ФИЛОСОФСКИЕ НАУКИ

PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF POSTHUMAN COMMUNICATIONS IN VIDEO GAMES: GAMERS, TECHNO-BIO-OBJECTS AND THE MOVEMENT OF AFFECTS

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Abstract. The article presents the philosophical foundations for understanding human-machine interactions in video game reception. A popular form of entertainment – video games are considered in the context of the so-called «nonhuman turn», within the framework of the ideas of posthumanism and New Materialism. Video game reception is determined by the affects circulating between objects and human bodies. The appeal to philosophy of affects and affective states allows us to consider them not only as special psychological states, but also as a communicative means and an essential condition of modern media communications. By performing game actions, gamers enter into a kind of assemblages with game objects and other players, in which affective forces circulate, forming «techno-bio-objects». Each game, each game mission creates an invariant of the player's «build» in a specific situation. The gamer's «body» is formed in relation and through the relationships of other bodies and is a partially organic, partially inorganic formation that arises through building connections with game objects and processes. It is argued that affects can be considered as a special way of perception of game techno-bio-objects. Affect and human intelligence work together in video game activities. The actions of gamers enhance the movements of affect, and the affects themselves can influence the thinking and actions of players. It is concluded that affect is involved in video game reception, which provides new opportunities for human communication and self-realization. Affective communication in video games could contribute to the formation of special human thinking skills by operating with invariants of the possible. Philosophical posthumanism partly explains the video game practices of creating body-object assemblages and affective attunements.

Key words: video games, posthumanism, posthuman communication, techno-bio-object, gameplay, affect, affective communication.

ФИЛОСОФСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ ПОСТЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСКИХ КОММУНИКАЦИЙ В ВИДЕОИГРАХ: ГЕЙМЕРЫ, ТЕХНО-БИО-ОБЪЕКТЫ И ДВИЖЕНИЕ АФФЕКТОВ

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Аннотация. В статье намечены философские основания для осмысления человеко-машинных взаимодействий в видеоигровой рецепции. Популярная форма развлечений – видеоигры рассматриваются в контексте так называемого «нечеловеческого поворота», в рамках идей постгуманизма и Нового материализма. Указывается, что видеоигровая рецепция сопровождается движением аффектов, циркулирующих между игровыми объектами и человеческими телами. С опорой на современные философские и культурологические исследования аффекты и аффективные состояния рассматриваются не только как особые психологические состояния, но

и как коммуникативное средство и существенное условие современных медиакоммуникаций. Выполняя игровые действия, геймеры совместно с игровыми объектами и другими игроками вступают, в своего рода, ассамбля-жи, образуя игровые «техно-био-объекты». Каждая игра, каждая игровая миссия создаёт инвариант сборки игрока в конкретной ситуации. Игровое «тело» геймера формируется в отношениях и через отношения других тел и представляет собой частично органическое, частично неорганическое образование, возникающее через выстраивание связей с игровыми объектами и процессами, в которых циркулируют аффективные силы. Ут-верждается, что аффектированные взаимодействия можно рассматривать как особый способ интуитивного «мышления» в процессах воплощения игровых техно-био-объектов. Аффект и человеческий интеллект рабо-тают совместно в видеоигровой деятельности. Действия геймеров усиливают движения аффекта, а сами аффекты могут влиять на мышление и действия игроков. Делается вывод о том, что движение аффекта в ви-деоигровой рецепции обеспечивает новые возможности для человеческого общения и самореализации. Постче-ловеческие коммуникации в видеоиграх могли бы способствовать формированию особых навыков человеческого мышления с помощью оперирования инвариантами возможного. Постгуманистичекая философия отчасти объясняет видеоигровые практики создания телесно-объектных ассамбляжей и аффективных сонастроек.

Ключевые слова*: видеоигры, постгуманизм, постчеловеческая коммуникация, техно-био-объект, геймплей, аффект, аффективные коммуникации.*

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Introduction

Video games have become extremely popular and are now considered to be a favorite form of entertainment and leisure activities among people of all ages.

In the technical sense, «video games» can be defined as software running on special equipment (computer, game console, portable electronic device), serving to organize a gameplay, communicate with game partners, or act as a partner for gamers. The term «video game» includes both console, arcade, portable, and computer games [5, p. 54].

Games are still perceived as entertainment, as «toys», but attitudes towards them are changing: experimental learning methods involving video games are emerging, video games are becoming part of the real economy, be-coming platforms for distributing diverse media content, and revealing their wide communication potential. Video games are considered to be a means of communication, socialization, demonstration of skills, creativity and even accumulation of philosophical ideas [25, p. 33; 13, p. 22]. Some researchers claim that digital games provoke hot debates among players and develop critical thinking [15, p. 123].

Video games generate and transmit information, ideas, and values. For example, by teaching players certain ways of reacting and acting, video games in the genre of first-person shooters convey certain ideological attitudes to gamers, quest games train the ability to quickly find op-timal solutions, and video games in the genre of strategy can teach players how urban planning works, how to man-age a virtual kingdom.

Moreover, video games provide players with informa-tion not only of a developmental, educational, artistic or aesthetic nature, but also with specific information that gives gamers the opportunity to experience what a person could not feel in real life, and what is very difficult to implement in any other media formats.

For example, the video game «Hærfest» (Breda Uni-versity of Applied Sciences, 2009) give players a general idea of what it's like to be a bat, thanks to the developed synesthetic design, visual indicators, special sounds and color filters. In addition, in the game «Mark of the Ninja» (Klei Entertainment, 2012), a form of synesthetic percep-tion unusual for humans is practiced, when audio infor-mation is transmitted using visual images.

It is symptomatic that video game researchers are in-creasingly interested in the modes of generation and cir-culation of video game information that go beyond only narrative, technical and mechanical game specifics and allow them to detect communication processes outside the sphere of applied human tasks – such as video game interactions that can be attributed to *posthuman commu-nications*.

By *posthuman communication*, I mean the unification of digital, physical and biological entities (objects), as a result of which unusual ways of transmitting informa-tion and nonverbal types of communications are formed in the mutual influences or «intra-actions» (as the philoso-pher Karen Barad writes about them) [9] of these hetero-geneous actors.

This follows in the mainstream of modern humanitar-ian thought, where the concept of the «inhuman turn» is becoming more and more clearly evident, which includes «more-than-human», transhuman and posthuman theo-ries, and trends of new materialism (J. Bennett, K. Barad), speculative realism (R. Brassier, K. Meillassoux), object-

oriented philosophy (G. Harman, L. Bryant, T. Morton), actor-network theory (Br. Latour), theory of affect (G. Deleuze, B. Massumi), animal studies (D. Haraway), theory of assemblage (G. Deleuze, M. De Landa, B. Latour), neurobiological and cognitive theories, artificial intelligence research, new media theory, neovitalism, and others. Although these theories differ in their approaches and argumentations, they are generally united in their rejection of such fundamental logical oppositions as human/ non-human, subject/object, natural/human.

The «posthuman subject» acts as a relative subjectivity without beginning and without end: it is represented only by its uncertainty and possible variants of its own transformation, through connections and interactions with digital technologies and other communication actors. Forms of «individual identity» (represented on Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn, discussion forums, chat rooms, or online games), as well as new forms of network collectives (MUD and MOO, etc.) partially realize this posthuman form of constructed subjectivity, based on the growing relationship between people, media, and technology.

The concept of «posthuman» [3, pp. 177–178] is defined as a hybrid entity in a transitional state between a human and a non-human. Mutation and change occupy a central place in the understanding of the «posthuman», fixing human identity, mediated by technology, and the inevitability of constant modification of the human body, when the «I» can become «different» depending on circumstances, needs and situations. The posthuman «body» is a body augmented by technology, a body in an incessant cycle of reconfiguration and redefinition of what it means to be human.

Posthumanism ideas have recently attracted more and more attention from video game researchers. Their range of interests is wide: from consideration of aspects of the manifestation of the inhuman in video games [33, p. 11–12; 34, p. 105–115] and methods of video game research based on Latour's actor-network theory [18, 24] to the use of the conceptual apparatus of object-oriented ontology (OOO) in determining computer and game objects [10, p. 96–99; 14, p. 4–5].

Researchers are turning to the idea of «cyborgization» as a technological unification of man and machine. Thus, O' Riordan [30, p. 236] discovers that in the video game Tomb Raider (1996), the gamer ceases to distinguish the boundaries between himself and the avatar of Lara Croft's character so much that we can talk about the formation of united «cyborg subjectivity» between them.

In a transhumanistic way, researchers consider game avatars to be an extension of a gamer's body in a gaming environment. Moreover, in video games themselves, mutants, cyborgs, and characters with extraordinary abilities are often found as avatar characters. Controlling such an avatar provides players with new physical and practical opportunities in the game world.

Researchers demonstrate how, with the help of visual effects (for example, when the screen simulates the situation of blinding an avatar or «clouded» consciousness), video games change the way a person perceives their own body – the cyborg-human body [26, p.159–162]. J. P. Gee argues that through game avatars, gamers project their hidden desires onto the game world and the objects in it [17, p. 259]. But he further clarifies that this is a two-way process, and players often unknowingly obey the guidelines and objectives of the game itself.

The posthuman approach is also seen in the definition of video games by researcher Alexander Galloway, as the actions of not only human operators, but also equally the actions of machines [16, p. 5]. Galloway gives an example of cases when a computer does not always respond to human actions as expected, but functions independently in the so-called machine «actions of the environment» («ambience acts») – the moments when a digital game «plays» on its own, without the active participation of the gamer.

As part of the posthumanist approach, some authors turn to actor-network theory (ANT) [13; 19].

In 2008, at a conference on philosophical issues of video games, Jan Bogost made a presentation entitled «The Phenomenology of video games», in which he called for a discussion of the «Alien Phenomenology», which is the possibility «to understand how the myriad objects that constitute videogames relate to one another» [11, p. 32.] Bogost noted that the study of video games has historically unfairly favored an autonomous player who «freely» chooses how to act «inside» the virtual world. The researcher proposed discussing the possibilities of phenomenology in connection with object-oriented and speculative realism approaches in order to identify how video games construct worlds in which gamers are only one aspect in the processes of program functioning.

When considering video games, these researchers propose a very unusual approach: to go beyond human interests and values and instead look at game events from the point of view of the game itself, internal software processes and hardware interactions. This requires the presentation of video games as artifacts that organize the processes of techno-material interactions.

The purpose of this article is to consider the communication capabilities of human-machine interactions in video game reception; based on posthumanism, to define affect in video games as a specific communicative means.

Various philosophical and cultural theories of affect, as well as examples of affective human-machine interactions in video game reception are chosen as the *object of research*. Special attention is paid to video games as the clearest example of working with affects.

The posthuman voices of game «techno-bio-objects»

Video games, as a product of digital technoculture and also as an example of the practical application of digital technologies, modeling techniques and software, function through algorithmic organized interactions between humans and computers. A video game is interesting because it consists of emergent, partly spontaneous processes of implementing strategies and actions of gamers who try to predict, neutralize or circumvent the reactions of the game program and/or other gamers.

Gameplay is not a quality inherent in the video game itself, but an improvisational aspect of the interaction between the game system and the behavior of the players. Gameplay is how a video game is played, being limited by the rules of the game and determined by the dynamic relationships that arise when players interact with these rules. Therefore, the gameplay of a particular video game cannot be understood without the experience of the game itself, without familiarizing yourself with the game system, its dynamics, rules and features.

Video games offer the experience of simultaneous activity/physical action of a gamer and observation of their own activity and its results. This feature fundamentally distinguishes video game communication from spectator communication in cinema, theater, music, literature, etc., where the screen boundary, ramp, platform, binding of a material medium, etc. are always clearly marked. The use of kinesthetic and human physical action in video games, along with visual and auditory channels of perception, makes it possible to actualize the processes of joint activity and the realization of human-machine symbiosis as a powerful communication tool.

A video game is a process of constantly changing game conditions, situations, and results of actions, demonstrating the redistribution of control between a person and game objects, between a player and a machine. The video game device and the gamer are connected by circulating cybernetic feedback loops, in which the player's body combines with technology, expands and reconfigures.

Video games function as a kind of interweaving of human and non-human activities, each of which contributes to the gameplay. For example, players constantly influence the visual representation of the game space and the objects in it because of collecting resources, eliminating enemies, and solving puzzles. In turn, video game objects and events affect players on a cognitive or emotional level, when during the game the user is required to make difficult choices, for example, sacrificing or saving non-player characters or other players.

Players and video games «shape» each other through mutual activation, and each of them would not be able to do this without the activity of the other. Both human and non-human actors take part in this qualitatively new unity. Within this process, there is a continuous struggle over which side, human or non–human, will gain an advantage over the other: either the player/actor dominates the game object and uses it at his discretion or the object/ game imposes certain conditions on the person and restricts his actions in the game.

When a player is skilled at completing game tasks, they can be said to be in a dominant position. However, when the level of the game becomes too difficult to overcome, the initiative passes to the game object. This kind of «rivalry» is especially noticeable when a player tries to violate the programming rules of the game itself, for example, by illegally hacking the game code, using cheat codes, or glitching game failures. If in the first case we are talking about establishing human dominance over the game object, then in the second case we are talking about the self-manifestation of the digital «matter» of the game itself: glitches, failures of unplanned and unexpected stops, etc.

In this sense, the theory of «agential realism» by the American philosopher Karen Barad [9] can be useful for video game research. The gameplay of the game can be interpreted in K. Barad's terminology as a dynamic force of «intra-actions», which constantly changes in intensity, which leads to a reconfiguration of the boundaries between the player and the game and changes in the properties of the player and the game. In what is happening in video games, neither the gamer nor the game makes sense without the very practice of gameplay, as a space for their joint intra-actions. Meanings are not conveyed by the video game and are not contained in the game itself, but are formed through the game in «material-discursive» practices (Barad) because of the joint activity of a person, gaming devices and software objects.

The player and the game objects exist within a complex, multi-agent network of relationships, where autonomous actors define each other's boundaries and properties on a material level, working together but remaining relatively independent.

As a result, video games organize the action of assemblages of forces and intensities, special states of varying and mutating «protosubjectivity» [20, p. 8], which belongs neither to the player nor the machine, but to a network of interacting components. This can be explained from the standpoint of *relational philosophy*. [21; 22; 27; 28], that is, a theoretical form of reflection that asserts the interconnectedness and embeddability of all entities in the joint processes of becoming. Relationality indicates the mutual influence of dynamic systems formed by people, machines, protocols, technologies, society and culture.

In video game activity, a gamer, having fully mastered the mechanics of the game, ceases to pay attention to both

the small details of interface management and the external attributes of game images and begins to instinctively interact with the game world, as if the interface were a continuation of its bodily embodiment, a kind of «prosthesis».

The video game researcher J. Janik, using director T. Kantor's idea of a theatrical «bio-object» and the concept of «intra-actions» by K. Barad, calls this state a video game «bio-object»: «the bio-object is neither the object/ game nor the actor/player. It emerges due to the actions of both, and connects them on the level of their different materialities (respectively both digital and physical) through performative, meaning-generative processes (or intra-actions). In order for this to happen, human and non-human actants need to remain linked but distinct <...> «constituting the bio-object, the human being does not transcend their human condition, and the game object does not stop being a digital object» [23, p. 1–2].

Thus, posthuman communication makes it possible to «feel» the voice of the game's «techno-bio-object». Video game analysis helps to understand how the game object and the player do not only influence each other, but form a symbiosis in the process of creating «meanings» in video game communication.

Moreover, although the moments of this machine-human symbiosis are temporary and unstable, they are embodied in the form of a gaming experience with real results and consequences. There is no shortage of examples of such material-discursive practices: this includes gameplay itself, and all kinds of creative interactions between fan-gamers within the framework of fan fiction, fan art, amateur videos, and even activities in the form of comments from gamers on forums and discussion boards on the Internet.

It can be assumed that video game communications are not limited to the implementation of in-game tasks and meanings. Communication in video games is also built through material-discursive practices and intra-actions, and its result is the constant updating of objects and processes in order to realize the possible, which is in the potency of its embodiment. The processes of reaching the possible for gamers and game objects are a significant part of the content of video game communication. Differentiation of the possible, manifested through gaming activities, can be considered as a value, in addition to the narrative, technical, human, and semiotic aspects of video games that are familiar to researchers.

In this case, game meanings and feelings are not those that arise in a person's mind and drive his gaming behavior. These «meanings» are formed within procedural interactions and intra-actions. Their source is a kind of «voices» of gaming protosubjectivities – «techno-bio-objects» that are realized not only in the processes of video game activity, but also in the network communications

of gamers, interactions between gaming and other industries, and more broadly, in cultural processes in general.

Thus, in video game communications, a new form of player «subjectivity» is being formed, which does not belong to the player or the machine, but to a network of components – techno-bio-objects («gaming protosubjectivity»).

At the same time, the implementation of the techno-bio object allows us to see that the video game and the player remain independent entities with different characteristics. It is the condition of simultaneous connection and separation that makes it possible to enhance gaming emotions, make game meanings valuable for gamers, and, most importantly, become a vehicle for affective states that form within procedural interactions and video game intra-actions.

In video game research, affects are increasingly considered to be the driving forces of video game communications [8, p. 4; 31, p. 87–102].

Therefore, affects and affective states are of significant interest when considering the posthuman aspects of the functioning of video games.

Affective communications of video game techno-bio-objects

The concepts of «affect» (affectus, affectio), «feeling» and «emotion» are often used interchangeably [7, p. 173].

Nevertheless, affects can also be understood as a special elementary psychological state, different from emotions and feelings. So, according to the French philosopher G. Deleuze and the French psychoanalyst F. Guattari affect entails the change and «intensity variation» (force) that occur when bodies collide or come into contact. Affects, they claim, are neither feelings nor experiences (i.e., basic emotions), because «they exceed the strength of those who go through them» [4, p. 72].

Philosopher Brian Massumi sees affect as a force that determines what is potentially possible for any person or event. He points out the connection between bodily manifestations and the movement of affect [29, p. 96].

A number of researchers point to the circulation of affects between bodies as a place of knowledge production, considering affective interactions as a special way of cognition [1; 2; 32].

The circulation of affects is especially noticeable in video games, in which the content of communication is determined not by texts or audiovisual images, but by the «movements» of affects.

By completing game tasks, players emotionally capture the affective charge of what is happening, «reading» the general mood, getting into a particular situation.

The movement of affects creates associations for gamers from various game situations, a kind of «skills». Play-

ers rely on the experience of moods they have already experienced, but they replenish it with a new set of skills, which increases their playing abilities and makes it possible to respond to events faster and more successfully.

These skills are quickly remembered, both on a cognitive and somatic level. For example, the ability acquired by a gamer to precisely press the button of the game control interface on the screen (as in the game World of Warcraft (2004–2023)) can be considered a somatic skill that requires users to coordinate the movement of various muscle groups well.

Nevertheless, analytical skills are also involved in game practice. When, for example, the gamer, based on knowledge gained from experience of the game, quickly decides where to take his character in case of danger. For example, in the challenging video game DOOM Eternal (2020), relying on both somatic and analytical skills helps gamers achieve victories.

Cognitive and bodily skills work together in video game reception, while being driven by affective states. Affects materialize in the experience through game actions. This is not a mechanical learning of the game skill by gamers, but its active formation in the process of meaningful play. For example, in the massively multiplayer online game EVE Online (2003–2021), a character is constantly learning new skills. The game requires gamers to upgrade their skills, react to their opponent's actions in a timely manner, and think flexibly to increase their skills.

The player's physical body is complemented by an avatar, game objects, and expansion controllers. As a result, video games give gamers a unique opportunity to experience transcending their natural body. This method of forming a human-machine «body» as an extension of networks and connections beyond the surface of human skin «allows us to define the posthuman gaming «body» as a set of biocybernetic relationships» [6, p. 15].

Becoming an assemblage of forces and affects, the player ceases to be a self-sufficient individual during the game, becoming involved in the functioning of software and algorithmic processes and becoming part of video game «techno-bio-objects» that arise and disintegrate during the game. This is a kind of invariant of the player's assembly in a specific game situation, which disintegrates («reterritorialized» in the terminology of G. Deleuze) when the game is over.

This kind of affective communication provides a person with the conditions for experimenting with their potential. It can be assumed that a video game affective action materializes something in the experience that cannot be expressed by other means. Posthuman affective communication functions in the space between material and virtual realities, where there is not a transfer of meaning / meanings, but an exchange of invariants of possible actions, which opens up a pre-experimental experience of the potential and the feeling of the realization and materialization of its invariants in reality.

As a result, affective gaming interactions enrich the video game experience, and its results, preserved in the memory of gamers, can further influence human behavior, thinking and consciousness.

Conclusion

Therefore, affect plays an essential role in video game reception, which implies the development of special methods for evaluating and understanding the work of affects.

Affect and human intelligence in video game activity are interdependent. Cognitive acts of gamers enhance the affect circulation, but affects can also influence the thinking and actions of players.

Affective communication in video games should not be limited to the sphere of gamers' entertainment, but could contribute to the formation of special human thinking skills by the invariants of the possible.

Philosophical posthumanism partly explains video game practices of creating body-object assemblages and affective attunement processes. The relevance for modern media practices of the theory of «agential realism» by the philosopher K. Barad, her concept of «intra-action», relational approaches in philosophy (W. James, B. Massumi, E. Mening) and the philosophy of affect (G. Deleuze, B. Massumi) are confirmed by the practices of video game reception.

Further scientific research is required to find and develop additional methods for analyzing posthuman affective communications.

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