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# Phenomenological Aspects of Video Game

Aleksandar Filipović

Faculty of Law for Commerce and Judiciary in Novi Sad

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## Author Note

Aleksandar Filipović  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1097-2079>

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Corresponding author: Aleksandar Filipović

E-mail: [sasha.filipovic@gmail.com](mailto:sasha.filipovic@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

In the era of digitalization, globalization, and the fourth industrial revolution, human knowledge is rapidly increasing every day, and the amount of information and data being generated is growing at unimaginable scales, transcending all barriers and becoming crucial in almost all spheres of life. Digital technologies and computers are increasingly permeating culture and everyday life, transforming traditional cultural forms and practices and creating space for profound anthropological changes. This process reaches its peak in the phenomenon of video games, which, although initially conceived as a means of entertainment, have evolved into a dominant form of virtual culture. Video games have quickly surpassed their original purpose, becoming a ubiquitous phenomenon that contributes to the creation of new sociocultural practices and the expansion of anthropological identity. With their unique virtual-interactive tools, video games open up space for a new understanding of creativity, life, freedom, art, and aesthetic values, while carrying significant political and ethical implications. Like any new phenomenon, video games are a field with insufficiently developed and systematized scientific theory, interpretation, and understanding of basic concepts. Science needs to focus on the ontology and epistemology of video games to better understand their essence and place in the contemporary world, providing answers that only the philosophy of video games, with its metaphysics as a way of understanding and describing the era of video games, can offer. This work is an attempt to identify and understand certain phenomenological and noumenal aspects of video games, thus making an additional step towards the systematic philosophical study and deconstruction of video games, one of the most important phenomena of the modern world.

*Key words:* video game, phenomenon, noumenon, eidetic aspects, philosophy, ludology

## Phenomenological Aspects of Video Game

### Introduction

Video games are the most elaborate and imaginative digital worlds and environments. As such, they contain the greatest potential for immersion and presence in the digital world. The combination of this nature and the competitive online component gives purpose and function to this digital world, as well as an additional reason to spend more time there. It is also important that in most online video games, a session cannot be paused because the game is played with other people, either as collaborators or competitors. This creates a tendency for excessive playing, leading many to point out its harmful effects on mental and physical health (Bjelajac and Filipović, 2020a). According to the Statista Market Forecast, the video game market is projected to reach a revenue of \$282.30 billion by 2024. Many who suggest a consistent relationship between the use of violent video games and an increase in aggressive behavior use this data to highlight the powerful global video game industry that influences society's indifferent response, employing latent corrupt practices (Bjelajac, 2008 & Bjelajac, 2015).

The phenomenological “processing” of video games is not a simple task. This is not only because video games and their mystical and sometimes esoteric nature elude any sense and purpose other than the purpose of play and playing but also because a significant part of the ontological corpus of video games lies far beyond human sensory and phenomenal experience. Thus, a researcher who insists on the phenomenal aspect of video games might find that what they are looking for is mostly not where they expect it to be.

The phenomenological processing of video games is in a certain way hindered, or at least made uncertain and challenging, by the expected and upcoming symbiosis of video games and ubiquitous artificial intelligence (AI) (see more: Filipović, 2023). People fear the unknown, they fear everything they cannot understand, predict, or control, especially phenomena that exist beyond their will. This

psychological-mental framework can be applied to the question, "Can AI be evil?" And if it can be evil, can its malevolence contaminate the video games it helps create? The dilemma is not simple because the omnipresence of artificial intelligence brings a series of profound ethical and legal questions and dilemmas that require careful consideration and the establishment of responsible frameworks (more in: Bjelajac, Filipović, Stošić, 2023).

A video game, as an ontological extension or imago of the game, is a pre-human entity; its ontological being was not created by humans, nor did humans play any role in shaping or determining its characteristics. Upon gaining consciousness, humans found the game on the planet as a self-existing divine remnant, which, like its creator, is an end, meaning, and purpose in itself. A video game, like any other game, is much more a matter of human impulses than human senses, and especially the human mind (see more in Kant, 2008). Being older than humans and having neither a beginning nor an end, the game is a phenomenon "beyond purpose" (Fink, 1984).

A video game is, more than any other game, an extra-human activity; it represents a game that merely plays itself through humans because humans are the only entities capable of initiating the game and giving it life (see more: Fink, 1984, p. 292)<sup>1</sup>. For Gadamer, the human player, in relation to the game, is always in the background. In the relationship between humans and the game, humans are insignificant; they are merely tools, mere playthings of the game, which uses them to play the game and be played within it (Gadamer, 1978):

"Gadamer strips humans of their playful subjectivity to proclaim the game as the subject of the play. It is not the human who plays, but the game that plays, using the human as its toy. Since everything is at the level of given phenomena, the game is possible even without a player, and the appearance of humans in the game does not give the game any specificity or quality.

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<sup>1</sup> "The game is an exclusive possibility of human existence. Only humans can play. Neither animals nor gods know how to play."

The human is merely a medium through which the game unfolds, and in this sense, the human is, concerning the game, on the same level as waves, toys, or a ball..." (Grlić, 1975).

Video games have definitely changed the world and continue to do so. According to data from a competent website (WebTribunal), as of March 2023, there were 831,000 video games in at least 30 genres worldwide. The number of players who played all these games slightly exceeded three billion (Statista, 2024). Today, a year later, the number of released video games has surpassed one million, and by the end of the year, the number of players could reach 3.3 billion (TrueList, 2024). By changing the world, video games are also changing humans and their ontological being, adapting them to future times and preparing them for the dystopian challenges of destructive alienation that inevitably awaits humanity and human society in the not-so-distant future. Before our eyes, an era has seemingly formed on its own, which needs to be properly described from the beginning, starting from its "is." Heidegger wrote that "metaphysics establishes an epoch by providing a foundation for the epoch in its essential form through a particular interpretation of being and a particular understanding of truth" (Hajdeger, 2000, p.60).

In the times of digitalization, globalization, and the fourth industrial revolution, the total knowledge possessed by humanity is dramatically increasing every day. The amount of information and data being generated in every field of life is becoming unimaginably large, overflowing all barriers and becoming essential in almost all areas of life. Computer and digital technologies are beginning to actively penetrate culture and everyday life, significantly transforming the design of many traditional cultural forms and practices, thus creating space for far-reaching anthropological transformations (Fabian, 2007). The undeniable pinnacle of this powerful intrusion "into everything" is the phenomenon of video games as a form of undeniably dominant virtual culture in the digital world, although video games were initially conceived, created, and focused solely on entertainment functions. Video games have quickly and easily outgrown this format, establishing themselves everywhere as a multifaceted phenomenon. They already

contribute to generating new sociocultural practices and expanding the boundaries of anthropological identity (Branco, 2012). Due to their unique virtual-interactive procedural tools, they become a space for the explication of a new understanding of creativity, life, freedom, artistic, and aesthetic values, while also carrying significant political and ethical meanings. At the same time, "video games carry many cultural and anthropological risks and uncertainties, fundamentally deconstructing current concepts of human corporeality and personal uniqueness, avatarizing and blurring the self-identity of the person playing" (Belyayeva, 2020).

Like all emerging phenomena, video games are, proverbially, an entity with a very underdeveloped and insufficiently systematized scientific theory, interpretation, and understanding, even of elementary concepts. The task of science is to, in order to properly determine the place and essence of video games, "descend" into ontology and epistemology and there begin seeking answers that only the philosophy of video games, with its metaphysics as a way of understanding and describing the epoch, can provide. In our case, the epoch of the video game.

This task is significantly hampered by the public perception of video games, which is today unacceptably biased, still mostly situated in the sphere of the childish, unserious, and entertaining, heavily stigmatized by moral panic and many psychological and ethical, regularly negative prejudices and modern, often dystopian myths (Filipović, 2016). At the same time, the philosophical, scientific, and academic discourse worldwide still treats video games with a degree of suspicion, even disdain, often considering them too profane a subject for serious study. Consequently, on the one hand, the contemporary cultural and anthropological significance of the video game phenomenon, and on the other, the persistence of many scientific prejudices and everyday stereotypes, highlight the importance of a philosophical perspective on video games in the context of cultural and human dimensions.

## **The Phenomenological and Noumenal in Video Games**

Given the speed of changes, adoption of new technologies, and density of innovative events in the digital sphere, video games seem to have originated in the distant past. Initially, what we now call video games were by no means intended to be games, especially not for entertainment. Video games represent a young form of media, technology, or artistic expression, with just over half a century of real history. The academic study of games as a systematic field of research is even younger – it has been less than 25 years since the opening of the first scientific and educational center in Denmark specialized in video games. Nevertheless, within this brief period, Game Studies has already established a tradition of philosophical consideration of video games through the lens of specific realism and object-oriented phenomenology associated with it. The main focus is on the distinctive characteristics that differentiate the experience of video games from that of the real world, and the separation of the world into "virtual" and "real," or as we have put it in several works, the experience of inhabiting worlds "on this or the other side of the monitor" or another display where the game unfolds. The experience of video games allows for discerning the flexibility and plasticity of human nature, which philosophers had only hinted at before the emergence of this entity.

The current development of playing video games retains, in ontological and epistemological terms, as a necessary constant, the enormously growing segment of serious gaming. In recent decades, the use of the internet, pushing the development of video games as software and hardware, has acquired a universal social and ethical form but has also, as an unintended consequence, provoked numerous ethical and legal dilemmas by opening up space for the misuse of human intimacy, which until recently was a blatant taboo topic (Bjelajac and Filipović, 2020b). Besides fulfilling the fundamental impulse of human beings, the instinct to play, what has conquered the global media space are at least three ludistic-media phenomena: online entertainment, social networks, and the mobile phone as a channel for ICT connectivity. All three phenomena "significantly enhance the

representational possibilities of video games and emphasize the social function of video games as a new, dominant interactive medium and its influence on user activities in physical environments, as well as the ability to manage the impression users leave on other members of social networks and society in general" (Filipović, 2022).

In our previous work, we have been free to provide our own definition of games and video games, as well as the essence of video games, a definition that included the description of phenomena that were not known at the time when the classics of game theory were giving their still unsurpassed definitions.

As a reminder, our definition (as stated in Filipović, 2022) characterizes a game as:

*Voluntary activity of conscious beings that, due to the needs and demands of the game entity, consciously shifts into a spatially and temporally delimited altered reality within physical or virtual realms, adhering to predetermined game rules or spontaneously creating them on the spot, as permitted or envisioned by the game entity.*

Unconditional acceptance of altered reality and adherence to game rules are mandatory conditions of the game, with the goal of the activity being the gameplay itself as actual or meta-activity in obligatory meta-reality. The aesthetic, ethical, and logical reception of the game entity as a phenomenon temporarily situated in "meta-reality within actual reality" is based on altered adequate strategies that create the game world with an unprecedented relationship between player, life (reality), and game. This reception, when it comes to games with sine qua non meta-activities, is equally susceptible to sensory as well as higher cognitive and receptive forms of aesthetic and ethical processing.

The existence of the game entity is limited only by the existence of the player and the game itself, and the game entity is given and unchangeable to the extent that it is also given and unchangeable as a social and psychological being of each player and their imagination as the ability to combine elements of the game entity and images and

value judgments from their own experience to create representations, concepts, and ideas that do not exist in their previous experience, often not anywhere else.

A video game is something different, although primarily a game and an inseparable part of the social and ontological corpus of the existence (being) of the game. To begin with, we offer our definition of a video game, which states that

*A video game is a game created in software form, played with the aid of corresponding hardware, which represents a designed ethical object in which one or more players achieve its objectives through their own gameplay experience, using embedded mechanics and rules of the game that cannot be altered by the will of one or more players outside of the already embedded values (op. cit).*

However, further studying the specificities and unique aspects of video games, we are inclined to offer a more abstract definition focused on interactivity and the relationship between players and the game world:

*A video game is a game in virtual reality, object-oriented towards the player, without whom it cannot exist. Through interaction with hardware, the player activates pre-defined game software. Together, within the game's own space and time, they create its alternatively real world, whose perceptual existence is displayed on the screen of an electronic device. The virtual entity remains confined within the parallel world of the game alongside the player's avatar, with neither entity aware of the other or dependent upon each other (op. cit.).*

When discussing video games as a form of human creativity, it's time to contemplate them from the perspective of classical phenomenology, which requires us to address the routine phenomenological question: What is phenomenal in the phenomenology of video games? This question can temporarily be simplified to inquire about what distinguishes the experience of playing and experiencing video games within the worlds of video games from other human

experiences. Specifically, whether there are differences between the given video game per se, as a noumenal entity that transcendently exists independently of how the player apprehends it, and the experience of that video game as perceived by a specific player, thus experienced phenomenally, sensorially, within the limits of possible experience, albeit not the totality of human experience, but rather the experience of the specific player who begins playing that particular video game (see more: Kant, 2012).

Studies of video games can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of this subject and contribute to a broader understanding of human nature. To embark on such research, we must first reassess our intuitive understanding of video games and get to the heart of their subjective experience. This is not easy, primarily due to the inconsistency of theoretical positions and the differing priorities of various authors. Therefore, one of the most important assumptions that must be respected should be the "assumption of equal ontology" (Zdanevich, 2019). No part that constitutes a video game is ontologically more significant than others. Video games are not merely software, nor are they commands executed by a processor, nor solely cultural phenomena, nor specific existential experiences, but rather all of these simultaneously and as a whole.

As a young field of study, game studies should not allow itself to favor any particular perspective—all are equally important and valuable in answering the central question: "what are video games really," or whether they "are," what they truly "are," and why they "are what they are" (op. cit.).

Traditionally, philosophy presupposes at least four key areas or disciplines: ontology, epistemology, logic, and ethics (Smith, 2018). Ontology is the study of being, i.e., what something is and how and why it "is" what it is. Epistemology is the study of knowledge, i.e., how we know what we know. Logic is the study of formal correct reasoning—how we conclude. Ethics is the study of right and wrong—why we consider something right or wrong and how we should behave. In the last century, phenomenology has undoubtedly been added to this highly informal list. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of

Philosophy, phenomenology is the study of our experience—how we perceive what we perceive and how we build and accumulate our experience:

Basically, phenomenology studies the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity. The structure of these forms of experience typically involves what Husserl called "intentionality", that is, the directedness of experience toward things in the world, the property of consciousness that it is a consciousness of or about something. According to classical Husserlian phenomenology, our experience is directed toward—represents or "intends"—things only *through* particular concepts, thoughts, ideas, images, etc. These make up the meaning or content of a given experience, and are distinct from the things they present or mean (Smith, 2018).

In our endeavor to provide an answer, we should start from Heidegger's rigorously exact definition of everything that "is," particularly from his insistence on the actual character of everything that exists (Hajdeger, 2000)<sup>2</sup>. Consistently paraphrasing Heidegger and applying his ontological views to entities that did not exist in his time, our video game is indeed a thing. Heidegger reminds us that, "According to Kant, the whole world,... even God Himself, is such a thing, a thing that does not itself appear, i.e., a thing in itself" (op. cit.). However, unlike things that exist and appear, such as, as Heidegger says: "hammer, shoe, axe, clock" (op. cit., p. 10), a video game is a thing "that does not appear" until its phenomenological features are presented to the player and their senses, and until those features become a somewhat coherent object of perception for the player. In this sense,

"The task of phenomenology is not to ascertain how something is a natural object, how it is an object of our surrounding world,...

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<sup>2</sup> „Im Ganzen nennt hier das Wort Ding jegliches, was nicht schlechthin nichts ist“ (Broadly speaking, the word "thing" here denotes everything that is not simply nothing)

nor to debate the reality of a thing, i.e., what makes something precisely that thing. Phenomenology does not aim at investigating the perceived as an existent in itself, but rather emphasizes the perceivedness of a certain existing thing, or more precisely: the perceptibility of a specific object. The manner in which something is perceived structurally differs from how it is represented in consciousness. By pointing out what is perceivedness, i.e., what is "perceived as such," it refers to the mode of existence of that which is perceived (and not to the mode of existence of the object of perception itself). What is perceived does not belong to the perceived thing but to the structure of perceptibility, to perception itself, i.e., intentionality." (Heidegger, 1979, p. 53, in: Uzelac, 2009, pp. 46–47).

Therefore, a video game, as a thing, in the sense of Heideggerian hermeneutic-phenomenological ontology, emerges only when it, the game, manifests its phenomenological attributes to the player's consciousness—image, sound, and in the last decade, some haptic effects like game controller vibrations, chair movements, or entire gaming setups. There is no guarantee that the video game will appear to the player as envisioned and created by the game developers or as experienced by another player. Instead, it will appear and present itself to the player as he perceptually experiences it and constructs his own world of the video game, independent and sovereign in his gaming experience.

In this sense, one of the issues with our previous definitions could be an overreliance on the noumenal aspects of video games and their mystical essence. Besides the necessary noumenal aspect that video games have, and the beautiful noumenal impressions and experiences of playing and residing in the worlds of video games that they offer people, video games also possess their very pronounced, sometimes profane, but always indispensable phenomenological features and contents. Furthermore, we must necessarily view the noumenal in video games as a variable extension and enhancement of the phenomenal, without which the existence of a video game is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive and execute.

To contemplate and consider the noumenal aspects of video games, therefore, those aspects which we experience through higher, super-sensual cognitive receptors, we must first delve into the sphere of the sensory and build a clear and undisputed stance on the phenomenological aspects of video games. Phenomenological constructions of anything material are, with perhaps the exception of contemplating the sublime (Kant, 2011, in: Filipović, 2022)<sup>3</sup> and always, the older phenomenological aspects necessarily precede noumenological constructions. However, it is worth noting (or perhaps just a hypothesis that needs proving) that the process of this transition is not necessarily reversible. If in the genesis of experiencing and contemplating gameplay we had to start from the first perceived, i.e., the phenomenological, in order to even reach the noumenological, for the reverse journey there might, or at least could, exist a shortcut that does not necessitate returning to the phenomenological within the being of the video game. To clarify further: if a player of a video game, having transcended the phenomenological aspects, reaches the heights of noumenological aspects of experiencing the video game, they do not necessarily have to regress back to the phenomenological aspects. In the margins of the hypothesis (Szirmay-Kalos & Magdics, 2022) concerning the "curvature" of the meta-entity of the video game being, once the game, processed through sensory, i.e., phenomenological receptors, is "loaded" into the player's cephalus and remains there long enough to inundate their memory units, there may no longer be a need for any phenomenological update or input to continue playing. There are works (Dudai, 2002; Dudai, 2003) referring to "synaptic consolidation" as the process of transferring and storing data from short-term to long-term memory in humans, claiming that "within the

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<sup>3</sup> In video games, the beautiful is experienced sensorially, while the sublime must be experienced through transcendent receptors. Confirmation of this thesis can be found in Kant, who writes that the sublime aesthetically differs from the beautiful just as the soul's yearning for the otherworldly differs from the mind's dwelling in the worldly realm: in the beautiful, the mind "calmly contemplates," revealing the purposiveness ("purposiveness without purpose") of individual objects in nature (the worldly realm), while under the influence of sublime objects, the soul enters a state of "agitation," "disturbance," and "frustration," feeling that it progresses towards "absolute totality," yet sensing it can never fully grasp it."

first minutes or hours after acquisition, an engram (memory trace) is encoded within synapses, becoming resistant to external disturbances." This concept has been explored and explained in eidetic theory in general, particularly in eidetic theory of video games (Behrenshausen, 2007), concerning how the experience of a video game "beyond the monitor" residually affects the player's psyche and their real world "this side of the monitor," changing the player and adapting them to the world of the video game with newly created phenomenological and noumenological aspects.

It is entirely certain that there is a possibility for a player to continue the game within themselves and in their personal memory, even when the computer or other device on which the game is played and the results displayed is turned off. This is because sensory experiences of the game and gameplay, once processed in the player's brain, evolve into irreversible noumenological mental categories that can remain in the player's memory for a very long time, perhaps even forever. This process is possible because throughout evolution, humans developed imagination "as a special and blessed power of the soul which, along with hope, enables man to separate himself from facticity, from the inexorable thus-it-must-be..., to temporarily forget misery and to withdraw into happier dream worlds" (Fink, 1984, p. 292). Fink further wrote that "imagination, inspired by hope, provides privileged access to the possible as such, it is dealing with what could be and has the power of opening of immense significance. Imagination is simultaneously dangerous and timely good for man – without it his existence would be comfortless and without creativity. And finally – although it runs through all areas of human life, imagination resides in a privileged way in play" (op.cit).

What gives stability and meaning to a video game as a phenomenological object that ontologically unquestionably 'is', is the way it communicates with each player individually through sensory pressure. Through this sensory pressure, the video game acquires substance, while its display on the monitor gives the video game its form. Milan Uzelac (2009) writes:

"Contrasted with psyche (ψυχή) as the form (εἶδος – μορφή) of life, whose highest form is intellect (νοῦς) and which manifests as foundation, purpose, and meaning (έντελέχεια), stands physis (φύσις) as a mode of existence, as the manner in which a being exists and acts. Metaphysics should have as its subject matter what is in the 'background' of the existence of physis and is found in psyche, which is designated as foundation, purpose, meaning. In this way, the question of being posed by individual consciousness equates with the question of how that same being sees itself when it finds itself in a position to thematize its existence, further confirming that there exists a distinction between the act of knowing and the concrete being as the object of knowledge."

The synthesis of matter and form gives rise to the concept of video games as "things" that equally correspond to natural objects and useful items, thus we obtain an eidetic<sup>4</sup> character and eidetic aspects of the video game. This is a new field in defining the video game because it no longer represents just a narrative or a system of conditional transitions governed by rules actualized in the simulation process, but it begins to represent a new entity, transforming into something that necessarily enters into interaction with another self<sup>5</sup>. Getting new and different phenomenological and noumenological aspects that necessarily vary from player to player, as different as their perceptions are, but also as different as the representations of individual subjects that can interact quite differently with the same video game. In this sense, we should talk about the phenomenology of video games, describing how the game world that appears on the screen each time redefines the forms in which we perceive both the world of the video game and our own world and the world around us.

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<sup>4</sup> Eidetic (from Gr. eidos – form, essence): relating to the essence of things, their meaning. The term is often used in Husserl's phenomenology: eidetic reduction is a method of reflection involving the infinite variation of representational content (e.g., ideas of emotion) in order to isolate the essence of things (the universal character of emotion as momentary incapacity to adapt to the situation).

<sup>5</sup> The self (personal identity, selfhood, individuality) represents the complete essence or ideal spiritual magnitude that, as a super-concept, encompasses the conscious self in terms of completeness.

In video game research, this problem is known as the problem of simultaneous involvement and conditioning of gameplay experience (Salin, n.d.). On the one hand, during gameplay, the player must be engaged in a process without which the game becomes a boring and uninteresting activity; on the other hand, the player must be aware of the conventionality of this process. Due to the duality of conventions and involvement inherent in the gaming experience, the boundary between the player's world and the game world becomes blurred, but it is blurred because the world of the video game insists on this blurring. The possibility of discussing the boundary between the player's world and the game world is ensured by the thesis of player involvement, according to which the world of the game itself must assume a place where the player can and must identify with their avatar and accept the agreement by which the alternatively real world of the video game and the real world of the experience of the video game intermingle and intertwine, so that the player and their avatar in the player's imagination can exchange places, with total identification of the player with their own avatar being the ultimate goal and limit of the implementation of the real player in the alternatively real world of the video. This allows us to repair a certain area of mediation, namely the area that simultaneously belongs to the player and the game world, and it is precisely this area of mediation that is also the boundary between the player's world and the worlds of the game.

To determine what is common in the experience of existence in these worlds, we need to consider two concepts from Husserl's phenomenology: "horizon" and "point." In Husserl's phenomenology, the "point" refers to the intentional object – what consciousness grasps from that object and towards which consciousness is directed. In consciousness, the point is situated against the background of the horizon, which represents the set of all possible perspectives of all other intentional objects. The point itself contains an inner horizon – the set of all other perspectives from which knowledge can encompass the intentional object (Merleau-Ponty, 1978, pp. 115–116).

Husserl wrote about virtual worlds, referring to those worlds that were accessible to him: the world of the stage in theater or film, and the world of the book. Adapting Husserl's ideas to the present time and applying his teachings to the world of video games, we consider that by participating in activities in a virtual world, the video game player objectifies not the monitor, stage, or page, but the action that unfolds on the screen, stage, or page. Therefore, the world of the video game must be highlighted as a distinct realm. Of course, Husserl neither wrote nor thought about the world of video games or other virtual worlds, but the mental categories he discussed fit perfectly within his phenomenological theory. During interaction with the world of video games, knowledge makes transitions between points in a very conservative, closed scheme, which aligns more with the world of books than with real worlds.

### **Phenomenological ontology and eidetic aspects of video game**

Although the term "eidetic" was not explicitly used in classical philosophy in the way it is used today, classical philosophy, especially Greek and German philosophy, provides foundational concepts and perspectives for considering eidetic aspects. Some classical philosophers and their philosophical concepts (Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer) can be relevant for understanding phenomena related to identity, perception, and reality, which are key elements of eidetic analysis.

Phenomenology, developed by Edmund Husserl (1975a), plays a leading role in understanding eidetic aspects, although Husserl did not address eidetics in the context of video games or digital media. Husserl developed the concept of fundamental phenomenological transcendental epoché, known as transcendental phenomenological reduction, which involves the suspension and setting aside of assumptions and previous judgments to arrive at pure phenomena (Husserl, 1975b). Through this process, the subject directs attention to the phenomena themselves without prejudice. This approach can be useful in the analysis of video games, where players may apply a

similar strategy by disregarding their prior knowledge or expectations to explore the phenomena within the game.

Husserl's theory of intentionality (Dreyfus, 1982) describes how consciousness always "goes beyond itself" toward objects. This concept can be relevant for understanding how players experience virtual worlds in video games. The player's consciousness is directed towards virtual objects in the game, even though these objects are merely digital representations.

Husserl used eidetic reduction to approach the essence of things, isolating their essential characteristics. This method can be applied to analyze video games by exploring the essential characteristics of games or virtual worlds, regardless of their particularities or individual instances. Although Husserl did not directly consider video games or digital media, his phenomenological methodology and concepts have broader applicability in the analysis of human experience, including digital phenomena. Studies using Husserl's approach can provide deeper insights into how people perceive, experience, and engage themselves in video games.

The connection between eidetics and phenomenology is rooted in their shared exploration of human experience and perception. Eidetics delves into eidetic memory, where individuals vividly recall and detail mental images or memories of visual, auditory, and emotional elements—especially within the dynamic realm of video games. It seeks to unravel how these memories form, why they vary among players, and how they adapt to different contexts.

Phenomenology, conversely, is a philosophical discipline that scrutinizes firsthand phenomena or experiences. It probes deeply into how individuals perceive and engage with their surroundings, how these experiences shape their understanding, and how different types of experiences interconnect. The interplay between these fields lies in their mutual emphasis on experience and perception. While eidetics focuses on the nuances of memory and mental imagery, phenomenology casts a broader net over the intricate tapestry of human experience and its perceptual dynamics.

Exploring the eidetic dimensions of video games unveils the profound richness of experiences this medium offers. From forging deep emotional connections with virtual characters to navigating intricate virtual landscapes, video games captivate our senses, stimulate our memory faculties, and ignite our creative imagination in unforeseen ways. Eidetic elements within video games highlight players' innate ability to construct vivid, detailed mental images or memories of visual, auditory, and often emotionally charged elements encountered during gameplay. This concept is anchored in the notion of "eidetic memory" or "photographic memory," illustrating the vivid and meticulous recall of visual stimuli.

Central to these eidetic aspects is the role of visual memory itself. Engrossed in gameplay, players encounter diverse terrains, architectural wonders, character archetypes, and immersive environments that leave indelible imprints. Whether navigating through an enchanted forest in an adventure game, traversing a dystopian urban sprawl in an action-packed saga, or exploring futuristic vistas in a sci-fi epic, each visual element etches a lasting impression in the player's psyche. This visual imprint transcends mere recollection; it becomes an active tool for strategic decision-making and spatial orientation within the game world. Players frequently harness their visual memory to navigate complex terrains, uncover hidden pathways, or decipher adversary strategies. Moreover, visual memory aids in pattern recognition and tactical planning, empowering players to anticipate and effectively respond to dynamic gameplay challenges.

Beyond visual landscapes and encounters, sound design emerges as a pivotal catalyst in shaping the eidetic dimensions of video games. Ambient soundscapes, combat reverberations, character dialogues, and thematic musical motifs collectively contribute to crafting the game's ambiance and evoking emotional responses. Distinctive sound compositions often become hallmark signatures of the game, fostering profound emotional connections between players and the game's narrative and characters. Iconic theme melodies or evocative sound effects serve as potent triggers that immerse players

deeper into the game's narrative fabric, eliciting visceral emotional reactions.

The interactive interplay between players and video games frequently cultivates intense emotional bonds and enduring memories. From adrenaline-pumping triumphs to poignant narrative twists that evoke profound emotional responses, players continually navigate a spectrum of emotional experiences during gameplay. These poignant moments crystallize into lasting memories that players passionately share and debate, underscoring their profound impact within the gaming community.

In essence, the eidetic aspects of video games not only invoke powerful experiences but also underscore the profound influence games wield over perception, memory, and emotional engagement. Through the lens of visual and auditory memory, games transport players into expansive realms and narrative landscapes, reshaping their understanding of reality through an interactive medium uniquely their own. Eidetic facets encompass not only emotional responses but also the enduring bonds players forge with games, leaving an indelible mark on their gaming journey and communal discourse.

## **Conclusion**

In this context, it should be noted that player engagement with the world of video games is still far from a satisfactory level. This is because the aesthetics of video games have not yet achieved the level of immersion in the world that, for example, books—literature in general—offer. The world of video games imposes too many given elements, which, like a curse, block or even disable the player's imagination and condemn them to adopt forms devised by the game creators that necessarily appear on the screen. Hence, there are sometimes feverish efforts to apply noumenological experiences—not phenomenological ones—of the game world and experience, akin to reading a book. This may sound problematic to some, but hasty conclusions should be avoided. Given that game creators cannot achieve the level of player engagement comparable to the experience

of reading a book through phenomenological aspects, they strive to incorporate instances in the aesthetic channel of connection at a higher cognitive level than just visual and auditory senses.

In constituting the aesthetic experience of a video game, both senses are naturally indispensable. However, if the story ended there, the sensory processing level in video games would be identical or similar to that of movies or comics, and such an aesthetic experience would sometimes be poorer than that derived from reading a book. The reason is that reading, although excluding the sense of hearing, involves imagination and the formation of one's own world of the book, which, in the case of individuals with developed imagination, can be very rich. When you start reading a book, you form images of the characters in the book yourself, just as you form images of landscapes and everything else. When you start playing a game, you already have characters, landscapes, and everything else devised by someone else, not for you but for a player with average emotional and all other types of intelligence.

Therefore, the aesthetic experience of a video game must be based on completely new aesthetic strategies that enable a unique relationship between the player, life (reality), and the game—a relationship that may be closer to logic than aesthetics at times. This is because the experience of a video game is often where human senses lose ground and give way to higher forms of cognition and experience. The aesthetic reception of a video game itself is limited only by the existence of the player and the game. In this regard, the intentions and strategies of game creators are just one pole in the game of ambiguity, where the creator (or artist) assumes and creates imagined aesthetic strategies for the video game for any reason. However, it is only the player who truly experiences the aesthetic interpretations of the creator's intentions on the field, in the virtual world that represents both a parallel and alternative world, in flagranti, as they want and can. This is because the "free play of ambiguity conditioned by the rules of the game of ambiguity" (Uzelac, 2004) is present both during the creation of the video game and later during its experience by the player. The right of the video game creator to

create aesthetic strategies (Eco, 1973) is equal to the right of the player, and even the observer, to experience the game in their own aesthetic way and to structure the game's elements in each of their specific interpretations.

Here, it is about the sovereignty of the video game entity to sovereignly create aesthetic strategies and experiences within the gameplay without interference from anyone. Such sovereignty does not exist in any other game.

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## Fenomenološki aspekti video igre

Aleksandar Filipović

Pravni fakultet za privredu i pravosuđe u Novom Sadu

### Sažetak

U doba digitalizacije, globalizacije i četvrte industrijske revolucije, ljudsko znanje se rapidno povećava svakog dana, a količina informacija i podataka stvara se u nezamislivim razmerama, prelazeći sve barijere i postajući ključna u gotovo svim sferama života. Digitalne tehnologije i kompjuteri sve više ulaze u kulturu i svakodnevni život, menjajući tradicionalne kulturne oblike i prakse i stvarajući prostor za duboke antropološke promene. Ovaj proces dostiže svoj vrhunac u fenomenu video igara, koje su se, iako prvobitno zamišljene kao sredstvo zabave, razvile u dominantan oblik virtuelne kulture. Video igre su brzo nadišle svoju prvobitnu namenu, postajući sveprisutan fenomen koji doprinosi stvaranju novih sociokulturnih praksi i proširenju antropološkog identiteta. Sa svojim jedinstvenim virtuelno-interaktivnim alatima, video igre otvaraju prostor za novo shvatanje kreativnosti, života, slobode, umetnosti i estetskih vrednosti, dok u sebi nose značajne političke i etičke implikacije. Kao i svaki novi fenomen, video igre su oblast sa nedovoljno razvijenom i sistematizovanom naučnom teorijom, tumačenjem i razumevanjem osnovnih pojmova. Nauka treba da se posveti ontologiji i epistemologiji video igara kako bi se bolje razumela njihova suština i mesto u savremenom svetu, pružajući odgovore koje može da ponudi samo filozofija video igara sa svojom metafizikom kao načinom razumevanja i opisivanja epohe video igara. Ovaj rad je pokušaj da se identifikuju i razumeju određeni fenomenološki i noumenološki aspekti video igre, i tako načini jedan dodatni iskorak ka sistematskom filozofskom proučavanju i dekonstrukciji video igre jedne od najvažnijih pojava savremenog sveta.

*Ključne reči:* video igra, fenomen, noumen, eidetički aspekti, filozofija, ludologija