

# A Game Within a Bio-Object(s): Redefining a Moment of the Gameplay

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## **ABSTRACT**

One of the most important premises of the posthuman discourse is the severance with the anthropocentric tradition. The human being has no longer a privileged position amongst other beings. As Levi R. Bryant states in *The Democracy of Objects* (2011): "humans are no longer monarchs of being, but are instead among beings, entangled in beings, and implicated in other beings". This supports Bruno Latour's opinion that social reality is built by human and non-human actors that are assembled together in a relational network. All of them have an equal status and can significantly influence others. The only constant thing in this crucible is its dynamic nature. The video game seems to reflect this way of thinking both on micro-level of the game world and the macro-level of the gaming culture. The player is tangled in a complex and constantly fluctuating network of various relations with different actors. However, she or he does not occupy the central position: the player is only a co-creator of the game reality. Alongside the video game software, she or he actively and performatively creates new worlds and meanings. This collaboration exceeds the limits of the gameplay and it needs analysis in the newly reevaluated, posthumanistic paradigm.

In this context, the critical thinking of Tadeusz Kantor seems to be an interesting theoretical tool to explore the relation between the player and the video game. Since the beginning of his aesthetical explorations, Tadeusz Kantor was deeply interested in the real nature of objects, their meaning and place in the surrounding reality. The real object, or poor object as he called it, held a special place not only in his assemblages but also in performances and plays. The special relation between the actor and the stage object, created during the play, was called bio-object by Kantor. The object defines moves and motives of the actor and the actor not only animates it, but in fact becomes the living part of it. They are both equally important in this qualitative new unity. However, even if they appear as one, the bond between them is not exactly stable. It is based on constant rivalry which, in the end, is responsible for producing new meanings. This dualistic nature of the bio-object seems to reflect the power struggle between the player and the game that emerges in the gameplay. In this very moment, the symbolic bond between the player and

**Proceedings of 1<sup>st</sup> International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG**

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the video game medium is created above the narration and, simultaneously, the space of multitude possibilities has been produced.

In my presentation I want to explore further the complex relation between the player and the game by using the idea of bio-object as a theoretical foundation. The analysis would focus on three different issues. The first one would consider the true meaning behind the visible traces of the player's activity that were left behind in the game space (e.g. the spectral images of the past gameplays, that are in fact the imprints of player's presence in a game environment). That would provide the basic knowledge that is necessary to explain how the player and the video game environment influence each other. These mechanisms are easy to notice especially in the moment of important, binding plot decisions. At first, in these situations the agency of the video game environment is often hidden behind the player's choices. However, the idea of bio-object, connected with theoretical position developed by Actor Network theory, helps to spot all the intricacies of the power struggle between the player and the game. That leads us to the third issue of the analysis: the instability of the connection between actors caused by their rivalry. One of the most interesting examples of this kind of rivalry are glitches. When the glitch occurs, the medium of the video game becomes visible. The illusion of fiction disappears and the player, for the moment, loses her or his advantage. This resistant nature of the video game makes it very difficult to be appropriated by the human player. This situation forces the player to develop subversive defiance strategies that would help her or him to regain the power. It seems to be strictly connected with the strong desire to place her/himself once again in the centre of creation, even if the world she or he conquers is a virtual one. The analysis of this power struggle, presented in case studies, will be the main point of the presentation. It will focus on particular out-of-order, immersion-breaking game behaviours and player's resistance strategies.

## **Keywords**

bio-object, posthumanism, glitch, gameplay

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