systems of regulation defined by transcendental relationships of power and vertical governance, while the other describes systems governed by horizontal, distributive, rhizomatic affinities, and affectivities.

Within art, the striated, sedentary organism is equated by Deleuze with the figurative line, while the smooth, nomadic body without organs is akin to the abstract line. One is “characteristic of art based on imitation and representation” while the other “is detached from the model of representation.”³¹ This idea can be transposed to theatre, where more traditional representational forms can be associated with the striated: they are often bound within well-defined forms and genres, they have well-defined characters and plot arches, they reproduce recognisable techniques and styles, and they operate within hierarchical power dynamics (often the playwright has power over the play text, the director over the actors, and so on). These regulatory frameworks are complemented by the transcendence of text, ‘text’ understood here both as ‘script’ in the theatrical sense, but also as language as a system that creates, organises and frames discourse. However, certain discourses may carry the baggage of phallogocentrism, placing a very specific dominant subject at the centre of representation and conceptualizing all else as other. Underpinned by text as the primary artistic tool, representational theatre may run the risk of reproducing the power dynamics that are at play in dualistic, phallogocentric discourse, thus restaging the centrality and transcendence of the dominant subject and the discursive mechanism that enforce its position. At the opposite end of the spectrum, nomadic performativity operates within the smooth plane, pursuing abstraction and affectivity as a way out of the power dynamics that text, language, representation, and dualistic discourse may imply.

Žukauskaitė further observes that, “if theatre as a form of representation creates a striated and hierarchized space which embodies and increases power, the non-representational theatre creates a nomadic smooth space of continuous variation, which transposes everything into a constant becoming.”³² Like Deleuze, she refers to the theatre of Antonin Artaud as an example of nomadic performativity. His theatre “denies all forms or representation, such

28 Deleuze & Guattari, 46. Cited in Žukauskaitė 2015, 11.

29 Deleuze & Guattari, 528-29. cited in Žukauskaitė 2015, 12

30 Deleuze & Guattari, 32. Cited in Žukauskaitė 2015: 13.

31 Žukauskaitė 2015, 12.

32 Žukauskaitė 2015, 14.

as authorship, role, text, genre or recording,”³³ challenging what theatre can be, allowing theatre to become, to emerge outside of strictly defined moulds. Žukauskaitė follows Deleuze in arguing that nomadic theatre is politically charged, as it can potentially undo the power hierarchies that come with representation and language. In doing so, it creates a smooth space, a space in which spectators, actors, and objects emerge together in performance, creating an ecology of immanence and affectivity, rather than a transcendental transfer of power through language and discourse.

As such, nomadic theatre is a form of multiplicities, where different elements assemble together without any one transcending the other. In freeing theatre from its centre - whether that centre is the text (language, representation), the author, the director – nomadic theatre operates a becoming-minor. It becomes an abstract form that operates on the margins.

And it is the margin that holds political charge. As Braidotti notes, “the minority is the dynamic or intensive principle of change [...] whereas the heart of the (phallogocentric) Majority is dead.”³⁴ Becoming-minor implies giving up on the centre, it implies imagining life outside the hierarchal, transcendental transfers of power that have come to govern everyday life, including life in the Anthropocene. The politics of such becomings are therefore important, and theatre might be one space in which they may be allowed to flourish.

Žukauskaitė thus summarises the principles of nomadic performativity as follows: “First, it is a distribution of intensities, which come to replace forms, bonds, organized hierarchies; second, it refers to fusional multiplicities rather than self-identical subjects; and third, it opens up the potential for change and becoming-minor instead of representing major figures of power.”³⁵

I will expand on each of these dimensions in the following sections, using *Everything* as a case study to think about the ways in which nomadic theatre can bring a challenge to anthropocentrism.

About *Everything*

Everything is an open-world video game created and designed by David O'Reilly and coded by Damien Di Fede, which was released in 2017 for PC, Mac, and Linux. The creators describe it as “a reality simulation game” in which “there is no right or wrong way to play.” Promising a different experience for each individual player, the gameplay itself involves “travelling through the Universe and seeing it from different points of view.”³⁶ The player is not given a fixed avatar, instead they can assume the shape of any element in the digital universe – these elements are referred to in the game as *things*. As such, at one moment the gamer can play as a mammoth, the next they can transform into a mushroom, a herd of elephants, bacteria, a continent, or even a galaxy. There are no rules to the gameplay, and there is no end goal, or way to win or lose. The only thing that the gamer does is to explore the digital environment, shapeshifting into

33 Ibid.

34 Braidotti 2011, 29.

35 Žukauskaitė 2015, 14-15.

36 “What is Everything?” 2019, para. 1-3.

different things along the way.

There are, however, a number of actions that the player can perform: for example, pressing the spacebar makes the things one is playing with (whether alive or not) sing. Pressing the 'V' key allows things to come together in flocks, assembling with different things. The mouse buttons allow the user to shape shift into smaller and/or bigger things. Using these simple commands, I started playing as a sheep, before turning into an elephant, a herd of elephants, a tree, a bigger tree, an ice island, then back into a tree, and so on.

In performing towards a non-specified goal, the user is empowered to create their own gaming experience, regardless of the makers' intentions. The creators describe *Everything* as a "creative canvas" for the user, in which "each part of the world allows complete freedom to create [their] own images, worlds, scenes and experiences using things instead of pixels or polygons."³⁷ It is this invitation placed upon the user to design their own experience that makes *Everything* theatrical. As Farley et al. have noted, "video games have seen a shift towards games as a platform for self-expression. Players, in these cases, do not play the game to achieve a certain high score but to make an artistic statement and express opinions."³⁸ *Everything* does not have a score system to begin with, instead it invites the user to perform their way around the game, becoming in a sense artists and dramaturgs of their own performance. Similarly, Damian and Sidney Homan describe such video games as a form of interactive theatre, where the player is playwright, director and actor at the same time.³⁹ In blurring these lines and empowering the user to become the creator of the performance, *Everything* assumes a nomadic attitude, decentring the hierarchal structure of more conventional games in which goals and storylines are predefined – a point I will return to later.

What is more interesting, however, is that *Everything* does not necessarily require a player at all: it is designed to switch to 'auto mode' after a few moments of inactivity and play itself, allowing, in truly nomadic fashion, the nonhuman agency of computer algorithms to perform outside human intervention.

This interest in agencies other-than-human is in fact what underpins the game. Laced at various points into the game's soundtrack are voiceover clips taken from lectures and seminars given by Alan Watts, a British author known for his interest in Eastern philosophy, whose ideas seem to have inspired the development of *Everything*. In one of the more memorable voiceovers that the user comes across, Watts is heard positing that: "One of the first things which everybody should understand is that every creature in the universe that is in any way sensitive and in any matter of speaking conscious, regards itself as a human being."⁴⁰

It is within this key that I would conceptualize *Everything*. As I will discuss in the following pages, the game resorts to nomadic performativity to invite the user to reflect upon the interconnectedness of all things – living or not. It creates

37 Ibid., "Create Your Universe"

38 Farley et al. 2009, 96.

39 Homan & Homan 2014.

40 Watts 1997 cited in *Everything*. 2017.

an ecology in which the human does not transcend other elements in the (digital) universe, thus inviting the player to imagine the emergence of *zoe* and *bios* on the same plane of immanence, proposing a “species egalitarianism, which opens up productive possibilities of relations, alliances, and mutual specification.”⁴¹ In doing so, the game provides a useful commentary on the Anthropocene, questioning the anthropocentric positioning of human as transcending nature.

***Everything* and nomadic performativity**

The first characteristic of nomadic performativity that Žukauskaitė describes refers to “a distribution of intensities, which come to replace forms, bonds, organized hierarchies,”⁴² As described above, nomadic performativity presupposes a structure that is akin to the body without organs, a structure that does not follow conventional and recognisable tropes. It is a departure from representational theatre and a challenge to its organized, hierarchal distributions of power in performance.

Everything achieves this in multiple ways. On one level, it employs a dramaturgy in which the player has no goals to achieve, no tasks to complete. The game experience is not predefined; it is not directed by the game creators, rather it emerges as the player wanders about exploring the environment at will. In doing so, the player works with the game to create an outcome that is always unique, rather than bound within specific scenarios. The hierarchical distinction between game creator and player is thus challenged: the former is not the director of the latter’s experience. Instead, the creator only provides an environment of potentiality, a sandbox in which the player and the game come together to build a unique performance. Undoing the binary between creator and gamer, between game and gamer, is the first nomadic step that *Everything* makes, and it is in itself a challenge to transcendental power structures in performance.

On a different level, *Everything* departs from conventional forms by pursuing a level of abstraction in its design. If, as described above, representational forms are confined to recognizability and normativity, the abstract emerges out of such confines. Whilst some contemporary video games strive to achieve unprecedented levels of realism, aiming for ever better recognizability and resemblance with real life objects, environments or people,⁴³ *Everything* aims for something completely different: It creates a digital world that is strange, filled with odd things that make no claim to photorealism.⁴⁴

This is further accentuated through the movement design used in the game, where instead of trying to create complex animations that resemble real-life motion, the creators employed a very minimalistic style in which animals and objects simply slide or roll about the environment in non-articulated movements. It creates an eerie, strange look. For example, animals move by rolling, like dice, instead of walking. The creators seem to embrace this level of abstraction, as exemplified by the Frequently Asked Questions section on their website which

41 Braidotti 2017a, 32.

42 Žukauskaitė 2015, 14-15.

43 MacDonald 2018.

44 Järvinen 2002, 121.

bluntly responds to “Why do the animals move this way?” with “Because they do.”⁴⁵ But it is precisely in this challenging of expectations of what a video game should be, how a video game should look, or even how an animal should move, that *Everything* exerts its nomadic performativity: I would argue that the almost absurd dimension that the aesthetic of the game creates is important, as it invites the user into a virtual world that is not characterized by the recognizable and well-practiced rules of the everyday. In embracing the strange aesthetic, and the unconventional gameplay dynamics, the player becomes open to a new way of gaming, but perhaps also towards a new way of thinking and doing in the world (virtual or not).

A second dimension of nomadic performativity that Žukauskaitė identifies is its leaning towards “fusional multiplicities rather than self-identical subjects”⁴⁶. Deleuze and Guattari explain that “A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature (the laws of combination therefore increase in number as the multiplicity grows). Puppet strings, as a rhizome or multiplicity, are tied not to the supposed will of an artist or puppeteer but to a multiplicity of nerve fibers, which form another puppet in other dimensions connected to the first.”⁴⁷

A multiplicity is thus an assortment of discrete elements that emerge together to reach ever shifting states that are in flux together, that form affinities and assemblages with no hierarchical control and never fully settle into an atomized unit. As Braidotti highlights, multiplicity points towards “a vision of the subject as process,”⁴⁸ as opposed to a well-bounded, standalone entity. The subject only exists in interrelation and interaction with others, whether human or non-human. This way of imagining the world does not flatten differences, on the contrary, as Braidotti highlights elsewhere, multiplicity implies that “we-are-in-this-together-but-we-are-not-one-and-the-same.”⁴⁹ That is to say, we are intertwined with all things, and while differences exist, they are not understood as oppositional binaries. For example, *bios* is different from *zoe*, but not in an oppositional way, rather they emerge together, they work together, they shape each other, complement each other.

When Braidotti proposes that humans “as embodied and embedded entities [...] are all part of something we used to call ‘nature’ and pleads for ‘species’ alliances with the productive and immanent force of *zoe*,”⁵⁰ she calls for a re-evaluation of the position of the human subject within the Anthropocene. More precisely, she calls for the re-imagining of the human as in process with, and embedded in, *zoe*, as opposed to detached from, and controlling of it. This re-imagining is necessary, because in order to limit the damage and othering of

45 Frequently Asked Questions, “Why do animals move this way?” 2019.

46 Žukauskaitė 2015, 15.

47 Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 8.

48 Braidotti 1994, 98.

49 Braidotti 2017b, 47.

50 Braidotti, 2017a, 32.

nature that anthropocentrism has created, a new way of thinking must emerge, one in which nature and human are seen as a multiplicity.

Everything makes a similar proposition. It is a game of multiplicities: As the creators point out, it “is a simulation of reality as a phenomenon of interdependent systems. There are thousands of things that perceive, think and interact differently while being driven by the same underlying rules.”⁵¹ The dramaturgy of the game points precisely towards this idea as all things in *Everything* can work together. This interconnectedness is creatively suggested through small interactions, such as singing. If one thing sings (and even non animate things, such as rocks, can sing in *Everything*) other nearby things join them in song. Similarly, different things can join up and travel together in groups, or can come together to form bigger things, such as continents.

Yet these interactions are not limited to objects. *Everything* creatively makes the human player part of this interaction. At certain moments for example, things in the game ‘think’, and the player can read their thoughts. Any object in the game can display thought bubbles that the user can navigate towards and read. Non-human things are therefore anthropomorphized, they think, and share ideas with the human player.

While anthropomorphizing may betray a human-centric dimension of the game (non-human things think, yet their language and thoughts seem remarkably human), it also functions to undermine anthropocentrism. As Bennet suggests, anthropomorphizing could make one see the vitality and vibrancy of all matter, as “a chord is struck between person and thing, and I am no longer above or outside a nonhuman ‘environment’.”⁵² The things’ wisdom in *Everything* is less an attempt to make objects more like humans, but rather to suggest that thinking is not an exclusively human affair, but an effect of the human being already tangled in the mesh of the world.

One such random thought that I found particularly interesting was a tree’s observation that “thoughts are the frictions between things and other things,”⁵³ This is meant to suggest that things, living or not, share a certain vitality, a certain vibrancy⁵⁴ and agency that underpins their ecology, and that even something so seemingly human as thinking is the result of interaction with other things – living or not. What *Everything* tries to highlight is that subjectivity is shared between multiple entities, all possessing some form of agency, all co-existing and sharing the same frictions. In proposing this idea, the game puts forward a critique of the Anthropocene, which is defined by the human having agency over the environment, as opposed to sharing agency with it.

One of the more obvious ways in which the game highlights the vitality of the non-human is through its auto play mode. If the gamer stops playing for more than 30 seconds, the game will automatically start playing itself. The auto play feature is interesting because it gives agency to the game’s algorithms, allowing the non-human to completely take over the gaming experience. In

51 “What is Everything?”, “A Nature Simulation”.

52 Bennett. 2010, 120.

53 *Everything*. 2017.

54 Bennett 2010.

the same way that, as explained above, the game decentralizes the position of the creator, giving agency to the player over the outcome of the game, the auto play feature decentralizes the position of the player within that same dramaturgy. Like the creator before them, the gamer becomes-minor in the gaming ecology, allowing the non-human algorithms to take centre stage.

According to Žukauskaitė, this is the third level of nomadic performativity, the capacity of a performance to open up “potential for change and becoming-minor instead of representing major figures of power.”⁵⁵ The possibility for the human to give up control, agency, and transcendence over the gameplay is not however the only becoming-minor that the player undergoes in *Everything*. Equally evocative is the way in which the player can assume a multitude of avatars, theoretically being able to become anything in the universe, from rocks, to bacteria, galaxies, and extinct animals, thus performing becoming-minor.

According to Braidotti, becoming-minor implies an exploration of the margins, by which she means that which sits outside the dominant grasp of the Molar. In the domain of the Anthropocene, the Molar can be seen as a certain model of “Man” with a capital M, a phantasm of the Enlightenment, “the humanistic measure of all things” that is “now called to task as the representative of a hierarchical and violent species.”⁵⁶ Becoming-minor implies a challenge towards that centre, it is an exploration of the world in affinity with the minoritarian. Becoming-minor can be actualized in a multitude of ways, which may include becoming-woman, becoming-insect, becoming-animal. While becoming-animal does not mean literally turning into an animal, it does imply a way of accepting the complementarity between human and non-human. It is a decentring of the human towards the acceptance of a more porous subjectivity. Towards opening up its boundaries.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the final stage of becoming is becoming everybody/everything. According to them, this implies renouncing “everything that roots each of us (everybody) in ourselves, in our molarity. For everybody/everything is the molar aggregate, but becoming everybody/everything is another affair, one that brings into play the cosmos with its molecular components. Becoming everybody/everything (tout le monde) is to world (faire monde), to make a world (faire un monde). By process of elimination, one is no longer anything more than an abstract line, or a piece in a puzzle that is itself abstract.”⁵⁷ Becoming everything is the world emerging as an abstract concatenation of pieces, it is the ultimate multiplicity in which the boundaries of the self are undone, enabling immanent relationalities which create a “cosmos.”

As I have mentioned above, in *Everything*, the world takes shape as the player assumes different and unexpected forms: from animals to molecules, from mushrooms to continents, the player’s avatars are continuously shapeshifting. I read this string of virtual becomings as an invitation addressed to the player to think outside their own subjectivity. To virtually step into the

55 Žukauskaitė 2015, 15.

56 Braidotti 2017a, 26.

57 Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 289.

body of a rock, or a herd of mammoths. To become-minoritarian, to become *zoe*, to become everything.

Although the becomings that the player enacts are mere simulations, they still work as powerful metaphors and imaginings of what a world in assemblage with a non-human other may be. For Donna Haraway, such “speculative fabulations” are important and politically charged, as they can provide both a vision of a future and an impulse and inspiration to build a better present. As she beautifully puts it, “it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.”⁵⁸

In *Everything*, the player is invited to fabulate about a world. They are invited to imagine with things other than human. To play with things other than human. To be with things other than human. In doing so, the game paints a world in which the human is part of an ecology, deeply embedded and interrelated with the non-human, rather than transcendently positioned above it. In articulating this idea, *Everything* makes a critique of the Anthropocene and its catastrophic othering of nature. The invitation to become-minor, to become rock, tree, continent, mammoth, is a way of provoking the player to reconsider the role of the human within nature, to imagine the human and non-human as interconnected agencies, emerging together, always in process, in constant flux, dependent upon one another.

Conclusion

The gameplay of *Everything* is the perfect enactment of nomadic performativity. It detaches from conventional video game dramaturgies, decentering the creator and even the gamer from the outcome of the performance. In doing so, it gives agency to non-human forces, such as computer algorithms, and invites the player to consider the vibrancy of non-animate entities. In giving voice to the non-human, the game invites the player to imagine a world in which the human does not transcend its environment, but is embedded within it, caught up in ties and alliances with every agent in the universe. In doing so, *Everything* challenges anthropocentrism, proposing instead a nomadic view in which *bios* and *zoe* come together, as opposed to one transcending the other. It suggests that the human is part of a vast and productive network of interactions with non-human others, part of an ecology of interdependence that the Anthropocene threatens to disrupt.

58 Haraway 2016, 12.

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