

Video games are currently the most dynamically changing branch of audiovisual arts. These changes concern not only the development of technology, but also the poetics of the game medium. Because of this, game studies scholars constantly search for new languages of description which would give justice to these dynamics.

In my project I see a video game object as our partner in play, the digital Other with whom we form a close relationship. This relationship, however, is not one-directional. The player does not stand in the centre of the virtual environment, having it all at their disposal. They are just one of the elements co-creating the gameworld. Moreover, they are constantly limited by the game object and the rules governing it, which they must obey in order to succeed in the game. Sometimes the game influences the player, showing its agency in a completely random and unintended way, such as through glitches (technical errors) that can throw the player out of the immersive experience of the game – or, in an extreme case, make further gameplay impossible. Hence the moment of gameplay is a moment of constant competition between the human (the player) and non-human (the game) elements. It is characterized not only by its high dynamics and complexity, but also its ephemerality (everything is happening ‘here and now’). Because of these factors, game analysis is a complicated task; to address it, I will refer to Tadeusz Kantor’s ventures into theatre theory, supplemented with posthumanist theories.

The object had a special place in Tadeusz Kantor’s oeuvre. In his plays, the artist placed it as equal to an actor, linking them together in the concept of the bio-object. Here an actor and a theatrical object become a new, symbiotic entity. The object defines the actions and motives of the actor, and the actor not only gives life to the object, but becomes its “living organs” (Kantor 2004). It does not mean that they are linked forever; the actor may leave the object, which becomes only an empty shell, but in doing so they lose their purpose of being on stage. This resembles the situation during gameplay, in which the game and the player form a similar relation. This connection, however, is not stable. Inside the bio-object there is a constant competition between the two elements: the human and the non-human. The player may “beat” a fragment of the game by a skillful use of the controller, but the game may in turn surprise them with an increase in the difficulty level. Thanks to such situations, the new meanings – also narrative-related – are produced in the course of gameplay, co-created by both the game and the player. Here Kantor’s theory also links with posthumanist theory, especially the thought of Bruno Latour: the game and the player are linked in a relational net of connections, in which they constantly act upon and influence each other, thereby creating meaning.

Kantor’s concept of the bio-object, supplemented with posthumanist theories, is able to grasp the complexity and dynamics of the whole process of gameplay and explain how meanings are co-created by the game and the player. In my project I will focus on the three (most interesting in my view) areas – the materiality of the digital game object, the game environment as a platform of communication, and the subjectivities in gameplay. I will examine them with the use of autoethnographic method (personal, but documented experience of gameplay); the case studies of chosen types of games; and the collection of chosen paratexts (from YouTube videos or posts on social media platforms like Tumblr or Reddit). In the last case, I will focus on the analysis of the testimonies of the contact with the game as the Other. Both my gameplay experience and acquired paratexts will be documented through screenshots, recordings and notes.