
Political Ludology – The Aporias of Ontological Discrepancy Between Game and Politics

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Abstract

The paper explores the concept of political ludology by analyzing the aporias of the ontological discrepancy between games and politics in the context of video games. Although video games belong to the corpus of fiction and simulation, they simultaneously generate significant political implications, shaping perceptions of power, identity, and responsibility. The paper problematizes the way video games function as spaces for political narratives, moral dilemmas, and existential questions, questioning the boundaries between games as free, autonomous spaces and politics as an organized order of power and obligations. The opening chapter analyzes what is political in political video games and how political elements in video games seemingly converge with the eternally given and unchanging ludological concepts of games. By exploring moral dilemmas and responsibilities, the author questions how political video games place players in moral choices and how these choices impact subjective responsibility. The focus is on the ethics of decision-making, the boundaries of free will, and the ways in which the player, through interactive experience, becomes a political subject. The author also examines the paradox of freedom in video games, contrasting "freedom from" the video game with "freedom for" the player, arguing that the latter is merely a permission, an illusion offered by the creators. It analyzes how the concept of political freedom is translated into the ludological system of rules and mechanics, and to what extent the player can transcend these boundaries. The concluding chapter raises the question of the ontological status of the video game in relation to reality. It discusses whether the political dimension of a game remains confined to the realm of fiction or has the ability to transform the player's perception of the real political order. The paper addresses the boundary between simulation and reality, as well as the potential of video games to redefine political discourse beyond their virtual sphere.

Keywords: video games, ludology, politics, ethics, freedom

Introduction

Contemporary society is shaped by complex power relations that manifest through various political and cultural practices. In this context, game and politics seem to operate as two seemingly separate spheres of human activity. Game, in its essence, implies an autonomous space of freedom, fiction, and experimentation, while politics is defined by hierarchical structures, rules, and the struggle for power. However, the boundary between game and politics is not as clearly defined as it seems at first glance. It is precisely this confrontation that opens up a space for analyzing the ontological discrepancy between these concepts, which is the main subject of this paper.

Game, in its classical definition, involves an activity that takes place within clearly defined rules, in a symbolic space that is separated from everyday life. Johan Huizinga (1992) highlights the game as a fundamental activity that precedes culture, emphasizing its autonomy and ritualistic dimension. In contrast, politics, in the classical tradition from Aristotle to contemporary political theorists, is defined as an activity directed at organizing communal life and managing power. However, contemporary forms of

political action often adopt the aesthetic and performative aspects of games, further complicating the boundary between these two spheres.

Political ludology, as an interdisciplinary perspective, explores how game structures are reflected in political processes, but also how political dynamics influence the shaping of games. This analysis requires a re-examination of the foundations of both game and politics, posing crucial questions: Is politics a form of game? Can a game be a form of political practice? How does the ontological discrepancy between game and politics manifest in contemporary social structures? These questions are not merely theoretical but have concrete consequences for how we understand contemporary political phenomena such as populism, media manipulation, and digital politics.

One of the elements that connects game and politics is the concept of rules. In a game, mandatory rules create a framework within which symbolic struggles unfold, while in politics, rules that are not consistently mandatory regulate institutional order and shape the boundaries of political action. However, while the rules of a game are necessarily known to all participants and remain unchanged during the game, political rules are subject to interpretation, change, and abuse. This flexibility of political rules allows players within the political field to manipulate the system for their own benefit, making politics take on characteristics of a high-stakes strategic game.

The aim of this paper is to explain the aporias that arise at the intersection of game and politics, with an emphasis on the contradictions of their different ontological statuses. Through the analysis of theoretical sources, examples from popular culture, and political practice, the paper will offer a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between game and politics, opening space for a new interpretation of political reality through a ludological lens. We will especially focus on how digitalization and media spectacularization transform political games, erasing the boundaries between fiction and reality.

In the following chapters, we will first define the concepts of game and politics, examining their philosophical and sociological foundations. We will then explore how elements of the game appear in political processes, from rituals and symbolism to strategy and tactical manipulation. Special attention will be given to the phenomenon of the gamification of politics, in which political actors use game mechanisms for mobilization, propaganda, and shaping public opinion. Finally, we will examine the consequences of the ontological discrepancy between game and politics, with a particular focus on contemporary forms of political games in the digital age, where political reality increasingly overlaps with virtual spaces and simulations.

Through this analysis, the paper will demonstrate that the game is not just a metaphor for politics but, under certain conditions, can be an integral part of it, pointing out that political power is not manifested exclusively through laws and institutions, but also through symbolic, performative, and ludological forms of interaction. Accordingly, understanding politics through the lens of the game opens up new possibilities for the critical analysis of contemporary political phenomena, emphasizing the role of fiction, narratives, and performance in shaping political reality.

What is political in political video games?

What is political in political video games, and when, otherwise apolitical per se, does a video game become political, and why does it become political? Is a political video game political per se, as an ordinary game is not, or should the politics of a political video game be proven? And what is, ontologically

speaking, the source of the political in political video games? The answer to all these questions should be unified: the source of the political in political video games, and the reason why a video game becomes political, should be – politics in the video game. We define politics in the broadest sense as an activity through which people create, preserve, enforce, or change the rules by which they live. As such, politics primarily refers to a social activity that is, on the one hand, essentially linked to the existence of diversity and conflict, and, on the other hand, to the willingness to compromise and reach consensus.

Given the classical definition of video games (Huizinga, 1992, p. 31), the question arises whether politics has a place in video games, or in games in general? This is due to the kind of nonsense or ontological and dialectical opposition between the concepts of game and politics. Kant, in his discussion of games, primarily noted “freedom from goals, needs, and the struggle for survival.” According to Kant, a game is “free from responsibility and consequences” (Kant, 1975, p. 109), i.e., everything that constitutes the essence of politics and the state, without which no known civilization is possible. The *raison d'être* of every politics is interest, while the *conditio sine qua non* of every game is the absolute absence of interest, except the interest of the player to play, or to have the game played with the help of the player (Gadamer, 1978).

Ludic puritans and theorists of the purity of the game (see Sicart, 2014) believe that politics has no place in the worlds of games, but the thousands of popular political games that exist and are played every day, in flagrante, say – yes. Politics may not have a place in games, but there are no mechanisms to prevent politics from using games to achieve its goals. The creators of political video games believe that politics, with its issues of power, authority, social relations, and conflicts, is an essential part of the human experience. Throughout history, societies have been shaped through political decisions, wars, revolutions, and economic systems. Games that explore these aspects, such as simulations, strategy games, and narrative games, can provide understanding and reflection on the world. However, it is not certain how this small war between ludic puritans and political utilitarians will ultimately end.

Recently, Statista, a reputable global statistics platform, published the results of its research on players' willingness to play political video games. In the article by Florian Zandt, titled "Should Video Games Be Political?" from January 2024, it is stated that “today, independent games produced by marginalized creators increasingly contain subtle and not-so-subtle messages related to political causes. But are people really interested in having games be part of political discourse? Statista Consumer Insights shows that the majority of the online survey population in six countries does not think of political messages as part of the video game experience. An exception is India, where thirty percent of respondents said that games should play a role in addressing social issues. In other top gaming markets like the US, Germany, the UK, Mexico, and Brazil, only between 12 and 16 percent of gamers think video games should comment on social and political topics” (Zandt, 2024).

This discussion becomes somewhat philosophical, and some might even say scholastic, because if art exists in the artwork (see Heidegger, 2000), then politics exists in political acts, meaning in every individual political action performed by humans. If we want to determine or define the political in political video games, then we must look for the political within each individual game, primarily in the actions and messages of the player's avatars that inhabit political video games beyond the screen, or in the quantum of political messages in all video games. If, to paraphrase Heidegger (2000), the artist is necessarily the source of the artwork, and together they form art, then the politician is necessarily the source of the political

act, and together they form politics, and, in the context of this paper, a political video game. There is no political video game untainted by politics. One might think that this wordplay is unimportant and meaningless, but that is not the case. If the politician is the source of the political act as the politics we have described – an activity performed by people – then we should look at who these people are in the narratives of political video games, the bearers of political messages and decisions beyond the screen, or the sources of the political in the video game. These people are the political avatars that, through gameplay, the players of political video games become. The moral and, generally, character traits of these avatars are defined by the narrative of the video game beyond the screen, but also by the traits of the players on this side of the screen, as these traits can influence the political choices that gameplay allows in the games.

How are the character traits of avatars, as inhabitants of the video game world, created, and who creates them? Who has the greatest influence on them? The commissioners of video game production, whether they are publishers, investors, or other organizations that fund or commission the creation of the game, have the greatest influence on the creation of the moral profile of avatars, and thereby on the morality of the political within video games. In the video game industry, commissioners often set strict goals and guidelines that shape the moral characteristics of characters and player decisions. Commissioners frequently set goals in line with commercial interests, attempting to make the game as appealing as possible to a broad audience. In some cases, this leads to the creation of avatars that align with popular moral and political norms to make the game attractive to various groups of players. Commissioners, especially in the case of large publishers or international distribution platforms, have specific requirements regarding censorship and game content. Some commissioners, particularly those associated with political or ideological movements, demand that the moral characters of avatars in the game reflect their views. This influence is greater in games with a specific political or ideological message, such as games that explore themes of totalitarianism, the fight for human rights, economic injustice, or political revolutions. The commissioners' requirements can also be tied to social responsibility when games are developed with the intention of raising awareness about certain ethical and political challenges, such as human rights, social justice, or environmental issues. In this case, the moral characters are designed to show how political decisions affect people and society, and players may be confronted with situations where they must make difficult moral decisions. The commissioners of video games, like film producers, have a decisive influence on the moral traits of characters in political video games, especially when it comes to commercial interests, cultural norms, regulatory requirements, and ideological goals (see: Filipović, 2013a). Commercial, political, and social factors often shape what The source of the political in political video games can be the author's intent to explore or present political ideas, reflections of the real world through themes and events, the systemic rules of the game that simulate political processes, or the interpretation of the player and the broader societal context. The political in games does not have to be explicit; it can result from the interaction between design, narrative, and the freedom players have to shape their own experience within the game. Philosophers like Hannah Arendt (1956) and Carl Schmitt (1932) emphasize that the political is inherent in human action and relationships. Games, as a medium that simulates social and human interactions, often inevitably reflect political dimensions.

Political video games carry with them a unique ability to interrogate, represent, and model political ideas, processes, and ideologies. However, if we make an analogy to Heidegger's question (Heidegger,

2000), who asks, "What is art in the artwork?" and ask, "What is political in political video games?", it requires a philosophical examination that goes beyond a superficial analysis of the themes and other aspects of political video games and delves into the essence of interactivity, the representation of power, ideology, and ethics. This question touches on the ontological nature of games, their epistemological role in understanding politics, and their ethical dimension in shaping social discourse. The ontological dimension of the political in video games raises the question: what, in the experience of the player beginning to play the game, makes it political? Is it their theme, the mechanics that simulate political processes, or the way players engage in shaping political narratives? The answer often lies in the interaction of these three elements. Political video games are not merely political stories or stories about politics; they are politics themselves, as they are designed to model relations of power, governance, and social dynamics, using mechanisms offered by the appeal of video games to ensure the widest acceptance of political messages.

Political video games often carry explicitly political themes. These are simulations of state power, resource management, elections, and international relations. Games like *Democracy* place the player in the role of a leader balancing various interests to maintain political stability. Here, the political is present in its traditional form: decision-making, relations with voters, managing conflicts. The political in games is often found in their mechanics. Simulations like *Civilization* or *SimCity* allow players to engage in political processes, from making laws to managing infrastructure. These games not only offer a story about politics but also an experience of politics through play. Management mechanics, compromise, and conflict represent political processes as complex systems where decisions are always linked to indirect and direct consequences. Philosophically, the political in games arises through player participation. Video games are not passive media; they require players to take a stance, make decisions, and take responsibility for the consequences. This act of interactivity places the player in the position of a political subject who shapes, examines, and questions political norms.

Epistemologically, political games are not just representations of the real world but tools for exploring and understanding political ideas. They provide a framework for simulating "what if" scenarios (Sicart, 2011), where players can experiment with different ideological approaches, social structures, and political strategies. Games place players in moral dilemmas of bureaucratic systems, allowing deep reflection on ethics, justice, and power. Games are, by nature, models of reality. Political games model ideologies and policies in a way that allows players to understand them through practice. In *Tropico*, the player can experiment with different forms of government, from democratic governance to authoritarianism. Such simulations educate players about political systems and encourage their critical thinking. Games can serve as mediums of propaganda, but also as tools for deconstructing political narratives. Games that glorify military conflicts often support certain political agendas, while games like *This War of Mine* highlight the human cost of conflict and question the ideological foundations of warfare. Games allow players to learn about complex political processes through simulation. *Democracy* or *Balance of Power* are not just games but interactive guides to political philosophy, as players must understand the implications of their decisions in the context of economy, diplomacy, and social policy.

Ethical aporias of the political in video games

The political in video games also has an ethical dimension, as it concerns how games shape moral and social norms. We dare to raise a consideration here regarding the essence of the ethical in video games, specifically about the likely transition of basic ethical principles of "regular" video games into a different ethics of political video games. The game, per se, has been based on a deontological ethical principle from the very beginning. Innocent and naive, as it once was—and to some extent still is—a video game was free of any goals and consequences (Kant, 1975, p. 109), basing its ethicality on duty as the basic reference in making appropriate decisions and consistently adhering to rules when performing a specific player task. Those who were good, were good; the rest were either evil or NPCs. Political video games are based on entirely different ethical strategies, and in order to succeed in their task, they had to adopt the teleological version of liberal capitalism's ethics, which assumes that ethically correct decisions are those that lead to the best consequences and provide the greatest benefit, even if they may be unethical and harmful to the "rest" of society. In line with this ethical stance, the benefit of an activity, including playing a video game, becomes the crucial criterion for assessing the morality of all aspects of the player's activities.

The change in the fundamental ethical principle has not made political games less good or less playable than regular video games, but it has introduced dilemmas that could lead to certain consequences in the future. In other words, involving players in political processes through games opens up a range of ethical questions about power, responsibility, and manipulation. The dilemmas do not offer "correct" answers; rather, they force players to confront the complexity of political and ethical issues. Games are often influenced by the ideological backgrounds of their creators. The political in games can be implicitly manipulative, introducing players to narratives that support certain political or ideological views. This manipulation can be subtle, like the economic system in the game *Capitalism*, or explicit, as in propaganda games promoting a specific agenda. The philosophical question of responsibility is at the heart of political games. Are designers responsible for the consequences their narratives and mechanics may have on players? Do players take responsibility for the moral and political decisions they make in a game, even when those decisions have no real-world consequences? Although one might think so, this is not merely a rhetorical question. Moral panic surrounding video games sometimes leads to bizarre demands and cases, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) once requesting punishment for virtual war crimes in video games (Šojer, 2013). What the ICRC advocates is cooperation with video game producers to somehow punish players who virtually torture, attack, or kill civilians, medical staff, and otherwise violate the provisions of the Geneva Conventions. The punishment would, of course, also be virtual, but the ICRC believes that this would prevent the trivialization of war crimes in games. The ICRC is focused on games that simulate real war situations, such as *Battlefield 4* or *Call of Duty: Ghosts*. This issue, although its applicability and feasibility are questionable, transcends the mere question of punishing virtual crimes and touches on other concerns related to the protection of vulnerable categories, such as children, from virtual violence, as well as other elements harmful to developing generations (see Bjelajac & Filipović, 2020a; Bjelajac, Matijašević & Počuča, 2012). Here we primarily discuss the perspectives of protecting vulnerable categories from already designed ethical objects, but as these designed ethical objects, in addition to their primary content, often contain the possibility of interaction with other people

that open new possibilities, we also speak about the undesirable aspects of these interpersonal online interactions (see Filipović, 2013b; Bjelajac, Filipović & Stošić, 2022; Bjelajac & Filipović, 2020b).

There is an interesting aspect in political ludology that offers a slightly different view on theorists who oppose the political in video games and want to keep politics away from video games. This is essentially an inconsistent stance, which, in one article (Huang and Kim, 2024), on the presence of politics in video games, is marked as “I don’t want in video games (only these, author’s note) the politics with which I disagree.” Soraya Murray (2017) argues that such “things tend to upset people because they are being suggested that politics now exists where it didn’t before.” When considering the call to keep politics away from video games, it becomes evident that the discussion extends beyond excluding certain political views from video games. The question arises about the “entangled relationship between games and the spectrum of political biases within the industry. In the end, developers should embrace political messages in their art. However, responsibility shifts in both directions: consumers also need to approach politically tinted games in good faith, rather than resorting to online boycotts and harassment, which can become discouraging and financially burdensome for developers,” and, the authors claim (Huang & Kim, 2024), “politics is everywhere in games; it is simply invisible unless it is part of politics with which someone disagrees.” Video games are an inevitable reflection of the political reality of the time in which they were created. Games like *Call of Duty* have come under criticism for their heavy reliance on Arabia, depicting the Middle Eastern society as a place where people are either traumatized victims of endless war or terrorists, with little difference between the two (see Zirojević & Bjelajac, 2013). This trend, which arose from the political climate after 9/11, government surveillance, racism, and the willingness to resort to militaristic violence, reflects the ongoing conflicts in the region that have intensified since the beginning of the U.S. global war on terrorism, nearly 23 years ago. Many increasingly argue that this distorted portrayal of Middle Eastern peoples has contributed to apathy and ignorance toward the ongoing conflicts in Gaza” (Huang & Kim, 2024).

The question of how much ethics there is in politics sparks deep and complex debates, as politics and ethics, although interconnected, have different goals, values, and norms. Politics primarily deals with power, decision-making, and achieving objectives, while ethics is focused on moral principles, which may or may not align with political practices. Kant wrote that “on earth, the laws of nature or the laws of freedom operate. The science of nature is called physics, the science of freedom is called ethics. Physics is called the science of nature, and ethics is the science of morality” (Kant, 2008b). In the real world, politics is rarely considered ethical, as it involves managing conflicts, achieving goals, and balancing needs and interests, often with limited resources. While politicians invoke ethical principles such as justice, equality, and freedom, they often face situations that require pragmatic decisions that are not fully in line with ideal ethical norms. In everyday political practice, ethics is often questioned due to compromises, opportunism, and corruption. Although politicians refer to ethical principles, their actual decisions are driven by the need to gain power, maintain their positions, or fulfill the interests of various groups. Class, ethnic, and other interests often influence political decisions, which can lead to ethical problems. Political decisions and ethical principles are not always aligned. Politics, especially in its practical sense, often requires compromises and making unpleasant, pragmatic decisions that are not fully in accordance with ethical norms. Ethics in politics can differ depending on political theory or context, but in any case, it raises fundamental questions about how political leaders and citizens should act in accordance with moral values.

While ethics in politics is not always clearly present, its question remains central to understanding how politics functions, how social power relations are shaped, and how justice and the rule of law are managed in society.

The ethics of the political in political video games opens up a range of questions about the moral implications, responsibilities of their creators, and their impact on players. Political games represent a space for reflection on power, justice, political ideologies, and the consequences of decisions. Games can become politically biased, consciously or unconsciously promoting certain ideologies. Is such bias justified, or does it undermine the freedom of players to independently form opinions? On the other hand, manipulation of players is another ethical challenge. Games can force players to choose between bad options, creating an illusion of choice. The way games represent different cultures and political ideologies is of great ethical significance. Moral choices and their consequences are a central aspect of ethics in political games. Games often reward or punish certain decisions, shaping how players think about politics and ethics.

Ethical mistakes in political video games manifest in various ways, from moral dilemmas that players must solve to the ways political ideologies, cultures, and social systems are portrayed. Through these mistakes, games can contribute to misinformation, the proliferation of stereotypes, or manipulation of players. One of the most common ethical mistakes in political games is giving players the illusion of choice, while the actually available options are limited. Players may face moral dilemmas, but their decisions often have no real consequences or are only superficial. This can create a sense that players are not given real freedom to shape the game according to their values, raising the question: is this manipulation justified in the context of the game? In games like *Mass Effect*, players make political and moral decisions, but many of those decisions have no long-term impact on the outcomes of the game, or only reflect superficial changes, which may be perceived as an ethical mistake.

When political games adopt specific ideologies or positions, they can create ethical mistakes if those ideologies are oversimplified, stereotyped, or inaccurately represented. Games that depict authoritarian regimes or democracies may present these systems in an exaggerated black-and-white perspective, which can lead to misunderstanding the complexity of political ideas and systems. Political games that use military themes or violence as a main element may promote militarism, war, and violence as legitimate political options. Ethics becomes controversial in games that do not sufficiently explore the moral aspects of war and militarism or that even glamorize them. When games like *Call of Duty* do not allow players to engage in deep reflection on the consequences of war but instead engage them in fast actions and excitement, an ethical problem arises in shaping players' attitudes toward violence. In political games that include historical events or fictional political systems, there is a risk of historical inaccuracy or superficial representation of complex political situations. Games that use history as a basis for political narratives may misinterpret facts, which could have long-term consequences on the understanding of the real world. Games like *Civilization* offer players the chance to solve historical challenges, but often ignore the real political, social, and economic challenges faced by people in different periods, simplifying complex events into entertainment and strategy. Political games can be created with the goal of promoting a specific political ideology or propaganda. Games like *America's Army* or *Defcon* are openly used to shape players' attitudes and behaviors, or even to recruit new soldiers into armies. These games, though possibly well-designed and entertaining, can raise questions about the ethical responsibility of creators regarding the

influence on political views and behaviors of players. In some cases, games can promote political narratives based on ethical issues, such as the laws of war, human rights, and the rule of law. If games insufficiently explore the complexity of political decisions or favor one political direction, they can become instruments for spreading propaganda.

Some political games may ignore or minimize the importance of human rights and social justice, which creates a serious ethical issue. If a game does not allow space to consider issues of economic inequality, discrimination, or human rights, one could question whether it is truly ethically acceptable to design a game that deals with politics without a deeper social responsibility. Political games have the power to shape attitudes but also pose serious ethical dilemmas. Through manipulation of choices, glorification of violence, inadequate representation of history and ideologies, games can easily become ethically problematic. Game creators have a responsibility to ensure that their games not only entertain but also encourage reflection on important social and political issues, respecting moral principles and responsibility toward players.

The political in political video games is not just content, it is a process through which players, designers, and society at large interact with politics and ideology. Games are not just representations of political ideas but also tools for examining, shaping, and deconstructing them. They become a space where players can engage in political discourse, examining power, ethics, and ideology through interactive experience. Through political games, the political becomes a dynamic process, not a static concept. Players transform from passive observers to active participants, while games become a medium for exploration, learning, and critical reflection. In this sense, the political in political video games is not just a reflection of the real world but a place where reality can be imagined differently, where politics can be redefined through play.

The player of political video games as a political subject – The ontology of the political subject in video games

At its core, the ontology of the political subject addresses the question of what it means to be a political subject, how the identity of a political actor is shaped, how it influences the circumstances surrounding it, and how the possibility of political action is implemented in games. Political games often place players in positions that allow them to make decisions, manipulate resources, shape power relations, and sometimes even control entire countries or civilizations. Classic examples include games such as *Civilization*, *Democracy*, and *Tropico*, which enable players to become leaders, rulers, or political strategists, providing them with mechanisms to shape social, economic, and political structures.

In contemporary video games that simulate political systems, the player appears as a specific form of political subject. The ontology of the political subject in video games raises the question of how the player's identity and agency¹ are constructed within the game's political framework.

Is the player truly a political subject within the game, or is their role determined by pre-established mechanics and narrative constraints? This dilemma raises key questions about the relationship between

¹ Agency, in the broadest sense, means the ability of a person to act within a given environment. Human agency is a concept that implies that each individual, within their own culture, has the ability to determine and decide how they will behave, what they will believe, and what actions they will undertake.

virtual and real political identity, as well as how games shape the understanding of politics and social structures. The political subject in a video game can be viewed as a hybrid entity – a fusion of the player as a real person and the avatar within the game. This ambiguity arises from the interactive nature of games, where the player assumes the role of a specific political actor (president, dictator, bureaucrat) and, through that role, participates in decision-making that shapes the virtual world. However, the agency of the player in these situations is often constrained by algorithmic structures and predefined game rules. In this way, the player becomes a political subject whose freedom of action is conditioned by procedural systems that regulate their decisions. Performativity² of players in political video games lean on theories of Judith Butlers on subjectivity as a product of actions (Butler, 1999). Through the series of decisions made in the game, the player performs a political identity – whether as a liberal democrat, an authoritarian leader, or a dissident bureaucrat. These decisions are not just mechanical but carry symbolic weight that reflects or challenges real ideological structures. In games like *Democracy 4*, the player manages a state through a complex system of policies, where every choice is linked to specific ideological assumptions. Although the game offers the illusion of absolute control, the choices are already rooted in a liberal-democratic framework, thus simulating but also reproducing political reality. On the other hand, games like *Papers, Please* provide a different perspective on the political subject. The player assumes the role of a border official whose tasks include checking documents and deciding on the entry of migrants into a totalitarian state. This bureaucratic agency is limited, but the game allows space for ethical resistance – the player can choose to help refugees, even though doing so risks sanctions. In this sense, the political subject in such games oscillates between obedience to the system and the possibility of subversion.

The ontological status of the political subject in video games can also be viewed through the lens of biopolitics and algorithmic power. In games that simulate population management, like *Tropico*, the player is placed in the position of a sovereign who not only controls economic and political processes but also governs the lives of citizens in a manner that reflects Foucault's concept of biopower. Biopower represents the ultimate development of sovereign state power as a mechanism of coercion, through which state apparatuses forcefully manage human biological processes such as reproduction, birth, mortality, health, life expectancy, etc. What characterizes the transformation of politics into biopolitics is the reorientation from governing death to managing everyday life. The ultimate state control over every human body and surveillance of the population announce the "era of biopower" (see Foucault, 1975). This type of control raises the question of whether the player, as a political subject, is truly free, or simply another agent in an algorithmic management regime.

An interesting question also arises regarding emergent politics in video games – how is the political subject shaped through unforeseen interactions and player behaviors? In multiplayer worlds and sandbox games, players often create their own political structures that are not part of the designer's intent. For example, in the game *EVE Online*, complex economic-political systems form based on the relationships and conflicts between players. These emergent politics suggest that, in certain situations, the player can

² Performativity is a concept that language can function as a form of social action and have an effect of change. The concept has multiple applications in various fields such as anthropology, social and cultural geography, economics, gender studies (social construction of gender), law, linguistics, performance studies, history, management studies, and philosophy. The concept was first described by the philosopher of language John L. Austin, who pointed out a specific capacity: the ability of speech and communication to act or complete an action. Austin distinguished this from constative language, which he defined as descriptive language that can be "evaluated as true or false."

transcend the boundaries imposed by game mechanics, thus becoming an active political subject in the fullest sense.

The ontology of the political subject in video games points to the dynamic relationship between the player's identity, algorithmic systems, and performative acts. The player is simultaneously constrained by procedural rules and empowered by the possibility of making decisions that may have political significance, both within the game and in a broader societal context. This ambiguity opens up space for further analysis of how video games shape our understanding of politics, power, and subjectivity in the digital age.

The player as a political subject in these games is not just a passive observer but an active creator of the virtual world. Ontologically speaking, the player becomes the central actor in the process of decision-making and shaping political structures. This shift from passive user to active creator raises questions about the meaning of power and responsibility in the context of virtual worlds. Is the player truly a political subject, or is their role limited to simulating power without real consequences? The answer to this question depends on how the relationship between the real and virtual worlds is perceived.

Political video games are not just media that showcase political ideas, processes, and ideologies; they are interactive spaces where players become active participants in political narratives. In this context, the player in political video games becomes a political subject – an entity that not only passively consumes political content but also actively shapes and participates in simulated political processes. Considering this topic opens up philosophical, ethical, and sociological questions about the nature of the political subject in digital space, the role of games in political education and reflection, as well as the boundaries between real and virtual political engagement.

The political subject in video games is not predefined but is constructed through the game. Unlike the real political subject, whose actions are constrained by laws, social norms, and political structures, the player in political video games operates within simulated systems that allow experimentation with different political roles and ideologies. The ontological dimension of political video games is experienced through the simulation of political action and identity construction. Political video games provide players with the opportunity to construct their own political identity through their decisions. Whether the player becomes an authoritarian leader or a democratic reformer depends on their values, beliefs, and goals within the game.

Ethics of a political subject: Moral dilemmas and responsibility

Playing political video games presents moral dilemmas that test the player's ethical values. The political subject in the game must balance personal beliefs, pragmatic decisions, and the expectations within the game. In games like *Papers, Please*, the player takes on the role of a border guard in an authoritarian regime, facing ethical questions such as loyalty to the system versus empathy for individuals. Such games challenge the player to reflect on their own responsibility in making political decisions. Although games provide the illusion of freedom of choice, this freedom is often just an illusion, as games frequently set limitations that confront the player with the complexity of political systems. For example, attempting to govern a state in *Democracy* can lead to unexpected consequences, such as economic crises or social unrest, even when decisions are motivated by the best of intentions.

Political video games have significant potential to educate players about political processes and dynamics of power. Players not only learn how political systems function, but also how their decisions impact various aspects of society. Games like *Democracy* or *SimCity* simulate complex systems, offering insights into the interconnected elements of politics, economy, and society. The player becomes a political subject who must understand the consequences of their decisions in the context of these complex systems. Games also offer the deconstruction of ideologies by providing space to explore various ideological approaches. In *Tropico*, for example, the player can experiment with capitalist or socialist policies, exploring how different ideologies affect society and the economy.

However, the political subject in video games must operate within the boundaries defined by the game's rules, story, and mechanics. These limitations shape the player's experience and their understanding of political processes. Although games provide the illusion of freedom, they are constrained by design decisions. *Frostpunk* sets the player in extreme conditions where morality often takes a back seat to the survival of the community. Political narratives in games affect how players perceive their roles. Games with dystopian themes often encourage players to reconsider authority and systemic repression, while games that glorify conquest promote a different kind of political subject.

One of the key philosophical questions is the extent to which political video games influence the adoption of targeted political messages and actual political thought and action. As political subjects within the game, players may recognize parallels between virtual and real political systems. It also raises the question of what influences the eventual transition of players from the game to real-world engagement shaped by the political messages in the game. Political games can inspire players to think about real political involvement, and this may well be the primary goal of political video games. Games that simulate social injustice, such as *This War of Mine*, can awaken awareness of humanitarian issues.

Political theory speculates on the existence of numerous limitations of simulation. One such limitation is the view that political games are, to some extent, simplified simulations of reality. As such, they may create a distorted image of the complexity of political action, limiting the player's understanding of real political challenges.

The political subject in political video games can be understood through several philosophical concepts. The first concept could be interactivity as political action, where the player actively participates in the creation of "something political," often without knowing exactly what that is or how it will impact the course or outcome of the game. According to Heidegger's concept of *poiesis* (creation) (Heidegger, 1999), the player creates political realities through their actions and decisions. In a philosophical context, Heidegger uses this term to describe the way truth is revealed through human action, especially in art, technology, and poetry. Heidegger's concept of *poiesis* transcends traditional understandings of creation as a technical or craft-based process. He sees it as an ontological act of revealing truth and opening up the world. *Poiesis* is central to human existence because it allows for a deeper understanding of the world and our place in it.

Another concept relates to the philosophical aspect of subjectivity and power, to which Foucault's analysis of power can be applied. This understanding of power and subjectivity provides fertile ground for analyzing political video games that explore the relationships between authority and individual resistance, especially in the context of political or dystopian narratives. Through Foucault's analysis of power, video games can be seen as media that allow the exploration of the relationships between authority, individual

subjectivity, and resistance (Foucault, 1975). Games provide space to simulate political and social conflicts, allowing players to explore how power is exercised and how it can be resisted. Games that explore such themes entertain and engage players as political subjects, shedding light on the complexity of power dynamics in the real world.

Sartre's existentialism could serve as a framework for considering the role of free will (more in: Sartre, 1943; Sartre, 1946) in political video games. The role of free will in players is a less-explored aspect, mainly because that will is substantially limited by the rules of the game defined by the gameplay. Regarding free will, Sartre also examines the concept of "bad faith" (*mauvaise foi*), which refers to the tension between individual existence and social structures (see Sartre, 1943). The concept of "bad faith" can be linked to political video games that offer the player the opportunity to choose between desired and possible actions or blind adherence to the rules of the game. By choosing to follow the rules of the game, the player denies their freedom, submitting to predefined roles. This aspect, however, provides a philosophical basis for analyzing interactive experiences in political video games in which players are constantly called upon to make authentic, and at times, difficult decisions that reflect their free will and responsibility.

Thus, video games become a space in which fundamental existential questions, such as freedom, responsibility, meaning, and authenticity, are explored. Through this lens, players become more than passive consumers; they become active subjects, participants in creating meaning within virtual worlds. The player of political video games, as a political subject, does not merely exist as a participant in the game but also as an active creator of political meanings. Through decision-making, narrative interpretation, and confronting moral dilemmas, the player examines political systems and questions their own values, beliefs, and responsibilities. Political video games, therefore, become a space not only for entertainment but also for reflection, education, and potentially political empowerment.

Political video games and freedom

In our understanding and interpretation of the freedom of video games, we are primarily and fundamentally referring to that type of freedom as the first in the primary hierarchy of human life values. And not just any freedom, but the most elemental freedom of the human being, the freedom of the soul, which our player and their avatar, like Prometheus from Zeus, wrest from the stagnating financial, technocratic, bureaucratic, educational, religious, and other modern gods and rulers, in order to, like Prometheus of old, save humanity and its soul through their own suffering. The freedom we speak of, the freedom of the being of the video game and the unprecedented shifting of the boundaries of existence within the game and playing a video game "from the other side of the monitor," echoes the emanation of Promethean freedom, a kind of hubris, the principle of a normatively forbidden, though not impossible, crossing of ontologically established boundaries set by the highest power. This concept of freedom, the video game did not acquire without struggle, nor has that struggle ended, and especially, it has not been irreversibly resolved. The dialectical conflict between freedom and the good, as outlined by Saint Augustine, is one of the crucial determinants of the being and the world of video games, from which it follows that the player cannot simultaneously be free and good, because freedom implies a free choice, which can also be a choice of evil as the path through which the player leads the game, for which the player cannot be sanctioned because that would then lead to the negation and deprivation of free choice and freedom as

a crucial determinant of both the being of the game and the player's being. By choosing between two concepts, the concept of freedom and the concept of good as the absence of evil, the creators of video games have clearly recognized the essence of the free being of man, as seen by Fromm (more in: Fromm, 1984), and, in a Machiavellian and diabolical manner, gave precedence to freedom, leaving goodness for other forms of creation. However, when the dualism of freedom and good is viewed from the standpoint of good, the relationship between good and freedom can be different. This is at least what John Milton wrote, saying that "only a good man can love freedom with all his heart. Others do not seek freedom, but permission, and it is this permission that tyrants most mercifully grant. Therefore, rarely do bad people attack tyrants, nor do they ever doubt them, being naturally slaves; rather, it is those in whom virtue and true values reside" (Milton, 1990).

Thus, we have inadvertently arrived at the dual concept of freedom in video games, as the freedom "from" and the freedom "for," namely the primal freedom of the being of the video game, unrestrained and independent of anyone, on one hand, and the freedom of the player of the video game, who, yes, within the predefined possibilities offered to them by the gameplay, makes free choices on the other side of the monitor during gameplay. The freedom of the game, which we call freedom "from," is the true freedom that the game "once and somewhere" received from its mysterious and mystical creator, a freedom that man, as the only being on Earth capable of play (Petrović, 2011), found and embraced as something that is an integral and inseparable part of the human being. This freedom of the game is, in fact, as Dewey argued, the liberation of the game from having any specific purpose (Beatty, 2017). The other freedom, freedom "for," we would rather, in the spirit of this work and Milton's spirit, call permission, because it truly is permission, granted to the player to lead their avatar in the way they wish within the world of the video game.

If we consider the game as an ontological concept, we come to the conclusion that a game, as a system, must be completely free in order to functionally exist. This freedom does not pertain to the experience of the player, but to the very essence of the game, its autonomy within its own ontological framework. Ontological freedom of the game can be understood as its ability to exist as a closed system of rules, relationships, and potentials. For the game to be "a game" in the ontological sense, it must be independent of external constraints in its self-defining space. The game is free because it creates a space within itself where all its elements operate autonomously, according to the rules it establishes.

In the Kantian sense (Kant, 2008a), the game as a noumenon represents the thing-in-itself, independent of the player's experience or perception of the external world (Gadamer, 1978). While players experience only the phenomenological dimension of the game, through its mechanics, narrative, and rules, the game itself exists as a complete entity. This ontological freedom is crucial for its existence. The autonomy to generate a meta-reality is part of its ontological freedom. Although players can never fully experience this freedom, it is essential for the game to function as a system. While the freedom of the player is always defined by permission, limited by the rules and mechanics, the freedom of the game itself is absolute within its own system. Without this ontological autonomy, the game would become a chaotic collection of elements without coherence. This consistency of rules is not the result of external intervention but the game's internal freedom to define and apply its own rules. The game, as an ontological entity, requires freedom to create and enforce its own internal laws. Without this freedom, the game would neither be playable nor meaningful. Ontological freedom of the game allows it to exist as a complete system in which the rules of the game and its mechanisms must be self-sufficient in order to create a meaningful

framework for action. The game as a system must be able to produce a consistent experience for players, regardless of their choice of actions, and adapt to changes. Games with dynamic elements, such as procedural generation, rely on ontological freedom to redefine their elements in real-time. Games can be seen as virtual universes with their own laws and ontological status. This universe is an autonomous field that defines its own rules of existence. In the game *The Sims*, the game world operates according to its own laws, independent of the external world. The player can manipulate its elements, but can never fully disrupt its internal ontological consistency. The ontological freedom of the game is the foundation of its existence as a coherent system. While the freedom of the player is limited by the rules and frameworks set by the creators, the freedom of the game lies in its ability to autonomously define, maintain, and adjust its own laws. This freedom is not visible in the player's experience but is crucial for the functioning of the game as a philosophical and ontological concept. In this way, games offer a space for interaction and serve as examples of autonomous systems that reflect the complexity of the concept of freedom within virtual frameworks.

The concept of freedom in video games is a dominant theme that relies on understanding the boundaries between actual ontological freedom and freedom as permission within a given system. Video games, as an interactive medium, provide players with the opportunity to explore, act, and make decisions. However, the question arises: is this freedom in games real freedom, or is it an illusion of freedom that is strictly controlled by game designers? In video games, the freedom of the player is inherently limited by the rules, mechanics, and narrative framework that have been predefined by the game creators. The player has the freedom to choose their actions, but these actions are always limited by the available options created within the game's system. In open-world games like *The Witcher 3* or *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, the player can freely explore the world, decide which quests to accept, and how to approach challenges. However, all of these decisions are already anticipated and shaped within a specific set of rules and design choices. This structure represents "freedom with permission." Players are free to act, but only to the extent that the game allows. For example, even in games marketed as "completely free," like *Minecraft*, players cannot act outside the technical and procedural limitations of the game world. Their creativity is always directed and shaped by the system's rules.

One element of freedom in video games is the illusion of choice. Games like *Mass Effect* or *Detroit: Become Human* offer players the opportunity to make moral decisions that affect the story. However, even these decisions are limited to a few predefined paths. The player may feel that they are influencing the game world, but that influence is strictly controlled by the code and narrative structure. This illusion of freedom is a tool used by game designers to give players a sense of autonomy. In this way, players emotionally connect with the game and feel that their choices matter, even though all possible outcomes are already defined. In *Red Dead Redemption 2*, the player can choose how to behave towards NPC characters, but these decisions always remain within the boundaries of the game world created by the designers.

Ontological freedom refers to the absolute freedom of action, existence, and creation without any limitations. In the real world, ontological freedom is a philosophical ideal that is rarely achievable due to various social, physical, and structural constraints. In video games, this ideal is even less achievable³

³ Here we talk about the freedom within a video game, „the freedom for“, defined as a permission given or restricted to players by video game developers. Freedom of the being of the video game is something different, and can be explained as „the freedom from“.

since video games, by their nature, are limited by technology, narrative and mechanics. The game *No Man's Sky* provides players with vast, procedurally generated worlds to explore without clear objectives. However, even in such "open" games, every aspect of the game is part of a pre-programmed system. Players are not truly free to create new laws of physics, change the fundamental structure of the game, or go beyond the boundaries set by its coding. Even in so-called sandbox games, where players have more control over their experience, freedom remains limited by the choices of the designers. Every tool, every option, and every possibility within the game is conceived and controlled by the people who developed the game. Perhaps the most accurate description of freedom in video games is the term "designed freedom." This means that game creators intentionally design systems that give players the feeling of freedom, but in reality, they direct their decisions and actions toward certain outcomes. This concept is not necessarily negative; on the contrary, it can be an extremely powerful tool for creating an engaging and satisfying experience for players. Designed freedom allows the game to balance between structure and chaos. In games like *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, players are free to explore, but the main narrative and the world's rules ensure that their experience remains meaningful and coherent.

Freedom in video games is a specific and complex concept that combines illusion, limitations, and creativity. While true ontological freedom remains beyond the reach of games, freedom as designed permission provides players with a rich and varied experience. This balance between freedom and limitations is at the core of what makes games an interesting medium, allowing players to explore worlds, make decisions, and feel like active participants in the narrative, all while staying within the boundaries set by their creators. Freedom in video games is best described as designed freedom, or "freedom within limitations." It does not function as true ontological freedom but as a framework of possibilities that game creators set up to give the player a sense of control and decision-making.

Freedom in video games is one of the crucial features that define the medium and differentiate it from other forms of art and entertainment. As a *sine qua non*, freedom allows the player to actively participate in shaping the experience, moving beyond passive content consumption. The freedom to decide is the first aspect of a video game player's freedom and is constituted either as narrative freedom—the player's ability to influence the story through choices like moral dilemmas or alternate endings—or tactical freedom, which is the freedom to make decisions about strategies, approaches, and problem-solving within the game. The second aspect is the freedom of movement, which, if it exists, allows players to explore the world without strict linear progression. This type of freedom contributes to a sense of control and authenticity in the experience. The third aspect of freedom is expressive freedom through character and avatar creation, or the ability to customize the appearance, traits, and skills of one's avatar, and the freedom to interact with the world in a way that allows the player to change or influence the game world, thus becoming a "creator within the game."

Although freedom defines video games, it is always limited within the framework set by the game designer. Too much freedom can confuse players, while too many limitations can feel frustrating. Successful games often find a balance between providing the illusion of freedom and setting clear goals. Therefore, freedom is not only a technical feature but also a philosophical foundation of video games. It allows players to experience stories, adventures, and emotions in their own way, which sets video games apart as a medium with incomparable potential for interactivity and immersion.

However, it may be at this point that we need to reflect on a higher aspect of cognitive freedom, one that allows the player to completely disengage from the real world and simply play within the game, without concrete objectives. This is the freedom of the mind and the instinctual freedom to play and engage in play. It is a situation where there is no intermediary between the player and the play itself, especially not an intermediary with political demands or suggestions that are often *déjà vu* and, by rule, fall outside the domain of ethically acceptable demands. This freedom of mind and the freedom of the video game's existence to think only of itself and for itself represents the alluring dimension of video games and is a fundamental part of their appeal. This "pure play" focuses on the intrinsic joy of interacting with the game systems, without the need for external rewards or pre-defined goals. The aspect of the natural joy of play (Stuart & Brown, 2009) relies on the basic human instinct for play, known in psychology as autotelic activity—that is, an activity that has its own purpose. The player plays for the sake of playing itself, not for rewards, rankings, or the completion of a story. Fink wrote that "a true player plays only to play" (1984, p. 297), adding that "play stands for itself and in itself," and further, that "the joy of play is not merely the joy of playing, but the joy of the play itself, the joy of the wondrous mixture of reality and unreality" (Fink, p. 298). Of course, he does not overlook the simple fact that "play is characterized by adherence to rules," certainly "the rules it itself sets." This concept echoes ludic philosophy, where play is not just a means, but an end in itself. The freedom that allows for "pure play" emphasizes experience and process, rather than the final outcome. Such games offer unique value because they allow players to play as they wish, without pressure, thus fostering authentic interaction with the virtual world. This "play for the sake of play" is the essence of what makes video games a special medium.

Discussion

The aporias of ontological discord between games and politics arise from irreconcilable differences in the essence of their being, which necessarily leads to differences in goals, rules, and methods of operation. A game, as a space of freedom, fiction, and temporary but obligatory rules, is based on voluntariness, internal autonomy, and freedom from goals. In contrast, politics is the domain of necessity, power, and responsibility, where rules are binding, and the consequences of actions often transcend individual intention. However, these two noumena, though seemingly incompatible at first glance, are not entirely separate – political structures often adopt elements of games through rituals, symbols, and strategies, while games reflect and subvert political relationships. Despite efforts to bridge this discord, the unresolved question remains whether a game can truly function within political frameworks without losing its freedom, and whether politics can retain its seriousness while adopting playful game elements. The aporias arising from this relationship point to a deeper philosophical tension between spontaneity and structure, fiction and reality, freedom and power. Perhaps it is in this tension that fertile ground can be found for critical reflection, where the game can become a means of explaining and challenging rigid political forms, while politics, by acknowledging the game, can open space for creativity and alternative forms of community. It remains open whether it is possible to reconcile these ontological differences, or if their discord is inevitable. However, it is precisely this likely irresolvability that encourages further reflection on the boundaries and overlaps between games and politics, as well as the possibilities for their mutual transformation.

Perhaps, in this conclusion, we can reflect or at least offer another aspect through which the given aporia might approach a solution. Heidegger called this "the shadow with which the modern world places itself into a space inaccessible to representation and makes itself incalculable. It is the invisible shadow that falls everywhere over all things since man became subjectum, and the world – image" (Heidegger, 2000, p. 76). A video game can be understood as a shadow of different aspects of human reality, depending on the perspective from which we view its relationship to the world. If we see the game as a simulation of reality, we can interpret it as a shadow of deeper ontological elusiveness. Like Plato, who sees the real world as a shadow of the world of Ideas, we can imagine a video game as the shadow of something even more real – a more complex cosmos beyond our perceptual limits. In this sense, a video game is not just entertainment, but an attempt to capture and present the invisible structure of existence. If we understand politics as the domain of power, institutions, and ideology, video games can be a shadow of politics in the sense that they simulate and obscure the mechanisms of power. They reproduce certain political values through their mechanics (rules, hierarchies, rewards), but in a form that is often invisible or "innocent" under the guise of entertainment. In this light, the video game is not just a passive reflection of politics – it is its shadow that hides and normalizes certain ideological orders. Of course, the very pertinent question is whether a video game remains just a shadow or whether it can become a means of illuminating what casts that shadow. This Heideggerian question opens space for deeper philosophical reflection, because Heidegger believed that "everyday thinking sees in the shadow only the lack of light, if not even its negation. But the shadow is indeed obvious, yet incomprehensible testimony to hidden lighting. According to this concept of the shadow, what we immeasurably experience as something that escapes representation is, nevertheless, clearly in its existence and points to hidden existence" (Heidegger, 2000, p. 89).

Our definition posits that video game is:

"a game in virtual reality, object-oriented towards the player, without whom it cannot exist, in which the player, through interaction with hardware, activates the pre-defined game software, and together, within their own space and time of the game, they create its alternatively real world whose phenomenal being is displayed on the monitor of the electronic device, while the virtual being remains confined in the parallel world of the game along with the player's avatar, with both game beings being unaware of each other and not depending on one another. The components and boundaries of the individual player's experience of the video game and the world of the video game are as follows: the predefined game world created by the manufacturer; the player's experience measured by the ability to perceive virtual reality through sensory and extrasensory receptors; and the player's imagination measured by their ability to create their imaginary being through their avatar in the form of the protagonist of the game, which, in their own sphere of meaning within the alternative reality, experiences the alternative world of the video game, while refining and controlling it. The alternatively real world of the video game and the real world of the video game experience overlap and intertwine, allowing the player and their avatar in the player's imagination to switch places, where total identification of the player with their avatar is the ultimate goal, but also the ultimate limit of the implementation of the real player into the alternatively real world of the video game.

Unconditional acceptance of the freedom of the altered reality and adherence to the rules of the game are mandatory conditions of the game, and the goal of the activity is the game itself as a real or meta-activity in the obligatory meta-reality. The aesthetic, ethical, and logical reception of the being of the game as a phenomenon temporarily placed in the 'meta-reality within the real reality' is based on modified appropriate strategies that create the game world with a unique possible relationship between the player, reality, and the game, making this reception, when it comes to games with sine qua non meta-activities, equally subject to both sensory and higher cognitive and receptive forms of aesthetic and ethical processing. The existence of the being of the game is limited only by the existence of the player and the game, and the being of the game is given and unchangeable to the extent that the social and psychological being of each player is given and unchangeable, and their imagination as the ability to combine elements of the being of the game, images, and value stances from their own experience to create representations, concepts, and ideas that did not exist in their previous experience, and very often nowhere else." (Filipović, 2016; Filipović, 2022)

This is a place where we could pose the question, even if rhetorical, whether political video games put players in a situation where, besides "playing for the sake of the game," they also have other goals and purposes, aside from playing. Given that most of these demands, goals, and purposes belong to the corpus of politics, the question is whether such demands inhibit freedom in video games, and what, after the reception of these demands, remains of the game and playing the game as a free activity. Answers to this question depend on the provenance of the one answering the question. If that provenance is political, it inherently means that the answer will ignore the problems the being of a video game faces with imposing any goal or any other purpose except playing, just as the same being will have problems with any intermediary between the being of the video game and the being of the game. A game, in its primal aspect, is a concept that is not easily explainable, and not easily understood. Although it may seem otherwise, the game resists rationalization, just as the game existed before humans, and perhaps in a different form of human, resisting the thinking of the human we know. It resists most strongly that part of its being which is not accessible to humans and their capacity for understanding.

Conclusions

Apologists for the political use of video games argue that political video games do not limit freedom, but rather transform it by placing players in a context that requires reflection, decision-making, and taking responsibility in accordance with political, moral, or social issues. These demands can certainly alter the perception of freedom in the game, but this does not necessarily mean that freedom is inhibited—it is simply manifested differently. Political games redefine player freedom, directing it towards decision-making, responsibility, and understanding the consequences. Although these games set demands and impose goals, they do not necessarily inhibit freedom; instead, they can transform it, opening doors to a deeper understanding of complex social problems. Freedom in these games is often found in the choices players make and the ways in which they confront those choices, which can be just as fulfilling as the game itself.

On the other hand, players who desire video games as a fulfillment of the cosmic urge to play, who view the game as the foundation of human freedom (Uzelac, 1987), the essence of humanity itself, and the only confirmation of one's humanness, prioritize freedom and aesthetics that allow the video game to be a game in virtual reality, object-oriented towards the player, without whom it cannot exist. In this context, the player, through interaction with hardware, activates predefined game software, and together, within the game's own space and time, they create its alternatively real world, whose visible being is displayed on the electronic device's monitor, while the virtual being remains confined in the parallel world of the game along with the player's avatar.

In a previous work, we noted that the aesthetic channels of connection place the aesthetic experience of the video game closer to logic than aesthetics, because the experience of playing a video game is often a place where human senses lose their footing and make way for higher forms of cognition and experience (see: Filipović, 2022). The aesthetic (aesthetic) reception of a video game is limited only by the existence of the player and the game and can be compared only to the play of a child who has just gained awareness but still lacks significant experience, so awareness itself is of little use. The aesthetic delight of a small girl playing with a doll, or the blindness of a child engaged in playing with lead soldiers, are the only experiences comparable to the aesthetic and cognitive experience of playing a video game. This necessary incorporation of the remembered and experienced childhood world into the adult world is something akin to how Saint-Exupéry dedicates his *Little Prince* to his old friend "León Werth, when he was a little boy" (De Saint-Exupéry, 1985). Through this dedication, he emphasizes the universal value of the child's perspective and its enduring presence within all of us. His gesture highlights that the childlike way of experiencing the world—through curiosity, imagination, and honesty—is not merely a privilege of childhood but an emanation of freedom that can and should be carried through life. Saint-Exupéry's dedication reminds us that play, much like the child's view of the world, is not confined to a particular age. As we grow and mature, our approach to play changes, often under the influence of life's complexities. However, true freedom in play lies in preserving that childlike part of us, regardless of age or context. Just as the *Little Prince* could play with his rose and volcanoes on his planet, adults too can find freedom and joy in play, even in a political context, if they preserve their inner world of childlike imagination and curiosity.

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Politička ludologija – aporije ontološkog nesklada između igre i politike

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Sažetak

Rad istražuje koncept političke ludologije analizirajući aporije ontološkog nesklada između igre i politike u kontekstu video igara. Iako video igre pripadaju korpusu fikcije i simulacije, one istovremeno generišu značajne političke implikacije, oblikujući percepciju moći, identiteta i odgovornosti. Rad problematizuje način na koji video igre funkcionišu kao prostor političkih narativa, moralnih dilema i egzistencijalnih pitanja, preispitujući granice između igre kao slobodnog, autonomnog prostora i politike kao uređenog poretka moći i obaveza. Početno poglavlje analizira šta je političko u političkim video igrama i kako politički elementi u video igrama konvergiraju, naizgled, zauvek datim i nepromjenjivim ludološkim konceptima igre. Istražujući moralne dileme i odgovornosti, autor propituje kako političke video igre stavljaju igrače pred moralne izbore i kako ti izbori utiču na subjektivnu odgovornost. Fokus je na etici odlučivanja, granicama slobodne volje i načinima na koje igrač kroz interaktivno iskustvo postaje politički subjekt. Autor razmatra i paradoks slobode u video igrama, suprotstavljajući "slobodu od" video igre, "slobodi za" igrača, dokazujući da je ova druga samo dozvola koju, kao iluziju, kreatori nude igraču. Analizira se kako se koncept političke slobode prevodi u ludološki sistem pravila i mehanika, i u kojoj meri igrač može prevazići te granice. Zaključno poglavlje postavlja pitanje ontološkog statusa video igre u odnosu na stvarnost. Razmatra se da li politička dimenzija igre ostaje zatvorena u okvir fikcije ili ima sposobnost da preobrazi igračevu percepciju realnog političkog poretka. Diskutuje se o granici između simulacije i stvarnosti, kao i o potencijalu video igara da redefinišu politički diskurs izvan svoje virtualne sfere.

Ključne reči: video igre, ludologija, politika, etika, sloboda