

**THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
BAHÇEŞEHİR UNIVERSITY**

**ANIMAL CRUELTY IN VIDEO GAMES:
AN ETHICAL INVESTIGATION**

Master's Thesis

AYŞEGÜL SÜRÜCÜ

İSTANBUL, 2020

**THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
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**GRADUATE OF SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
GAME DESIGN MASTER PROGRAM**

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Thesis Supervisor: ASSOC. PROF. DİĞDEM SEZEN

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Name of the thesis: Animal Cruelty In Video Games: An Ethical Investigation
Name/Last Name of the Student: Ayşegül Sürücü
Date of the Defense of Thesis: 26.04.2020

The thesis has been approved by the Graduate School of Social Sciences.

Asst. Prof. Burak KÜNTAY
Graduate School Director
Signature

I certify that this thesis meets all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

Dr. Güven ÇATAK
Program Coordinator
Signature



This is to certify that we have read this thesis and we find it fully adequate in scope, quality and content, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

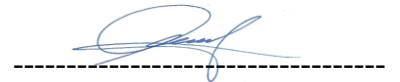
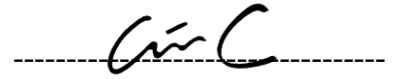
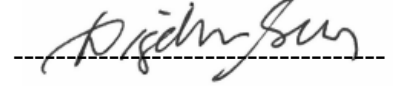
Examining Committee Members

Thesis Supervisor
Assoc. Prof. Diğdem SEZEN

Member
Dr. Güven ÇATAK

Member
Assoc. Prof. Barbaros BOSTAN

Signature



ABSTRACT

ANIMAL CRUELTY IN VIDEO GAMES: AN ETHICAL INVESTIGATION

Aysegul Surucu

Game Design Graduate Program

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The aim of the study is to explore the ethical perspective of the animal cruelty in video games. Although there are many studies considering violence on animals in non-interactive mediums, and many other studies considering violence on humans in video games, there seems to be a lack of studies considering animal-human interaction in interactive mediums such as video games where the players not only make the choice of using violence, but they also sometimes actively engage in it. The literature will be reviewed in order to create an ethical discussion on killing non-humanoid animal characters with analyzing indie survival realistic game: *The Long Dark*.

Keywords: Animal Violence, Ethics of Computer Games, Role-Playing Games, Virtual World, Human Animal Interaction in Video Games

ÖZET

VIDEO OYUNLARINDA HAYVANA ŞİDDETİN ETİK ARAŞTIRMASI

Ayşegül Sürücü

Oyun Tasarımı Yüksek Lisans Programı

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Bu çalışmanın amacı video oyunlarında hayvana şiddetin etik açıdan ele alınmasını araştırmaktır. İnteraktif olmayan ortamlarda hayvana karşı şiddet çalışmalarının ve video oyunlarında insana şiddet araştırmalarının bulunmasına rağmen hayvana şiddeti odağa alan ve bunu video oyunları tarafında, özellikle de oyuncuların şiddeti tercih olarak kullanabileceği interaktif ortamları işleyen çok fazla çalışma yer almamaktadır. Bu çalışmada gerçek hayat deneyimi yaşatan, doğada hayatta kalma oyunu olan The Long Dark oyununun etik bağlam çerçevesinde analiz edilecek şekilde tartışmak için literatür taraması yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hayvana Şiddet, Bilgisayar Oyunları Etiği, Rol Yapma Oyunları, Sanal Dünya, Video Oyunlarında İnsan Hayvan Etkileşimi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	viii
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
2.1 WHAT IS GAME AND GAMEPLAY?.....	7
2.1.1 Definition of Game and Play.....	7
2.1.2 Gameplay.....	8
2.1.3 Understanding Other Concepts Relevant to Game and Gameplay.....	10
2.2 ANIMAL CRUELTY.....	11
2.2.1 Representation Animal Cruelty In Media.....	12
2.2.2 Representation of Animal Cruelty In Interactive Media.....	14
2.3 UNDERSTANDING ANIMAL VIOLENCE IN INTERACTIVE MEDIA.....	15
2.3.1 Representation of Animals In Video Games.....	16
2.3.2 Animals as Avatars.....	16
2.3.3 Animals as NPCs.....	18
2.3.4 Animals as Resources.....	19
2.4 VIDEO GAMES ETHICS AND ANIMAL CRUELTY.....	21
2.4.1 Ethics	21
2.4.2 Ethics in Video Games	23
2.4.3 Players as Moral Beings	25
2.4.4 Other Discussions About Animal Cruelty in Video Games Ethics	
2.5 VIDEO GAMES AS EXPERIENCE	26
3. THE ANIMAL CRUELTY ETHICAL ANALYSIS RUBRIC.....	28
3.1 METHODOLOGY.....	28
3.1.1 Identification of Formal Elements with Fernandez-Vara's Game Analysis Approach	28
3.1.2 Mechanics, Dynamics and Aesthetics Approach	31

3.1.2.1 Mechanics.....	31
3.1.2.2 Dynamics.....	32
3.1.2.3 Aesthetics.....	32
3.1.2 Sicart's The Ethics of Computer Games Analysis Framework.....	33
4. THE ANALYSIS OF THE LONG DARK.....	37
4.1 BACKGROUND AND INFORMATION OF THE LONG DARK.....	37
4.2 FORMAL ELEMENTS OF THE LONG DARK IN THE ASPECT OF THE PLAYER ANIMAL INTERACTION	39
4.2.1 Rules of The World of The Long Dark.....	39
4.2.2 Diegetic and Extradiegetic Elements.....	41
4.2.3 The Level of Abstraction.....	41
4.2.4 Goal Oriented Game.....	42
4.2.5 Choice Design.....	42
4.3 APPLYING MDA FRAMEWORK ACCORDING TO HUMAN- ANIMAL INTERACTION IN THE LONG DARK.....	43
4.3.1 Mechanics of The Long Dark.....	43
4.3.2 Dynamics of The Long Dark.....	44
4.3.3 Aesthetics of The Long Dark.....	45
4.4 ETHICAL DESIGN OF THE LONG DARK.....	46
5. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH.....	48
REFERENCES	50

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Grand Theft Auto V: Choosing to play as the dog Chop, as an avatar.....	17
Figure 2.2: Assassin’s Creed: Origins, hunting animals for their pelt.....	20
Figure 3.1: Disco Elysium Video Game “Pat the mailbox” issue.....	35
Figure 4.1 The Long Dark Main Menu: Story and Sandbox Modes.....	38
Figure 4.2: Wolves are more aggressive on the nighttime.....	40



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI: Artificial Intelligence

CI: Categorical Imperative

FPS: First person shooter

NPC: Non-player character

RPG: Role playing game

TPS: Third person shooter

XP: Experience Points

1. INTRODUCTION

When I opened my eyes on the cold, starry night, I remembered that I survived a plane crash in the vast forests of northern Canada. My friend, whom I travelled with on the plane, is lost and I must find her. On the first night, I found a cave where it is safe to sleep. In the morning, I was dehydrated, starving, and cold. While I was walking in the freezing forest, there were some rabbits to hunt. I grabbed a stone, and I shot down the weak, harmless rabbit to feed me up in these harsh natural conditions. While killing the rabbit, I felt terrible. However, nothing was inevitable, and maybe the rabbit would be my last chance to eat something. I continued my way, and I must find a way to the closest settlement and get some help.

That was not a dream. It is the realistic, role-playing survival game, *The Long Dark* (2014), which was developed and published by Hinterland Studios. The game is about surviving in the winter conditions, and that has two different modes, one of them is sandbox and the second mode is following the storyline. The story mode is called Wintermute and was published in 2017. In Wintermute, there is the main character Mackenzie, who is an experienced pilot, and he is dragged into an unexpected adventure by his ex-wife Doctor Astrid Greenwood. Their plane crashes down during the geomagnetic anomaly on the sky as an aurora, and the story begins with searching Astrid, surviving in the vast forest.

Certain personal experiences are the reason for the choice of this topic. It is highly noticeable by players of open-world role-playing-games (RPG) that animal goods are an essential part of such games. They can sometimes be necessary for ensuring items. A way to obtain these goods can be by hunting and killing wild animals. Those cruel actions and consequently killing animals in the virtual world may make the player feel uneasy. Thus, fundamental ethical values that belong to the real life of the player can be transferred into the interactive story. Because the player's emotions and feelings are real, the player still cannot feel so well in the case of acting cruel against animals in the virtual world. This thought formed a basis for focusing on the current subject. It became an inspiration to investigate the ethical discussion of video games concerning an analysis of player-animal interaction in *The Long Dark*.

Unlike photos, videos, or movies, video games are interactive. The audience can also move around in the cyber and fake land that they see, as well as make changes in both the setting and the storyline, which would mean even more realistic stimuli than any other form of audio-visual media. By doing that, the player may encounter animals, and the actions of the player may differ according to the purpose of an animal, as a game object. The main question of this research, what is the classification of human-animal interaction in video games and how are they ethical due to game analysis through their formal elements and mechanics.

This study focuses on understanding the ethical aspects of animal cruelty in video games by concentrating on the game *The Long Dark* (2014, Hinterland Games). The study is essential for classifying player-animal interactions in video games and understanding those interactions, especially animal cruelty, the player applies that in games in an ethical framework with examining one game. The result of this study brings different investigations for ethical game design research, especially for game analysis and human-animal interaction. Assessing animal cruelty in video games from an ethical game design perspective and adding to this discussion is going to enlighten design decisions about animal-human interaction for industry professionals and ensure useful information such as ethical choice design to present to the player. Moreover, this study is going to be a key for discussion on the ethical design of human-animal interaction and animal cruelty in video games.

To understand the matter of human-animal interaction and animal cruelty within video games from an ethical perspective, first, it is essential to talk about some of the key concepts. While first trying to explain what the components of game design and game mechanics are, the notion of the game, play and gameplay, its basics, and one's ability to perceive and understand these concepts will be explained. A literature review on the discussions about what animal cruelty will be done by defining the representation of animal cruelty in media and video games, and then the video games ethics and animal cruelty will be discussed thoroughly.

In the second chapter, game design and the definition of the game will be explained broadly. The aim of the literature review is going to give answers to what is game design and game, what is game and gameplay. Additionally, this research aims to respond to the discussions around ethics and ethics of the computer games, definition of animal cruelty and how animals are represented in video games.

Game design is a creative process that merges different disciplines and insights such as art, design, and software engineering to make computer-player interactivity possible in a meaningful way. In the process of game design, game designers are responsible for making decisions for shaping human-animal interactions in the game. For example, in the game design process, decisions can be made for classification for animals, their effects, and their specific features to the game. After the discussion of game design and game mechanics, discussion about the game is going to be explained in the perspective of Jesper Juul. Moreover, the difference between game and play is going to be discussed in this chapter. The concept of gameplay is going to be addressed thoroughly and with examples from RPGs.

To understand animal violence and representation in media and interactive media, firstly, the definition of animal cruelty is going to be explained. Secondly, representation in the media of animal cruelty is going to be discussed.

In Role-Playing Games (RPG), there is always a classification between animals. Sometimes, animals in RPGs become companions to the player; sometimes, they can be wild predators in nature and threaten the player's virtual health and life indicators. Alternatively, sometimes they are formed as non-player characters (NPCs).

When it comes to the relationship between animals and media, it is crucial to look through the representation of animals within popular media. Freeman, Bekoff, and Bexel suggest that it is hard to cover the perspective of animals in their stories because they cannot talk for themselves (2011, pp. 2,3). In her book *Popular Media and Animals*, Molloy discusses how animals became a more critical issue for society, and even politics got involved in the subject, offering policies on the matter. She also

suggests that academics became more focused on animal ethics and studies. Since that became the case, the media began to be more involved with animals and animal rights (2011, pp 8,9).

Even though seeing images or footage of violence that applied to animals throughout the media is not pleasant, people should be informed about animal cruelty to know how and why it is wrong. Freeman et al. believe that only including animals to the news stories is not enough but informing the audience and giving out truthful information is the right thing to do (Freeman et al., 2011). Another study by Tiplady, Walsh, and Phillips shows that even though they are exposed to broadcasts of animal violence, people choose to see them and know about the situation rather than being kept in ignorance (2012, p.15). On the other hand, not only the violence is shown throughout the social media but also animal-human interactions, for instance, the Twitter account “Can You Pet the Dog?”¹ gives information about whether dogs can be petted or not in video games. This Twitter account is sort of an inspiration for this research too.

Violence against animals in video games also seems to be common like violence against human beings. The reason behind it might be explained by Huizinga’s concept of the magic circle, which can be called a platform for a game in which one can do anything (Huizinga, 1944). Although there are numerous studies considering violence on animals in non-interactive mediums, and many other studies examining violence on humans in video games, there seems to be a lack of studies considering animal cruelty in interactive mediums such as video games; where the players not only choose using violence, they also actively engage in it.

The reason the game *The Long Dark* was chosen for this current study is that it is a realistic survival RPG in the first-person camera angle, the player engages with harsh conditions of the wild life and nature in the middle of the winter and in order to not starve, the player has a choice to hunt animals. Because animals are both resources and NPCs for their hostile actions, *The Long Dark* is suitable for analyzing from an ethical

¹ Can You Pet the Dog? Twitter Account, <https://twitter.com/CanYouPetTheDog>, accessed in 4 December 2019

perspective that the game gives choices about killing animals or not, and some main quests are dependent on killing animals.

In the third chapter, for the methodology of creating an ethical video game analysis rubric, some of the formal elements are going to be taken from Video Game Analysis of Fernandez-Vara. Hunicke, LeBlanc, Zubek's Mechanics, Dynamics, and Aesthetic Framework and Miguel Sicart's Ethics of the Computer Games will be explained, and some components will be added to animal cruelty investigation rubric to analyze *The Long Dark*.

The findings are in the fourth chapter, the ethical analysis of *The Long Dark* will be conducted with ethical video game analysis rubric. The analysis will start with the background and information of the game will continue with an analysis of formal elements in the aspect of human-animal interaction in *The Long Dark*.

In the end, that is the conclusion part of the thesis, the representation and purpose of animals in gameplay and the ability to understand it will help make sense of the ethical issues about animal violence in gameplay, and there will be suggestions for the future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 WHAT IS GAME AND GAMEPLAY?

Creating an interactive world brings a series of events that need some instructions. From the design aspect, game design is a process of making a virtual world that covers iteration of creating ideas, prototyping ideas, applying playtests and changing the design according to issues in the playtest (Fullerton et al., 2008). It can also be explained that game design depends on many disciplines such as software engineering, psychology, art, and mathematics and blends with playful experiences (Sicart, 2009). Thus, game design frames the player's actions with setting boundaries and ensures features to make the player play the game.

Game designers decide how players interact with the game. From a game designer's view, these design decisions can be explained in many ways. To create design decisions, forming game mechanics that are a sort of guide, ensured by insights of game designers. To put it in a different way, this guide is a procedure for players. Fullerton, Hoffman, and Swain put on par with game mechanics as procedures (2004, p.25). They imply that the idea in games, the player acts and plays according to the rules. These rules enlighten patterns of player behavior, and this means procedures (p.29).

To explain game mechanics broadly, they contain main actions to ensure the player reaches their goal. In the fantasy role-playing game (RPG), *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt Red, 2015), the main character, Geralt of Rivia, is a witcher who uses spells and magic to survive in his realm, that is called the Continent. In the game, Geralt carries and fights with melee weapons to defend himself in the event of combat. For playing and making progress in the story, actions are game mechanics. For instance, riding the horse, fighting, using spells and weapons, crafting items with pieces are game mechanics.

Interaction of the player as following these procedures creates gameplay. However, the explanation of game and play is necessary to understand the relation between the gameplay and game mechanics concept altogether.

2.1.1 Definition of Game and Play

It is common to mingle the definitions of game and play; Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman argued how those two words differ from each other etymologically in the English language. The outcome of the argument has two definitions; games are subset to play; on the other hand, play is a component of games. Activities such as two children chasing each other can count as a play but not a game. While the concept of the game has rules and winning conditions, the concept of play is the way of that individuals live the concept of the game. To put it in a nutshell, if games are a subset of play, the play is a more general term than the games are (2004, p.72).

A game is mostly built with rules at the core that is mounted with pliable and measurable outcomes, and these outcomes are defined with some values. Players put in the effort to change the result, and emotional attachment can occur between outcomes and the player who is in the event of the pursuit of the result. In the end, the consequences of this activity are debatable (Juul, 2011).

Relating to the game definition of Juul, the fact is that this enlightens the player's journey from the beginning of the act of the play until the end. To illustrate, in first-person shooter (FPS) games, the reward may be gaining experience points, some money to receive new weapons and items, and passing through higher levels to complete the game. Hence, those are some outcomes. To reach outcomes, the player should take down enemies with shooting guns, and the last step, the action of shooting enemies, that is called a player's efforts.

When it comes to explaining outcomes that are defined with values, as mentioned in Jesper Juul's game definition, for instance, if the player is shot down and dies, he can respawn from the last saved point and continues to play. Health and experience points are outcomes with values. While playing the game, as mentioned in the FPS games

example, the player can interact with many different game objects according to game mechanics.

Methods of player-game interactions are framed with rules and that those rules are game mechanics. With the FPS game example, it can be said that some elements have interacted with the player that opens doors into the fictional world. Thus, the interaction between rules and player composes the underlying meaning of the gameplay (Juul, 2005).

Juul states that rules and imagination of the fictional world are the core of the games. This nuance of those core makes games “half-real” (Juul, 2005). He supports his idea mentioning Eddie Gordo, who is a *Tekken 3* (Bandai Namco, 1997) character; he is from Brazil and uses the martial art of Capoeira against his enemies. Capoeira and Brazil are real concepts, and they belong to the real world. However, the name Eddie Gordo is fictional, and when the player chooses Eddie Gordo and plays as this character, the decision and the playing activity belong to the real world too (p.167).

To summarize, in this chapter, game, play, and game mechanics definitions were discussed. The connection between the fictional world and the real world is defined with Juul’s “half-real” concept. To understand gameplay better, the notion of gameplay is going to be assessed in the next chapter.

2.1.2 Gameplay

To look through to matter in a general sense, that would be beneficial to talk about the broad definition of gameplay. Oxford Learner’s Dictionary defines gameplay as “the features of a computer game, such as its story or the way it is played, rather than the images or sounds it uses.” (2019). Thus, the method of play fits Juul’s gameplay definition, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

The gameplay is orientated by game mechanics, an essential part of game design. The player encounters the consequences of his actions by being directed by mechanics. To illustrate, in *Assassin’s Creed 2* (Ubisoft, 2009), one of the main mechanics is stealth. When the protagonist, Ezio, interacts with NPCs who have gold as money in their pockets and if the player chooses to steal their gold from NPCs, stealth mechanics get

involved with pressing the specific button next to NPCs, and eventually, the player gains some gold. Of course, this mechanic is not compulsory; however, stealth is sometimes beneficial to the player to obtain money to acquire better weapons to win combats for completing the game.

Moreover, the use of this mechanic depends on the player's choices. One important rule is not to get caught by guards, and sometimes the player can find stealth too risky to continue the game. Defined mechanics guide the player interacts, and the gameplay occurs in this frame.

On the other hand, when talking about game design fundamentals, Salen and Zimmerman describe the gameplay as a subset of play and also define play as an element of games. They represent gameplay by saying that: "The formalized interaction that occurs when players follow the rules of the game and experience its system through play." (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, p.303). Even though a little too direct, their approach reflects the basic ideas when defining gameplay.

If moving through with gameplay experience in *Assassin's Creed 2*, stealing money from NPCs pockets and, at the same time, sprinting from guards needs the expertise of the player. The player knows what to do in the game, and by following rules makes him experience the game system. Likewise, the gameplay is an invisible contract between the player and the game. With the following rules, the player can experience the more elements of the game.

Whereas Lindley, Nacke, Sennersten seem to add a bit to the subject and define the experience of gameplay as:

"One of interacting with a game design in the performance of cognitive tasks, with a variety of emotions arising from or associated with different elements of motivation, task performance, and completion." (2008).

For this completion purpose, the player follows game mechanics on his journey throughout the gameplay. For instance, joining combats and winning over them makes the player get along through levels and makes the player to one step closer to the final of the game. Showing enough performance according to game mechanics during the game, one can assume that it reflects the gameplay directly.

In the fictional world, actions still do not have any consequences like they do in the real world. However, there are also specific rules to follow and particular actions to perform in order to be victorious in the game. While sometimes they are entirely left to the choice of the player, they are also sometimes one of the necessities of succeeding in the game. At this point, in order to form an ethical discussion, it is vital to understand the difference between mandatory quests, side quests, and random violence as well as choice-based ones.

2.1.3 Understanding Other Concepts Relevant to Game and Gameplay

The gameplay is also associated with many other concepts and involves other elements within itself. It can be said that gameplay is more than seeing and processing the information presented. Other factors are also involved in gameplay.

During the gameplay, there might be different types of situations that require individual decisions to be made. Sometimes in games, the actions are entirely voluntary and have no necessity at all. A significant portion of certain games only comprises these types of decisions. They are separate from the story and do not affect the narrative in any way, more like free time activities, most frequent in open-world games. Although in some of them, the player may encounter a dangerous situation that suddenly becomes a crucial part of the story, usually life-threatening, that might require a specific action to continue.

Besides that, within single-player story mode in video games, there are duties to complete the story. These duties are called quests that are meaningful for the storyline. The reason for the meaningfulness of quests is that they involve the player to take the initiative to step up to the next level, and by doing that, quests are making the player more conscious of the rules and narrative of the virtual world (Howard, 2008).

In RPGs, the story does not depend on one single quest. RPGs contain quest systems that are branching into main and side quests. The most frequent type of decision-making situation probably is the main quests. Main quests should be completed to make the necessary progress in the game. On the other hand, side quests are optional and can be completed in different orders to ensure acquiring rewards (2008, p.105).

Main quests are required to be completed to pass a certain level or finish a mandatory duty. They usually need a particular action to be done, but they may also require choices to be made. Although they are both necessary, they require different decision-making processes and put different responsibilities on the shoulders of the player. Considering the primary purpose of playing video games is to finish the game either by collecting points or moving forward through the narration when they are genuinely mandatory, they are required to play the game.

Side quests might also require a decision to be made or might require a particular action to continue, to acquire extra points, or another type of benefit. Still, different from main quests, they are not necessary for completion, which is where the decision-making process comes into play: not necessarily during the quest itself, but also when choosing to play the quest too. In this sense, they might be the type that puts the most responsibility. Decision making and player's responsibility influences the whole gameplay experience.

In the event of the gameplay, the player can encounter plentiful living creatures who are shaped in different forms and with various duties to trigger game mechanics. Besides the player and humanoid character interaction, in video games, the player experiences mostly with animal encounters. During the gameplay, the player may change his action according to the representation of animal objects in video games.

To conclude, in video games, while the player's efforts create gameplay, through gameplay, completing quests differentiates according to their compulsion to complete the storyline. For completing quests, actions that the player takes are shaped by game mechanics.

2.2 ANIMAL CRUELTY

In a general matter of speaking, all the behavioral patterns that cause an animal to suffer explains the meaning of animal cruelty. Tochukwu, Oduah, and Nwankwo explain that animal cruelty has several types, and some may be defined as a) Simple Neglect, b)

Gross Neglect, c) d) Intentional Abuse, e) Animal Hoarding, f) Organized Abuse, g) Ritualistic Abuse or h) Animal Sexual Assault (2013, p.3). Animal Rights Law and the Legal Definition, according to *US Legal*, can be seen as follows:

“Animal rights is an idea that intends to provide humane treatment to animals. It means the right not to be exploited for human purposes and that the interests of non-human animals should be given the same consideration as the similar interests of human beings. It is also termed as animal liberation. People who work for animal rights often cover areas such as the fur and wool industry, aquariums and zoos, testing on animals, and pets. Animal rights activists require animals to be regarded as individuals, rather than property.” (2019).

It can be said that sensitivity towards animals and animal rights has been a relatively new topic throughout history. Rollin looks through social ethics for animals from a historical viewpoint and states that its emergence was in the late 20th century since violence towards animals was not considered unethical for a long time. He talks about the *Animal Welfare Act* of 1966 and newer movements towards animal research (Rollin, 2006, pp.286-287).

The society's concern on the link between animal cruelty and violent behavior towards humans can be seen from the articles published by the government. Both *Animal Abuse and Youth Violence*, *Juvenile Justice Bulletin* released by U.S. Department of Justice, and *Childhood Animal Abuse and Violent Criminal Behavior: A Brief Review of the Literature*, the paper published by the Massachusetts State point out through their literature review that animal cruelty is related to violent behavior and aggression in humans (Ascione, 2001; McDonald, 2011).

Animal rights acts or social ethics for animals seems to have developed rather recently. A reason for that can be the cultural impacts or viewpoint towards animals at the time.

2.2.1 Representation of Animal Cruelty In Media

It was discussed earlier that society's concern on the influence on media led a lot of discussions under the topic of media and violence (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Anderson et al., 2003; Cantor & Wilson, 2009). Since animal cruelty seems to be associated with violence and violent acts against human beings, it seems natural that the topic became sensitive to the media.

Freeman et al. believe that journalists must cover stories on non-human animals as well because they also are being affected within life situations. They suggest that only covering the story about animal rights or environmental movements is not enough. Still, they also should provide the perspective of the animals since they cannot talk for themselves (Freeman et al., 2011).

Molloy argues that where the media stands on the representation of animals is essential for how people see animals. According to Molloy, the media seems to affect the constitutions connected to animals or other systems concerning the animals. Thus, the media seems to play a meaningful role in the normalization of such matters (2011). It can be said that the media is a powerful tool and handy on people's ideas. If the media is such a powerful tool on people's opinions, even normalize them, it would not be surprising if they made images of animal cruelty seem reasonable - so to say.

However, it looks like the popular media seems to be concerned about animals and their wellbeing. Molloy argues that the reason the media focuses so much on animal rights and acts is that the society became more aware and concerned by it; it may mean that it's not just because of the primary concern of the community but also because it made more money (Molloy, 2011).

Media focusing on animal rights, activists' movements and creating contents accordingly seem to be a better act for society. However, not being exposed to the knowledge about violent acts on the subject and what is happening around the world might be a bit frustrating at times. A study by Tiplady and colleagues focused on people's reactions and responses to violent images of animal cruelty. They found media broadcasts of slaughterhouses in Indonesia and observed how cattle were treated and made people feel. The most common reaction they encountered was people feeling pity.

They also found that women are more likely to feel angry or sad by those images. However, the results of the study also indicated that even though it made people feel uneasy after one year, they reported that they would rather see the images and be aware of the situation than not being able to see it at all (Tiplady, 2012).

2.2.2 Representation of Animal Cruelty In Interactive Media

There seem to be many different aspects of animal cruelty act in video games from why they were included in how it makes the player feel about it or how it is justified ethically for both parties. With a thorough examination of previous studies, these aspects can be investigated separately.

To understand the interactive media and interactivity, Janet Murray constructs a digital environment on four main factors. These are procedural, participatory, encyclopedic and spatial factors. Both procedural and participatory elements effectuate the interactivity of the digital environment. On the other hand, encyclopedic and spatial factors shape a digital environment that is open to explore and express the player himself. These factors make the digital environment immersive (Murray, 2017).

To be more specific, the procedural part is that the codes are prepared in the system that they serve the calling of certain tasks and the computer compiles with them. The participatory feature expresses that the player has an active role rather than passive audiences, such as the audience in the film or literature. The player can change or add patterns himself into the digital environment (p.91). The third feature, spatial areas are defined as space. It gives the player a sense of full commitment, as in real life. And the last feature, the large storage capacity of digital media is called an encyclopedic feature. Because of the huge capacity of computers, the amount of information that is unique for the digital environment, that is never experienced before, in the real world (p.110).

Four features of the digital environment trigger three aesthetic feelings of the player; immersion, agency, and transformation (pp.158-159). Immersion is made by the encyclopedic feature and spatial areas. For example, when the player interacts with the huge amount of information of the game and its space, immersion can be ensured completely. Besides that, the agency means that individuals can move freely and make decisions against systems (pp.159-160). And the last element is transformation is about how digital games create acting areas for players with the worlds they have built. It can be said that transformation is adapting the character of the game, as role-playing by the player (p.195).

Explaining Huizinga's concept of the magic circle, which makes everything possible in the game, would be useful in understanding the difference between real-life and artificial reality. He describes the magic circle as a playground, a platform for a game, so to say. He explains it by saying that it is like the arena or the card-table (1944). It can be said that it is an important concept to help distinguish real life from the game experience. Since games and reality are different, and people can put boundaries to understand the distinction between them, the magic circle can be used to explain the violent acts and animal cruelty in video games.

The game that will be analyzed throughout the study will be an RPG; therefore, it is vital to show the common points of the game and role-play. It can be found that interactivity features and aesthetics of Murray exist totally in RPGs. When talking about games, simulations and role-plays as artificial systems and rules, Linser and Ree-Lindstad shared the viewpoint of Salen and Zimmerman as follows:

“They argue that what games and role-plays share is that they are artificial systems, requiring players to interact according to a priori rules in a contest or in conflict. As artificial systems, so the argument goes, they thus set both temporal and spatial boundaries between ‘real-life’ and the artificial life of the game.” (2008)

Another discussion defines animal violence in video games as a factor that creates desensitization on players however, they could not find significant evidence to support the claim (Chittaro & Sioni, 2012).

2.3 UNDERSTANDING ANIMAL VIOLENCE IN INTERACTIVE MEDIA

2.3.1 Representation of Animals in Video Games

It is essential to state that what animals are representing in the video game is necessary in order to talk about the ethical perspective of the subject. For instance, in the game, *Animal Crossing* (2002, Nintendo), a video game developed by Nintendo, animals were represented as town members for players to combine it with the idea of society (Bogost, 2008, p.119). It can be said that animals can be used as a mirror for human life.

There are many different animals used in video games for many different purposes. In their article *The Ethics of Human-chicken Relationships in Video Games: The Origins of the Digital Chicken*, B. Tyr Fothergill and Catherine Flick explored how chickens are represented in video games and what kind of roles they played.

They found out five distinct categories of functions and one of them was about violence. They have figured out that sometimes; much like in the *Zelda* series, *Chuckie Egg*, *Resident Evil* and *Monseigneur Cockburn* the chicken in the game is violent and attacks the player and the player must kill the chicken as some sort of a self-defense act.

Another similar idea comes from chickens being used to train and battle like *Final Fantasy* series, *Legend of Dungeon*, *World of Warcraft* and *Pokémon*. This sort of representation might be explained with utilitarian theories later discussed. Then there are expendables where even neither the chicken nor the player has to attack one another and they still do (Fothergill & Flick, 2015).

2.3.1.1 Animals as avatars

In his paper, *Toward a Definition of Virtual Worlds*, Bell defines avatars as controllable digital forms of human agents (2008). In general, in most video games, the player controls the main character as a humanoid character. However, in this section, there are answers for how the player controls its character as animals.

For instance, in *Lost Ember* (Mooneye Studios, 2019), the player can play generally as a wolf or another different animal species in wildlife to track back the ancient civilization of mankind and explore the past stories in the wild. Some occasions such as if the player wants to pass heightened spaces, the player can replace the wolf body with a bird body and continue his journey.

Another example is *The Wolf Among Us* (Telltale, 2013), where the protagonist is the Big Bad Wolf from famous *Red Riding Hood* and the previous game of Telltale Games *Fables*. The game is set in 1986 when the fable characters are living in Manhattan. The main character is in his human form and works as a detective. He only turns into a wolf

when he gets angry. The exciting thing about the game is even when the character is in his wolf form, the game gives him the choice to hurt someone or not in most cases.

In *Grand Theft Auto V* (Rockstar, 2013), one of the main characters Franklin has a dog called Chop. In most cases Chop is like an NPC, walking next to Franklin, obeying his commands. But in one of the missions, the player also needs to play as Chop and chase someone. Chop can also be customized and taken care of during the game. Rockstar Games even had a mobile application where it allows the player to show affection to and take care of him.

Figure 2.1 Grand Theft Auto V: Choosing to play as the dog Chop, as an avatar.



Source: GTA V (Rockstar Games, 2013)

Other games that the protagonists are animals include *Goat Simulator* (Coffee Stain, 2014); where, as the title suggests, the player acts as a goat living in an ordinary world, doing all the things real-life goats can do. *Depth* (Digital Confectioners, 2014) also is another example of this where the player is a shark that attacks other players or scuba divers. Similarly, *Untitled Goose Game* (House House 2019), as the title suggests, once again, allows the player to control a goose completing different objectives throughout a village.

2.3.1.2 Animals as NPCs

Animals as non-playable characters (NPC) play a significant role in video games. In general terms, those animal NPCs can be classified in two different positions according to their actions. The first one is about questioning whether these animals take any hostile reaction to the player. Because these kinds of animals may reduce the health of the player or even kill them, the player may choose to end their lives immediately to continue their journey in the game. To illustrate, *Grand Theft Auto V* features wild animals in nature such as lions who attack the player and kill them unless they are killed first.

The second position is non-hostile animal NPCs in the game. The interaction between the player and this sort of NPCs depends on the choice of the player. For instance, players can pet the llama in *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* (Square Enix, 2018). *Grand Theft Auto V* again has some interesting examples concerning this. Throughout the game, it is possible to encounter different animals from dingoes to deer, coyotes, and lions.

Although in most of the encountering with predators, players can just walk away from the animals, sometimes, as mentioned earlier, predators might attack and hurt the player. Usually though, unless it is a vehicle accident or a voluntary action, the player does not need to take part in the harming of an animal. Except for two specific side quests with Cletus where he helps Trevor practices his shooting by taking him to shoot inanimate objects alongside deer and coyotes but since it is a side quest, the player always has a choice to stop; although it makes the player get points and improve shooting skills.

Different from all the other examples, *Forza Horizon 4* (Microsoft Studios, 2018) does not let the player take part in any form of animal violence, even if the player encounters an animal and tries to hurt it. It is a car race game so it is understandable why they would not want to harm the animals.

2.3.1.3 Animals as resources

Resources in video games can affect the player's chance to continue the game. Likewise, health points are an indicator that is equal to the main character's life source and it is empowered by specific materials or items which vary from game to game.

Don't Starve (505 Games, 2013) frequently lets the player hunt and gather food but the sole aim of the game is to survive again and the primary way to do it is through animals. Although the game allows the player to hunt animals like rabbits, pigs and birds, it is essential to survival, so it is somewhat justified and also unavoidable in the game.

When the animal in the game is harmless, the game does not mandate it either as a mission or as a means of survival, it is usually only the player's choice to interact with or harm the animals. Although there are some situations where the player is encouraged to harm the animal with experience points or resources to be gained from them. This feature is sometimes included in the game in order to maintain the authenticity of the game. Depending on the nature of it, apart from survival needs which were mentioned many times before, sometimes the game has to include animal violence because the real-life circumstances simulated in the games included those too.

This might be because of historical reasons such as when ancient and medieval times people were frequently hunting. So, in order to write a game concerning those times, one has to include hunting; much like games that take place in the wilderness. For instance, in the world of *Assassin's Creed: Origins* (Ubisoft, 2017), this RPG encourages hunting animals as a resource. Wild animals are located in their lairs or within nature and they contain resources for upgrading weapons and armor. Besides that, these resources can be pelt, feather or leather. Those animal-based materials are useful for improving armors and weapons. Predators in the game act as enemies to the protagonist. If the player kills animals, the game rewards him with animal materials.

Figure 2.2 Assassin's Creed: Origins, hunting animals for their pelt



Source: Assassin's Creed: Origins, (Ubisoft, 2017).

Mostly for survival reasons again; either by surviving the attacks of wild animals or by only eating or using them as any other type of resource such as selling or wearing its skin. In *Assassin's Creed: Origins*, some main and side quests reward the player with experience points (XP) to upgrade his level and some animal resources. For example, the side quest is called Thick Skin, a tanner who is surrounded by wild animals, he needs help to get rid of them. The main protagonist Bayek kills animals and speaks with tanner. Tanner requests some animal-based materials and Bayek hunts hyenas, crocodiles and vultures. At the end of this side quest the protagonist gains experience points and this affects leveling up condition. Of course, the player may not play this side quest but leveling up is crucial to defeat higher level enemies throughout the story and the player seeks more experience points with completing side and main quests. This seeks to lead the player to kill more animals.

Allowing to tame animals is a part of the design of *Assassin's Creed: Origins*. In the game, after obtaining some skill points, the player can have animal taming skills. For instance, if Bayek encounters a lion, he can use his sleep dart at the first step and at the second step, he uses his animal taming skill to tame the animal. Because tamed animals

can be used as companions and help the players in battles, taming skill is useful for combating groups of animals.

2.4 VIDEO GAMES ETHICS AND ANIMAL CRUELTY

2.4.1 Ethics

To discuss video game ethics, first, it is essential to talk about what ethics is and to go through contemporary discussions in ethics. Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus defines ethics as "a system of accepted beliefs that control behavior, especially such a system based on morals," and ethics as "the study of what is morally right and what is not." (2013). Since ethics and morality are concepts that can vary under different conditions, such as cultural circumstances, it is natural that there have been numerous different arguments on the subject. Looking through the theory of ethics from a general perspective, it would be helpful for the current study to use the universal aspects of the matter.

Kraut talks about the aim of studying ethics is to improve the lives of individuals, and therefore its main concern is the nature of human well-being (Kraut et al. 2001). In *Nicomachean Ethics*, which is a compilation of all Aristotle's works of ethics, his notes and lectures, he argues that Eudaimonia may be referred to as the well-being of individuals, is the crucial point of ethics (Aristotle, Ross & Brown, 2009). Aristotle's view and understanding of ethics are considered substantial and has been a discussion of many works. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all argued that to achieve this state of well-being, it is essential to lead virtuous lives. Even though Aristotle agrees with Plato on ethical virtues such as justice, courage, and temperance being complex rational, emotional, and social skills, he disagrees with Plato on one point. Plato thinks that in order to acquire these skills, one must go through a training of science, mathematics, philosophy, and other skills.

In contrast, Aristotle thinks that his understanding of practical wisdom cannot be gained only by learning general rules. He believes that practical knowledge should be obtained through practice. Aristotle explains it by saying that one should practice deliberative,

emotional, and social skills that help them put their general understanding of well-being into suitable occasions (Kraut, 2001). According to Aristotle's opinion, thus the understanding of Aristotelian ethics, only knowing and applying the general rules of ethics is not the only way to achieve wisdom but being able to understand them and use them when necessary is the way to be virtuous.

From this point of view, it can be said that understanding the concept of real-life and gaming and telling them apart is essential. One can know that hurting people or animals is bad and morally wrong and practice this idea in real life and play video games, knowing the difference between virtual reality and real-life. Additionally, the use of animals in video games and how they are represented is a matter that should also be taken into consideration.

When Aristotle's arguments on moral philosophy are based on being virtuous and practicing it, Kant bases his arguments about moral philosophy purely on rationality. He defines rationality under what he calls the Categorical Imperative (CI). Within the concept of CI, Kantian ethics argue that for an action to be accepted as morally right, it has to be right for its own sake. For instance, according to Kant, the will to become rich is good in relation to the end, but it is not a good act in itself (Kant, Heath & Schneewind, 1997, p.70).

Thus, from Kant's point of view mistreating animals or anything that even resembles a living being should be avoided and, therefore, considered unethical at all times because it runs the risk of making that person, the player, a brutal person. Elton explores this by trying to explain that animals represent a specific agent that the player should respect and show moral concern (2000, p.2). In Kant's terms, it would be wrong to hurt any figure that resembles an animal because the act of hurting is a bad act in itself, which would make it against the CI. As stated by this idea, it would be considered immoral to play a video game with violence in it. Even though being universal though fits all, Kant's approach seems to leave out people's perception and understanding of the matter. Another perspective concerns the ethics of actions in games as defined by the games themselves.

Kant (1997, p.31) argues that anything resembling violence should not be considered ethical because violence is not a good act. Then, it can be said that games involving violence should not be played, and the games that involve violence, and people playing them should be considered unethical.

Nowadays, upgraded narrative styles and presented choices for the strategy of video games engage with the player. Thus, every action of the player that is encountered is gaining meaning. (Gee, 2003; Shaffer, 2006). Video games differ from other artistic mediums in that they can give players direct control over moral actions and choices, rather than have an audience who can only sit in judgment on actions and preferences over which they have no control. The agency that video games grant players has the power both to make moral problems much more personal and to test a players' moral capacities.

However, it also presents a host of issues in design with ensuring good selections with depth, nuance, and complexity and in motivating players to engage with the moral content at work. Some RPGs have crudely engaged with ethical issues by using choices clearly labeled "good" and "evil" (Heron & Belford, 2014) with few long-term consequences for either choice (Ryan et al. 2019).

Rauch, in Murphy and Zagal's article, explains that in utilitarian philosophies, people tend to weigh the pros and cons of an action before deciding on it (Murphy & Zagal, 2011). Since in most cases, players chose to use violence in order to get further in the game; this might be one of the main reasons that players justify violence on animals.

2.4.2 Ethics in Video Games

When it comes to an ethical discussion on video games, unlike other narrative audio-visual media, the interactivity of video games would also arguably make the player more or less responsible for the possible consequences (Zillmann & Vorderer, 2000). Although technically fictional, video games do not follow a narrative decided by

someone else; it allows the audience to take part in the experience and create their narrations, which categorize the phenomena as somewhere between real and fictional: the virtual (Aarseth, 2007).

Gooskens talks about what people do in virtual environments and the ethical status of virtual actions, he suggests that people not only do things they cannot do in virtual environments but the things they should not do. He gives *Grand Theft Auto IV* (Rockstar Games, 2008) as an example and talks about how people like being in a city representing a 3D simulation of New York City in which they can move their character in and do numerous activities. These activities include shooting innocent characters and buying weapons to do so (Gooskens, 2010). Again, there are many different ways to look at the ethical discussion of video games.

In the Aristotelian sense, for instance, which comprises a significant part of this paper, it can be argued that what is ethical is obeying the rules of the game and acting accordingly to achieve the goals given (Sicart, 2005). However, this might sometimes mean forming strategies specifically aimed at passing the level or the mission or completing the game while ignoring moral means of those actions (Sicart, 2013).

In games, some actions are encouraged and can be viewed as desirable or good, while discouraged actions can serve as evil or bad. In the game *Fable* (Microsoft Studios, 2004), for instance, some actions are deliberately classified as good while others are evil. As the player navigates around them, they figure out which action belongs to which category and the ethical framework that is procedurally encoded in the game (Zagal, 2009).

In some games such as *Fable* or *Knights of the Old Republic* (Lucas Arts, 2003), the player continually is obliged to choose between good or evil sides within the gameplay. In those cases, the event of moral selection turns into a rewarding aspect of gameplay, and that creates an ethical layer to the playful occurrence (Sicart, 2009).

2.4.3 Players as Moral Beings

In his book *Ethics of Computer Games*, Sicart argues that games are processes. Sicart points out that subjectivization comes within the player and the gameplay interaction. That means every player has unique reflections according to game mechanics. The player brings his culture and embodied presence through the game. Also, Sicart states that the player is a moral being who chooses to play the game voluntarily and reflects his values into the gameplay (Sicart, 2009).

Players are always chasing on accomplishing goals during gameplay. Consequently, they are aware of what they are doing, and they are responsible for their actions. For instance, playing *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (Rockstar, 2004) is ethically challenging from many perspectives. Sicart describes the situation by saying that, firstly, game cheats are needed in order to acquire some exciting items (Sicart, 2009).

Sicart argues that games are designed as ethical systems and that players are ethical entities (Sicart, 2009). Sicart also split ethics into two classifications: “virtue ethics” and “information ethics” (p.109). Virtue ethics is defined as how to be in pursuit of being good as a moral animal, a human being, with moral practices and characteristics. To apply virtue ethics to video games, the act of playing should be put at the heart of this standpoint. Therefore, the player is counted as the subject of the game. Because the player is regarded as a moral animal, when the player starts to play the video game and in need of making choices, the gameplay is considered as a computer game ethics experience (p.110).

Secondly, the game itself is known as being a violent game, and the storyline involves acts of violence that players should engage in on behalf of gameplay; however, players may choose not to engage in those actions and just explore around the virtual world (2009, p.112). Sicart explains where he stands regarding game ethics as follows:

“When defining the player as a virtuous being, I use the Aristotelian concept of practical wisdom, or phronesis, to refer to how a player determines which choices can further develop her virtues as a player.” (2009, p. 112)

Sicart sees the player as an empowered moral agent. This moral agent discovers the values of the game world with the single-player game experience. Also, with making decisions in the game, this process shows the value of choice (2009, p.163). On the other hand, Sicart believes that quarrel is encouraged by the game system that players make decisions more quickly to reach to solve the conflict (2009). Then, it is questionable if giving ethical responses during the action is possible or not.

To conclude, Aristotle discusses that people have the capacity to learn to be virtuous but also to apply them in suitable situations (Aristotle, Ross & Brown, 2009). Sicart thinks ethical discussions in-game analysis should be based around Aristotle's idea (2009). According to the research of Tiplady and colleagues, even though it made them feel uncomfortable, angry, or sad people stated that they would prefer seeing the violent acts against animals rather than not being able to know about the subject at all (Tiplady et al. 2012). In line with the stated ideas, making ethical research on the representation of animal violence in video games does seem reasonable.

2.4.4 Other Theories About Animal Cruelty in Video Games and Ethics

Whether it is ethical or not, killing animals in video games is questionable in the literature. Matthew Elton claims that animals in video games and animals in real life have no difference when it comes to their moral standings. Therefore, the way they are treated should not be different from how they are treated in real life (Elton, 2000).

This discussion resembles to how Kant argues that the reason people should not apply violence on other living creatures just because it might hurt them but also because of what it might do to them. By doing so, an individual runs the risk of making themselves brutal, and being brutal would cause them to mistreat people; therefore, prevent them from acting morally (2000, p.22).

On the other hand, if it comes to player's feeling about killing animals, Keza MacDonald mentions *Monster Hunter: World* (Capcom 2018), a game that invites the player to think more about killing than other video game and that it might be absurd to call killing to pretend monsters unethically but also because it puts the player face to

face with the monster they are about to kill, some people tend to feel uneasy about it. Although, it is necessary in the gain in order to get a set of armor themed after a monster, to fight them over and over again, also known as farming. Furthermore, it is what made her a vegetarian eventually (Macdonald, 2018).

2.5 VIDEO GAMES AS EXPERIENCE

Video game experience seems to be different from any other media experiences. Since human-computer interaction makes the player take chains of actions, the player can intervene with the virtual world. This intervention brings connectivity between the player and this interactive medium. Sicart describes the situation as follows:

“Gameplay is defined by the goals stated by the game system but is actualized by players when playing. Thus, gameplay should be understood from the rules, but as a player experience—creatively engaging activity.” (2013, p.30)

When talking about understanding the experience of playing video games Calvillo-Gómez and Cairns explain it by the theory of puppetry. The game tells stories in order to make the player engage in the game, but the most critical part of the game is the player and how the player participates in the game (2008, p.313). They state their view as follows:

“Puppetry covers both sides of the definition; the name gives a metaphor to which the player can help internalize the experience, and its elements are those that affect the building of the experience.” (2008, p.319)

Engagement in video games seems to define the experience by adding something from oneself. In his article, Veale talks about how the experience of video games are different from other kinds of storytelling because the player may feel responsible for the events and characters from that fictional world. He explains that because games are developed with engagement modes that make the player decide, they feel responsibility since they feel like they have an impact on the game (Veale, 2015).

3. THE ANIMAL CRUELTY ETHICAL ANALYSIS RUBRIC

3.1 METHODOLOGY

To provide answers for whether animal cruelty is ethical or not in video games, gathering three analysis frameworks in one rubric. Fernandez-Vara's game analysis framework, Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek's Mechanic, Aesthetics and Dynamics Framework, and Miguel Sicart's multidimensional theoretical framework is going to be integrated to come up with an animal cruelty ethical investigation rubric. The chapter 3.1.1 where *The Long Dark* is going to be analyzed, which is a realistic survival RPG.

As a realistic survival game, *The Long Dark* presents real-life conditions by giving options to players such as applying violence on animals or can end up the death of our character. Also, having an open world, *The Long Dark* is chosen for the ethical investigation for its projections of wildlife conditions.

3.1.1 Identification of Formal Elements with Fernandez-Vara's Game Analysis Approach

The game analysis should have a unique method, just like other visual mediums have analysis compasses. C. Fernandez-Vara also mentioned that the composition of game analysis includes three main elements conforming three building blocks, which are context, game overview, and formal elements (Vara, 2005).

For producing an ethical game analysis rubric, firstly, it is needed to highlight the formal elements of the game. For the ethical analysis of *The Long Dark*, Fernandez-Vara's formal elements analysis method is going to be used (2005), which is one of the three blocks. The formal analysis examines the involvement of the player through the game and gives unique points of the selected game. Useful factors such as rules of the world and choice design are very beneficial for the ethical investigation around animal cruelty in video games, which is chosen.

First of all, *the rules of the world* discuss the boundaries of the player of the fictional world (2005). Encouraging and discouraging factors that affect the actions of the player can be taken as a discussion point for the analysis. The rules of the world frame player's allowance against the game object to interact during the gameplay. For instance, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* is a challenging fantasy role-playing game that has a strong narrative and exploration elements. This game is also choice-based; this feature ensures the self-expression of the player. The game encourages the player to kill monsters and bestiaries to gain some XPs and materials. However, the philosophy of Geralt of Rivia is represented as killing creatures is the last option for him. In order to survive in the game or to gain some reward, the player can choose to kill monsters. Encouraging the player about killing monsters and the consequence of this action is rewarding, which can be defined as rules of the world.

When it comes to analyzing the sound and music of the game, *diegetic and extradiegetic rules* represent where events happen in the fictional world, which may be defined as diegetic elements (2005). The game soundtrack especially starts in the crucial scenes and if the music affects the motivation of the player that may be considered as an extradiegetic rule. To support this definition with an example, in the world of *Assassin's Creed: Origins*, wild animals located in their lairs or within nature, and they contain resources for upgrading weapons and armor. For instance, these resources can be fur, feather, or leather. Those animal-based materials are useful for improving armors and weapons—wild-life animals in the game act hostile to the protagonist. Thus, in the event of encountering them, they notice the player and start fights. At the very beginning of the battle, an exclusive soundtrack for fighting starts to play. This music can be regarded as an extradiegetic element. Moreover, when the player hurt animals with his weapon, the sound of animals taking damage plays in the background. At the end of fighting with animals dynamic; if the player kills animals, the game rewards him with animal materials.

The third formal element is about the entanglement quantity of a simulation, and implementation stranding of the world is discussed in the relationship between rules and the fictional world (2005). Jesper Juul's *level of abstraction* defines this relationship

(Juul, 2007). The junction between rules and fiction is named with simulation. Juul suggests that more overlapped areas represent higher scenes of abstraction; this shows that harmony is directly proportional to the overlap between rules and fiction (Juul, 2007). For instance, in *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, Geralt of Rivia uses specific spells to kill monsters and animals. Using magic and the existence of magical creatures makes the level of abstraction higher.

Defining the game as a *rule-driven game* or as a *goal-driven game* helps to understand another part of the formal elements of game analysis. Rule-driven games depend on rules that play methods of players are defined with specific procedures (2005). It can be said that strategy games such as *Cities Skylines* (Paradox Interactive, 2015) are rule driven games. While playing rule driven games, the player can follow procedures and proceeds with outcomes of his gameplay. In *Cities Skylines*, the player can produce roads, hospitals, fire stations for the city. However, selection of properties does not have any order. For example, the player can choose to build extra fire station for his city or make other decisions to develop his city. Rule driven games directs the player make decisions continually (Fernandez-Vara 2005).

On the other hand, the goal-driven games, one of the instances is quest-based games are considered as goal-driven games such as if any quest is completed, the player can reach the necessary completion aim of the game, and some rewarding systems are triggered as a consequence of this such success situation.

The last formal element that is taken for the animal cruelty game analysis rubric is *choice design*. Player's choice can be analyzed into five main phases, as discussed by Salen and Zimmerman's book *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (2004). The first phase is information that should be looked for in the game in its current state. The second step is presenting options for the player's choice. Then the decision made by the player in the third phase and the fourth phase are consequences of that action of the player. The final step is the reflection of effects to the player. (2004, p.48). Because RPGs are presenting options to the player, it is essential that the choice design formal element is chosen for the game analysis.

These formal elements are gathered from Fernandez-Vara's analysis method of games that construct the skeleton of the ethical investigation rubric for this research.

3.1.2 Mechanics, Dynamics, and Aesthetics Approach

For the animal cruelty ethical game analysis rubric, it is highly essential that analyzing the systematic structure of a game. To analyze the game thoroughly, the Mechanics, Dynamics, and Aesthetics framework is going to make a systematic structure of this analysis rubric.

MDA Framework is a game analysis method that contains three main branches that include mechanics, dynamics, and aesthetics. This framework builds a bridge between the game designer and player with those three elements (Hunicke et al. 2004). In this analysis framework, games are considered as "designed artifacts," designers make mechanics shape dynamics that arise aesthetics. According to the perspective of game designers, the flow starts with mechanics, dynamic comes after mechanics and eventually reaches aesthetics and to the player. On the contrary, emotions of the player trigger dynamics, and dynamics emerge from the mechanics.

3.1.2.1 Mechanics

First, initial sets of rules can be defined as mechanics. According to this framework, mechanics are not only contained by rules, but also they are similar to a conductor of a train; they are responsible for feeding dynamics. In the MDA Framework paper, Hunicke et al. state that:

"Mechanics are the various actions, behaviors, and control mechanisms afforded to the player within a game context. Together with the game content (levels, assets, and so on), the mechanics support overall gameplay dynamics." (2004)

Affordance to the player is the fundamental element for this definition. For instance, *Battlefield 5* (Electronic Arts 2018) is a World War 2 themed first-person shooter (FPS) game that has specific mechanics that the player can afford, such as shooting, running,

ammunition, respawn points. Those mechanics ensure that game dynamics work as intended.

In the aspect of human-animal interaction in video games, mechanics are connected with behaviors against animals. For instance, hunting animals can be a mechanic for a game. Avoiding a fight with a wild animal is also a mechanic. To sum up, mechanics are the most concrete element, and it can be seen as the base of the MDA Analysis Framework.

3.1.2.2 Dynamics

Dynamics are systems that connect mechanics and aesthetics. Game dynamics are the run-time behavior of the mechanics (Korn & Lee, 2017, p.29). Dynamics are an encouragement for aesthetics and related to the gameplay (Hunicke et al., 2004).

To be clearer about dynamics and gameplay connection, for instance, being medic in the multiplayer mode of *Battlefield 5* is a mechanic. The player can choose to be a medic in the game. With this choice, the player can assist his other teammates; this effort can be defined as dynamics. Supporting teammates is a player's actions that affect the gameplay directly.

Dynamics brings emotions to the player. Even though mechanics make the game playable and more invisible, dynamics are more visible than mechanics. Dynamics can be counted as an interaction between game mechanics and the player.

3.1.2.3 Aesthetics

While playing the game, the player's efforts make emotional outcomes. Every gameplay brings its own emotions, and it is defined with aesthetics in the MDA Framework. For ethical analysis of animal cruelty in video games, emotions are the key factor due to eight essential aesthetic elements that are defined by Hunicke, LeBlanc, and Zubeck (2004). a) *The sensation* is an emotional situation for the player, which ensures enjoyment upon audio-visual experiences in the game. b) *Fantasy* presents the fictional

world. c) *The narrative* defines the story of the game. d) Passing through obstacles points out the *challenge* aesthetics. e) *Fellowship* needs cooperation between players, and competition represents mostly for online games. f) *Discovery* focuses on making the player explore the game world. g) And the last one is *abnegation*, which equals the feeling of playing games that do not make the player overthink at all (2004).

Aesthetics of a game are triggered with game dynamics. For example, one of the main aesthetics of *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* is the narrative, to move forward in the story, the player should complete the main quests, with their efforts in playing.

On the other hand, fantasy is a strong aesthetic for *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* that makes the emotion for the player as he wanders around in a surrealistic world. If giving an example around human-animal interaction in *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, fantastic non-human animals are included in the game and the main character, and some main quests are about killing them.

3.1.3 Sicart's The Ethics of Computer Games Analysis Framework

Applying violence on animals in video games, whether it is true or not, that can be analyzed with Miguel Sicart's ethics of computer games. The ethics of computer games play a significant role in video game analysis for this research. Sicart implies three dimensions of computer game ethics: the game system, the player, and the game design (Sicart 2009). Because every one of video games represents values that contain in their design, they are ethical entities. In design choices and game world simulations, Sicart argues that every single moral value can be observed in both (p.108).

For instance, rewarding "good" choices can be regarded as a function that adds ethical depth to the gameplay experience (Sicart 2009, p.208). However, Sicart does not find enough to define the ethical game design with this feature. Sicart suggests that there are two moral concepts: open and closed ethical design to analyze video games. In the open ethical design, the game design allows the player to bring his values through to the

gameplay (2009, p.214). For instance, the player can choose how to act to conduct relationships between people in *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts, 2014).

In the closed ethical design, that branches in two different aspects that are closed subtracting ethics and closed mirroring ethics (Sicart 2009, p.213). At first, it is needed to explain the closed ethical design. The player interacts with the game world's values according to the closed ethical design. Some adaptation is required by the player to get used to the game's moral values (p.215).

To explain closed ethical design deeply, subtracting ethics allows the player to participate in the ethical design of the game. The ethical stand of the player gets shaped according to what game presents (p.215). In this approach, the player has no chance to influence the gameplay with his unique moral standing, but also, the game makes the player think about the moral values of the game.

With supporting subtracting ethics, for example, some video games have a design that does not allow to show violence on animals, and sometimes, the game punishes the player's violent act on non-humanoid animal objects. For instance, in *Disco Elysium* (2019, ZA/UM Studios), when the detective sees a mailbox, three options are visible on the screen: to pet the mailbox, kicking the mailbox or leaving the area. When the player chooses to pet the mailbox, the detective's animation is similar to petting the dog in real life, and also talking with the mailbox is like talking with a dog in real life. In the event of choosing to pet the mailbox, the game rewards the player with positive morale points, which is a significant indicator of health points in the game. On the contrary, if the detective decides to kick the mailbox, suddenly the health points drop, and the game points out that showing violence to animal-like objects is not the correct action at all.

Figure 3.1 Disco Elysium Video Game “Pat the mailbox” issue



Source: *Disco Elysium* video game (2019).

Apart from that, in *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, "A Dog's Life" side quest, Geralt encounters a bunch of wolves that attack a domestic dog, and saving the dog is the task to complete. If Geralt kills wolves and protects the dog, the game allows him to pet the dog. With Geralt's victory on this side quest, Geralt is rewarded with a key on the dog's collar that opens the door of a house that contains valuable items to complete this side quest. Saving an innocent animal from wild animals was optional due to the construct of the side quest. However, saving a dog in the game is rewarding and reflects the game's ethical values. This rewarding design has subtracting ethical design.

The second branch of the closed ethical design is mirrored game design. The mirrored ethical design does not give any chance to the player to express his values and creativity but also rewards the unethical actions that support the process of the game (2009, pp. 216-217). Sicart exemplifies the ethical choices in *Manhunt* (Rockstar, 2003) to support this definition. In *Manhunt*, the violent acts are especially rewarding in the game; applying more executions brings extra points to the player (2009, p.217).

To sum up, there are five formal elements of game analysis as rules of the world, diegetic and extradiegetic elements, level of abstraction, rule-driven or goal-driven of a

game, and choice design of a game. They are going to be featured with animal cruelty investigation rubric, and it is going to be added mechanics, dynamics, and aesthetics framework for the analysis. Eventually, every framework is going to be investigated around Sicart's ethics of the computer game approach.

4. THE ANALYSIS OF THE LONG DARK

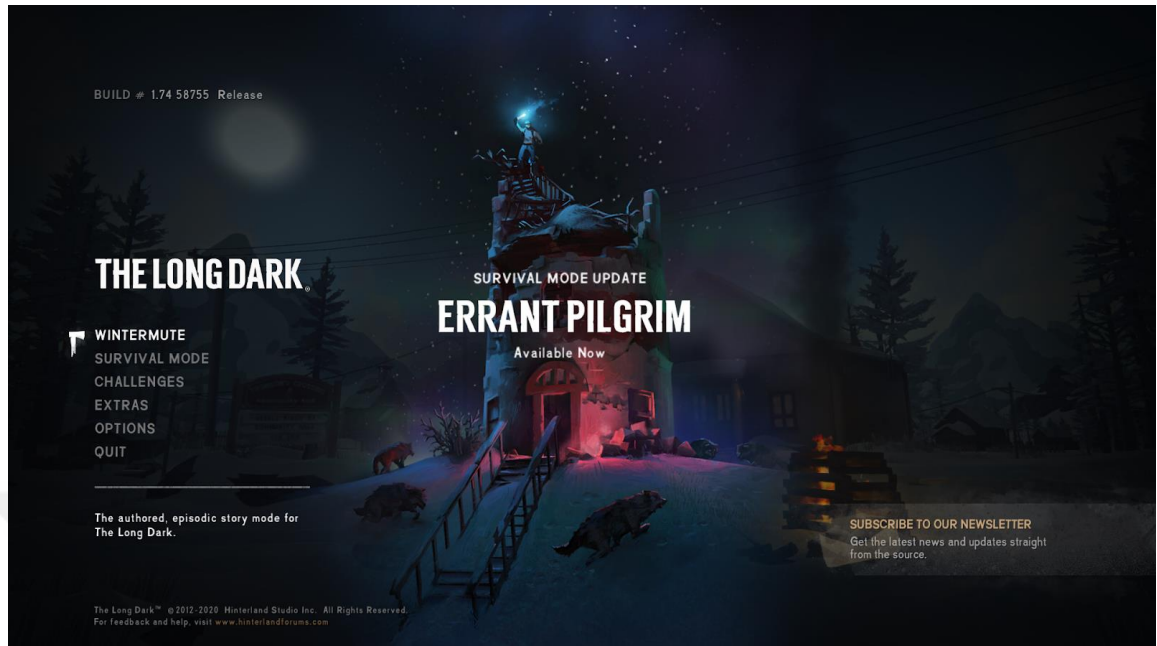
Animal cruelty ethical investigation analysis rubric is crafted with significant parts of game analysis methods, as mentioned in the third chapter. In this analysis of *The Long Dark*, interactions with non-human animals are the focus point. In the first step, brief info is going to be presented about the game. Secondly, formal elements, mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics are going to be investigated according to the animal cruelty ethical investigation rubric. At last, overall design, which makes the way into player-animal interaction, is going to be analyzed by Sicart's ethical framework.

4.1 BACKGROUND AND INFORMATION OF THE LONG DARK

The Long Dark is a survival, open-world realistic RPG that contains three episodes. The game is available on PC, PlayStation 4, and Xbox One. The creators of the game are Hinterland Games, located in Vancouver, Canada. The game was first presented as a Kickstarter campaign, and when the campaign reached the goal, the game was published. The first version of the game was published in 2014.

The game has two modes, one of which is sandbox survival mode, and the other is the story mode. In the sandbox survival mode, the goal is about surviving in the harsh winter conditions and wildlife as many days as possible. On the other hand, the story mode is called "Wintermute," in this mode, the player should complete the main quests to finish the game. Hinterland Games is planning five episodes in total. The first three episodes of the game have been published. The first episode is called "Do Not Gentle," which was released in 2014, and the second episode is called "Luminance Fugue," which was released in 2017. The third episode was released in 2019.

Figure 4.1 The Long Dark Main Menu: Story and Sandbox Modes



Source: The Long Dark (Hinterland, 2014).

The game starts with the main character William Mackenzie's atelier. He is a pilot, and the beginning of the game is a tutorial. The player learns basic controls with instructions on the atelier, and his ex-wife visits his atelier and requests him to carry to northern Canada for a secret reason. After packing up and loading items to the plane, the journey begins. During the trip, their plane crashes in the north of Canada that is caused by a geomagnetic disaster that makes complete electronic tools turn off immediately.

After the crash, the first level begins with the cold winter night in the forests of northern Canada. Mackenzie wakes up in a safe area where any wildlife animals cannot attack the player. Mackenzie realizes that Astrid is missing and begins to search for her. However, he is cold and tired, so he needs to find a closed area to get some sleep. The next day, he wakes up, and he proceeds on to nature, looking for clues to find his ex-wife. As the player continues his journey, the tasks and harsh conditions to survive escalates step by step.

4.2 FORMAL ELEMENTS OF THE LONG DARK IN THE ASPECT OF THE PLAYER ANIMAL INTERACTION

4.2.1 Rules of The World of The Long Dark

Before the story mode begins, the game shows up the player difficulty options on the screen, which affects the wildlife actions in the game primarily. Difficulty levels can be seen as rules of the world. In the Pilgrim mode, the game encourages the beginner level player to survive comfortably in winter conditions and wildlife. Wild wolves never attack the player. However, bears are attacking when the player shoots them, but at the core, the rules make the player comfortable. Likewise, the main character is just going to nature trails.

In terms of difficulty levels, from easiest to hardest, levels are Voyager, Stalker, and Interloper modes. As the difficulty level rises; predators begin showing more aggressive behavior and directing the player to fight with them. Also, the respawn time of the animals is much longer when the player chooses the harder levels.

Besides that, some environmental conditions occur without the player input. These conditions affect the behavior of animals and human-animal interaction as rules of the world of the game. Weather, the day and night cycle, and aurora in the sky exist without the player's action.

First of all, the weather is changing randomly in the game. Sometimes a blizzard may start, and that makes the gameplay harder such as increasing fatigue level or slowing the walk of the player. In the weather condition, human-animal interaction is not changing. On the other hand, day and night cycles affect the behaviors of animals. During daylight, wolves follow Mackenzie, and they don't directly attack him. However, on the sunset, while bears are moving into their caves for the sleep, wolves are becoming more aggressive, and there are chances to attack Mackenzie directly. This condition makes the player self-defensive, and to survive in nature, eventually, the player attacks back at wolves. In this condition, the player cannot bring his moral values to the game; the game offers him to kill predators to make progress in the game.

Figure 4.2 Wolves are more aggressive on the nighttime



Source: The Long Dark (Hinterland, 2014)

In Episode 2, the player is requested to kill a deadly Old Bear in the forest. During the chase, if an aurora appears in the sky, the bear becomes more aggressive and closer to being undefeatable. This environmental condition limits the player and directs them to kill the bear more violently. Being cruel towards animals in a specific situation does not give any chance to the player's moral values, and directly unethical conditions occur during the killing act.

Killing animals in *The Long Dark* is naturally rewarded by the game both in main quests about killing animals or randomly encountering animals in the wild. Harvesting their carcasses rewards the player with meat and animal hide. While meat is filling the hunger indicator, crafting coats with animal hide upgrades the armor and capacity of the inventory of the player. Despite killing animals is a rewarding element, making progress in the story mode without killing animals is discouraged by design. The player should always be aware of surroundings to survive in nature, and he should complete all life indicators or needs in nature, such as hunger, sleep, thirst, and health.

4.2.2 Diegetic and Extradiegetic Elements

Diegetic rules of the game, according to human-animal interaction, are when the player shoots a rabbit with a stone, the player can hear a wounded rabbit's voice. This diegetic rule recalls the player's emotions and values in the game. With this sound effect, the player may not decide to kill the rabbit and release it back to nature.

The player's four leading life indicators such as thirst, tiredness, body temperature, and hunger. When to explain extradiegetic rules according to human-animal interaction in the game, when the player can't hunt enough to fill his stomach and survival indicators are low, dramatic music begins to play. This means that Mackenzie is near to death, and he needs to hunt an animal and cook it. The music directs the player to kill an animal to survive in the harsh winter conditions.

4.2.3 The Level of Abstraction

The level of abstraction, according to the aspect of human-animal interaction, seems on the high level. Because of the difficulty levels, the behaviors of animals may vary to those modes. In the easiest mode, Voyager, wolves do not attack the player. On the contrary, in the hardest mode Interloper, wolves are very aggressive, and when they see the player object, they are triggered and attack the player directly. As the disclaimer is shown at the beginning of the game, wolves are less aggressive in real life than in the game. This difference raises the level of abstraction of the game.

On the other hand, the appearance of aurora makes animals more aggressive that this aurora event is fictional and affects the level of abstraction of the game positively. Wolves and bears turn into green and glow in the dark, and it is a sort of a warning sign to a player if he does not choose to fight with aggressive predators.

In Episode 2, in the quest "You Fix My Rifle?", Mackenzie goes to the maintenance yard and finds the Hunter's Lodge. While he is in the building, the aurora event shows up in the sky, and the player can hear the sound of wolves. If the player looks to the outside, he can see glowing wolves, and he can choose to fight, or he can wait until the aurora passes by. Moreover, to give an example about the level of abstraction, in the

Carter Hydro Dam, when aurora appears in the sky, all of the electronic devices are going to be active, and the player can complete his mission.

4.2.4 Goal Oriented Game

The game's story mode is goal driven. The player must complete the main quests to make progress and finish the episodes. The game is progression oriented, and according to human-animal interaction, the game has animal killing related main quests to complete the story. If the player doesn't do the quest correctly, the story will not make progress, and eventually, the player cannot finish the story.

In Episode 2: Luminance Fugue, the story is formed with the main antagonist, the Old Bear. Mackenzie saves the primary NPC Jeremiah at the end of Episode 1 from the Old Bear. At the beginning of Episode 2, Jeremiah implies that Mackenzie must kill the Old Bear on account of its strength and aggression to humans, and it is risky to make progress in the wild while Old Bear is alive. The main goal of this episode is to kill a predator. The design wants the player to harm an animal and make a progression.

On the "The Best Defense" quest, the player has been requested to find a legendary spear to kill the bear. After finding the spear, the player must repair the spear at the forge and should get back to the quest-giver NPC, Jeremiah. This main quest directs the player to kill a predator.

The quest design offers a mandatory animal killing act. This choice cannot provide to express the feelings or values of the player to the gameplay.

4.2.5 Choice Design

The last element is choice design. The player must survive in the winter conditions. To do that, he must hunt animals and cook them. Sometimes he uses their pelt for clothing. If the player must feed himself, the choice design, according to human-animal interaction, does not give any chance to the player to choose his actions independently. Because there are survival indicators to fulfill them, and the player must hunt and kill rabbits, wolves, moose, or bears.

On the other hand, for example, if the player goes to a location for a quest and encounters a predator such as wolves, he may choose not to fight with them and chase them with a flare or runaway while keeping the distance from them.

Choices and their consequences are connected strongly with each other in the game. The player is always on the alert to survive in harsh conditions, and killing animals mostly depends on Mackenzie's needs. Besides that, if the main quest wants to kill an animal as in the "What One Man Can Do," the player has no choice but to kill the bear.

Depending on the nature of it, apart from survival needs, which was mentioned many times before, sometimes the game has to include the animal violence because the real-life circumstances simulated in the games included those too. The game teaches the player holding hard, real tension in the challenge.

4.3 APPLYING MDA FRAMEWORK ACCORDING TO HUMAN-ANIMAL INTERACTION IN THE LONG DARK

4.3.1 Mechanics of The Long Dark

In the aspect of animal cruelty ethical investigation analysis, *The Long Dark*'s mechanics mostly depend on hunting animals to survive in the freezing nature. Also, after the hunt, harvesting their meat and carcass is another mechanic. The consequence of harvesting meat from an animal is cooking it and fulfilling the hunger. Besides direct killing rabbits, the player can set traps for chasing rabbits.

If the player hurts a predator such as wolves or bears, animals can run from the player. To hunt them, the player trails their bloodstains in the area. What is more, baiting is a kind of a survival mechanic, if the player carries raw animal meat, bears and wolves can smell their odor and chase after the player.

Not only are whole mechanics shaped with killing animals. If the player encounters a rabbit and throws a stone to hunt it, throwing the stone is a mechanic too. In the event of chasing a rabbit, if the player catches a rabbit with throwing the rock, two choices appear on the screen: kill or release. Releasing the rabbit is also a mechanic. Thus, overall mechanics are not entirely unethical; the choice design leads the player to choose not to kill the rabbit.

Figure 4.3 Killing or Releasing The Rabbit



Source: The Long Dark (Hinterland, 2014).

4.3.2 Dynamics of The Long Dark

Dynamics extract after applying mechanics; they are not written into the game. However, dynamics are emerging how the player is playing the game. The main dynamic of the game is to survive. To experience discovery aesthetics, the player moves forward on the map. In every step of the player, he can discover new items and animals to hunt. To do so, the player must survive and keep through scenes.

According to Hunicke et al., dynamics are the run-time behavior of mechanics (2004). So, in The Long Dark, if the player hunts down an animal, harvests and cooks it, and eats it, the hunger indicator rises. Increasing indicators is a dynamic of the game.

If any predator attacks the player, the player gets hurt, and on the game user interface, the player can see health indicators and details about the parts of the body. Another dynamic through the aspect of animal cruelty in *The Long Dark* is getting hurt.

If the player chooses not to kill animals and starves to death, extreme hunger is the consequence of the player's not applying violence on animals. This hunger dynamic may also trigger the player to hunt animals and fulfill his hunger.

4.3.2 Aesthetics of *The Long Dark*

The game aesthetics, according to the player-animal interaction, are narrative, discovery, and challenge. To analyze the game from the narrative aspect, that should be considered as a game as a drama. The player follows a storyline in Wintermute mode, and especially in Episode 2: Luminance Fugue, the big bear, is one of the main elements of the story. For the narrative, the story makes the drama, and the player experiences the drama, according to human-animal interaction, the player must kill the big bear to experience the completion of the storyline.

However, in Episode 2: Luminance Fugue, there is a finding bear spear and killing the bear quest. After the player kills the bear he apologizes as a dialogue, he says sorry to the dead animal and mentions that the bear was such a majestic creature.

Challenge aesthetics is related to survival in nature. The challenge aesthetics can be seen as a game as an obstacle course (Hunicke et al., 2004). Finding a way to survive with hunting animals is challenging. For instance, if the player wants to chase a rabbit to fulfill his hunger, he needs to throw a stone to a rabbit. Because rabbits may escape from the player, there is a chance to hunt it or not.

On the other hand, discovery is another aesthetics in *The Long Dark*. The player is exploring the map while making progress in the game. With exploration, the player may encounter animals in areas, and some of them are predators that can harm the player. Fighting with animals in a new area can be counted as a dynamic to open the door to the discovery aesthetics.

4.4. ETHICAL DESIGN OF THE LONG DARK

The Long Dark begins with a disclaimer that the wildlife in the game does not reflect real wildlife at all. Because the choice of difficulty level affects the reaction and wilderness of wild animals, the game warns the player that the mechanics of the wildlife of the game is not the same as the real world.

The game represents four different difficulty levels. The Pilgrim level is more non-violent against animals. Virtuous players who do not want to kill animals may choose the Pilgrim mode, and in the game design, there is a specific selection for it.

When it comes to discussing the ethical design of *The Long Dark*, the game has closed ethical design; it contains both closed ethical design elements: subtracting closed ethical design and mirroring ethical design. The player can question himself due to killing animals, and sometimes it is not necessary to kill them. However, there are mandatory quests about hunting and killing animals; the player cannot move his values or emotions to the game. The main quest about killing animals addresses that this game has subtracting ethical design.

Moreover, with exploring dynamics and fulfilling hunger dynamics, the player must hunt and kill animals. For instance, sometimes, the player must not fulfill his hunger; he can continue to his next house to loot to find some conserved food; he can pick not to kill a rabbit at all. Instead of killing and cooking a rabbit, the player can choose on his way with hunger. It can be said that the choice design and the game design have mirroring closed ethical design.

The Long Dark expresses the idea of "half-real." The mechanics of The Long Dark allows the player to make a choice to kill animals, which is real action in the real world. Besides being a real action, killing an animal brings us ethical questions which have been argued before. Because quests on The Long Dark have main killing quests to proceed, on the other hand, Mackenzie's character is not really in the real world, and the player chooses his actions in this fictional world.

Since the violence that has been applied to animals is in a virtual world, and the agents do not get hurt; as a result, it is not physical and may not be seen as real. However, as Juul argues, video games are platforms with real rules and fictional worlds; thus, the virtual world is half-real (2005).



5. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

In video games, players might act violently towards specific human and non-human agents according to the roles assigned to them and other agents around them in a world composed of an already decided storyline.

The selected open-world first-person view RPG was analyzed based on the ethical framework of the game analysis rubric. The game was analyzed through different elements on whether they can be considered ethical within the perspective of animal cruelty. In mandatory quests, it shows that the game design has closed mirroring ethical design if it directs the player to animal violence and if it is rewarding as a result. However, while there are alternatives such as, on the low difficulty level, Voyager, killing wolves is a choice. Hunting wolves and making use of the animal as a resource is the player's choice. According to virtue ethics, the selection of the player indicates the morality of the player. If they choose to behave immorally and act violently against the animal, then it points out that they are not behaving ethically.

When it comes to surviving in nature, in real life, people might give up their ethical values. For instance, if an individual doesn't want to harm an animal but she is alone in the forest, and there is nowhere to go; eventually she has not any choice to fulfill her hunger, she needs to hunt an animal in nature. That is the main point that *The Long Dark* reflects to its game design. Surviving after a plane crash is hard and environmental conditions make the player to struggle to survive. Especially from the animal cruelty aspect, the ethical design of the game directs the player to hunt animals to survive in the nature.

Moreover, in the story mode, one main quest directly wants the player to kill an animal. It can be said that realistic survival role-playing games don't allow that the player brings their ethical values. If the player is against animal cruelty, he may leave their values at the beginning of the game and must kill animals to reach out to the final.

To summarize, this ethical investigation gives an idea of how an RPG that contains human-animal interaction, analyzed through an ethical game analysis aspect. Also, this investigation can be beneficial to game designers who would like to design their games

that they have been work on; they can design games without animal cruelty into the respect of the player who wishes to give ethical decisions during their gameplay.

For further research, another good approach may be involving players and investigating how they feel about applying violence on animals. It can be dependent on psychoanalytic methods of how they are playing and reacting specific RPGs, which they are contain animal cruelty related design. During their gameplay, their actions may be scaled with some fMRI tests thoroughly.

It is also crucial to include more games in the analysis as well as using the help of cognitive sciences and analyze what responses each situation evokes in the brain during different conditions of applying violence to animals.

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Cities Skylines. 2015, Paradox Interactive
Chuckie Egg. 1983, A&F Software Pick & Choose
Depth. 2014, Digital Confectioners
Disco Elysium. 2019, ZA/UM Studios
Don't Starve. 2013, 505 Games
Fable. 2004, Microsoft Studios
Forza Horizon 4. 2018, Microsoft Studios *Final Fantasy* series. 1987, Square Enix
Goat Simulator. 2014, Coffee Stain
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Legend of Dungeon. 2013, Robot Loves Kitty
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Manhunt. 2003, Rockstar
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Shadow of the Tomb Raider (Square Enix, 2018)
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