# Game/r - Play/er - Bio-Object.
# Exploring posthuman values in video game research

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While there are a few publications in the field of game study that focus on posthuman approaches (Bogost 2010, Jessen & Jessen 2014, Wirman 2014, Gualeni&Westerlaken 2016, Fizek 2017), we still need works that would emphasize the ethical foundation of a posthuman approach focused on human relation with technology. Therefore, in this presentation I will follow the premises of critical posthumanism, especially in the work of Joanna Zylinska (2009). As a means of theorizing the player-game relation in dialogue with these premises, I shall introduce the idea of bio-object (Kantor 2004) – which simultaneously emphasises both the equality and the uniqueness of human and non-human actants in the player-game relation.

The idea of the bio-object emerged from Tadeusz Kantor's aesthetical explorations concerning the nature of objects, their meaning, and their place in the surrounding reality. Kantor coined this notion to describe the special relation between the actor and the stage object that is established during the performance of the play. In this paper, I shall make the argument that the notion can also be applied to the situation between the player and the video game. The stage object/video game defines the moves and motives of the actor/player and the actor/player not only animates the object/game, but in fact becomes the living part of it. They are both equal in this qualitative new unity and, as equals, they are both the main conduit of the play's meaning.

However, even if they appear as one, the ontological status of the bio-object is more nuanced. In the context of digital game play, the bio-object is neither the game, nor the player. It emerges/manifests though the actions of both, and connects them on the level of their different materiality (respectively both digital and physical) through performative, meaning-generative processes. In order for this to happen, human and non-human actants need to remain linked but distinct.

In Kantor's theory, this happens because of two reasons: first, the bond between actor and object is not exactly stable. It is based on constant rivalry (Pleśniarowicz 1990): either the actor/player dominates the object and uses it as she wishes, or the object/game imposes itself over the human and confines her movements. Second, it is possible because of the specific status of the Kantorian object, which is not defined by its given, human functionality, but also has the capacity to define and transform human actants when they are using it.

This is similar to the situation in a relational network, as Bruno Latour (2005) theorizes it. Actants operating inside such networks are constantly in the process of being translated. It is

also attuned with Karen Barad's concept of intra-actions (2007), in which agency is not something that actants have and can use, but rather a dynamic force that happens between them. By not differentiate between human and non-human agency, Barad wants to escapes the anthropocentric tendencies that can unintentionally appear when using those terms in traditional understanding, while also emphasizing its transformative power.

Moreover, while constituting the bio-object, the human being does not transcend her human condition, and the game object does not stop being game. In this way, the idea of the bio-object also follows the premises of Zylinska's posthumanistic bioethic, in which she combines Levinas and Derrida to show how being-in-difference would help us to better understand/think about the Other we are facing in a situation of mutual connection and influence.

Therefore, in my presentation I will not only focus on presenting the idea of bio-object from a game studies perspective, but also locate it in the context of critical posthumanism. By analysing the process of creating meanings inside the player-game relation (especially the aforementioned power struggle and the transformative nature of the agency), I will try to show how this approach could be potentially beneficial to our thinking about the player-game relationship. The main point is to answer the question of how the game object, understood as both the partner in play and the platform for this dialogue, and the player create new meanings by transforming each other in the mediations involved in the process of play.

**Acknowledgment**

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