There is No Videogame: Nishida, Posthumanism, and the Basho of Gameplay

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Abstract

This article traverses from humanist to posthumanist philosophies to analyse videogame ontology. It challenges Cartesian dualism, understood as emblematic of humanist thinking, by bringing the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō in conversation with posthumanist thought. Nishida's rejection of the subject-object split and his concepts of 'pure experience', 'basho' and 'action-intuition' provide a framework for understanding games as dynamic events in a relational matrix of nothingness rather than as discrete entities. The game Jetpack Joyride is analyzed through this lens, illustrating how gameplay is a co-creative experience within a complex interplay of technology and human agency. This approach promotes an inclusive and global understanding of the interconnected nature of videogames and player identities, challenging entrenched Western paradigms in game studies and posthumanist thought.

Keywords: *Ontology; Meontology; Games; Nothingness; Flow*

Introduction - From Humanism to Posthumanism

What happens when playing a videogame? What establishes its boundaries? How do rules appear, and why must we follow them, or feel compelled to? What is a player? Are they different from a non-player? If I am a non-player at work, do I stop being a non-player when experiencing a videogame? What even is a videogame?

The answers to these questions may seem common-sense. Yet, it is precisely the common-sensical that most deserves scrutiny. One of the most common-sense set of ideas adopted by Western cultures are those associated with the philosophy of René Descartes (1641/2008), who introduced the split of subject and object, that of mind and body, and the idea of a rational self. These ideas define humanism, which typically also involves seeing knowledge as a product of rational subjects observing objects, distinguishing between mental and physical realms, denying the supernatural, and viewing the self as an independent agent. This perspective also typically includes a belief in progress and anthropocentrism (Gumbrecht, 2020; Law, 2011).

Posthumanism addresses the shortcomings of this *ethos*. Posthuman approaches, include different frameworks such as new materialism, actor-network theory (ANT), object-oriented ontology (OOO), assemblage theory, speculative realism, and more, reject subject-object dualism and the belief in a stable, autonomous self, instead acknowledging the entanglement of reality and the embodied, local, historical, cultural and, importantly, the technological (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles,

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1999; Nayar, 2014; Wolfe, 2011). Such approaches are well-suited for analysing videogames and their players, and to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this article. It is unsurprising, then, that posthumanism has been frequently deployed within game studies, with scholars exploring what happens when players enter into a relation with the machine (Keogh, 2018), extending their bodies into gameworlds (Conway & Trevillian, 2015), assembling with avatars and digital objects (Cremin, 2016), and the consequences this has for matters of identity, affect, embodiment, aesthetics and ethics (Wilde, 2023).

Additionally, posthumanism critiques humanism for its lack of attention to race and gender, often defaulting to white, male perspectives. This critique extends to the Western-centric nature of canonical humanist thinkers. Posthumanist scholars, recognizing this issue, advocate for a broader intellectual dialogue that includes non-Western contributions to challenge this dominance (Heise, 2020; Hinton et al., 2015; Jackson, 2018; Sundberg, 2014; Wilde, 2023; Winnubst, 2018). Yet, Western authors still prominently feature in posthumanist discourse. For this reason, I propose a posthuman framework for understanding videogames inspired by the philosophy of Kyoto School thinker Nishida Kitarō.[2] Nishida's philosophy, echoing posthumanist goals, rejects subject-object dualism, the fixed nature of entities, including the self, and highlights the interwoven fabric of existence. According to Shizuteru Ueda (1995) Nishida puts into question "the background of European thought structure" (34), centred around notions of substances, essences and transcendental subjects. Utilizing Nishidian concepts of *junsui keiken* (pure experience), *basho* (place), and *koiteki chokkan* (action-intuition), I argue against the essentialist view of videogames as isolated, definable objects. Nishida's perspective enriches posthumanist game studies investigating the dynamic between human and machine, by revealing the foundational level where these elements intersect and become distinct.

This article contributes to the posthumanist game studies discourse while also responding to calls to look beyond Western ontologies. My approach includes a review of significant posthumanist game studies scholarship, pinpointing how Nishida's philosophies contributes to this scholarship. I will present the *basho* as the foundational ground for the emergence of the videogame. Lastly, I will employ *basho* in a concrete analysis, drawing on Nishida's later work, to examine *Jetpack Joyride* (Halfbrick, 2011), explaining how we may understand a videogame event prior to the subject-object split.

Posthuman Game Studies

Posthumanism has significantly influenced game studies. Scholars have focused on representations of cyborgism and post-apocalyptic narratives in games (Boulter, 2015) and films (Krzywinska & Brown, 2015). Others explore the idea of a posthuman, post-anthropocene condition (Ruffino, 2020), and the evolving player-avatar relationship that fosters posthuman identities (Wilde, 2023). This relationship is examined through concepts like cyborgism (Keogh, 2018), collective identity (Cremin, 2016), and the avatar as a prosthetic extension of the player (Aliano, 2020; Boulter, 2015). Research has also reconceptualized the gaming experience from a posthuman perspective, recognizing the influence of non-human factors in gameworlds (Conway & Trevillian, 2015; Taylor, 2009), and the phenomenon of human-less gameplay (Fizek, 2022).

Posthumanist game studies aim to move beyond human-centred perspectives, but often, these very humanist elements reappear. Boulter (2015) and Aliano (2020) discuss games as practical

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[2] I follow Japanese naming conventions when referring to Japanese scholars, indicating surname first and first name second.

prosthetics, echoing Marshall McLuhan's idea of technology as extensions of the body ([1964]1994). As Poppy Wilde (2023) argues, such a viewpoint is essentially humanist, or at most transhumanist, emphasizing the enhancement of human capabilities rather than the fusion of human and technology.[3] Moreover, Boulter (2015) depicts gaming as a u-topian act, suggesting that physical location and identity become irrelevant in play, thus neglecting the material factors—like poor internet or faulty hardware—that shape gaming experiences (Conway & Trevillian, 2015). This notion aligns with immersion theories suggesting players can escape physical reality, overlooking how players' bodies and social contexts are integral to immersion. Contrary to this view, Brendan Keogh (2018) stresses that "the videogame is touched, seen, heard, and ultimately understood through a perceiving, located, and augmented body – a body the player often works hard to forget in order to feel that sense of 'immersion' within the virtual" (15).

Ian Bogost's *alien phenomenology* (2008, 2012) aims explicitly to move beyond human-centric perspectives, drawing from OOO (Harman, 2005) and speculative realism (Meillassoux, 2008), but ends up adopting a decidedly Cartesian perspective (as will become clear later in the article). Bogost (2012) critiques the Kantian idea of correlationism, which posits we can only understand reality through human cognition, leaving the true thing-in-itself unknowable. Bogost (2012) argues that posthumanism remains too tied to this concept and advocates for an 'alien phenomenology' that appreciates the perspectives and experiences of non-human entities. Bogost proposes three methods through which one may perform an alien phenomenology: *ontography*, *carpentry* and *metaphorism*. Ontography consists in the meticulous cataloguing of the material components in videogame creation and interaction (Bogost, 2012). Carpentry is a practical method for hands-on game analysis, such as using emulators to deconstruct game mechanics and other methods of tinkering with the machine (Bogost, 2008). Metaphorism is "a way to grasp alien objects' perceptions of one another" (Bogost, 2012, 67) through the use of metaphor. Metaphorism in particular seems to contradict Bogost's goal of surpassing correlationism and anthropocentrism. More crucially, despite its intent, Bogost's methodology still reflects humanism by viewing objects as separate entities for human analysis, a notion reminiscent of the 'agential Cartesianism' implied by Boulter (2015).

Other scholars, such as Wilde (2023), Justyna Janik (2021), Conor McKeown (2021) and Sonia Fizek (2022), try to avoid the anthropocentric pitfalls by drawing from Karen Barad's (2007) *agential realism*. Barad, inspired by quantum physics, blurs the line between subject and object, suggesting reality is crafted through *intra-actions*, where entities come into existence and acquire properties within relationships rather than interacting as separate pre-existing units. Phenomena, as a result, become the primary ontological unit (Barad, 2007, 33), highlighting the merged nature of observer and observed, and the entanglement of all agentic components. Wilde (2023) discusses the intertwined relationship between a player and their avatar, highlighting the symbiotic creation of human and digital realities. Janik (2021) combines Barad's theories with Tadeusz Kantor's avant-garde theatre, rethinking how meaning emerges through the intra-action between player and game, viewing them not as separate entities but as a single, intradependent bio-object. Fizek (2022) challenges the separation of material computational elements and immaterial aesthetic elements in gaming, arguing

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[3] When this perspective is presented as one of 'masterful extension' and traced back to McLuhan, we are in the presence of a misreading. McLuhan never claimed humans have mastery over technology. In fact, by highlighting that "the medium is the message", he was insisting that technologies *do things to us*, shaping how we perceive the world and our possibilities. This is as far as it gets from an argument of mastery over technologies.

that all aspects intra-act in the gameplay experience. McKeown (2021) asks us to focus not only on the emerging intra-active identities, but also those that do not originate due to choices not made. Together, these scholars posit that games are dynamic spaces of shared agency, where human and non-human elements intra-act, co-creating their reality and challenging the view of games as systems with passive environments.

These approaches, while innovative, are not immune to critique. Justin Keever (2022) points out that despite efforts to decentralize the human subject through Baradian concepts like entanglement and intra-action, these works may still position the human as central in interpreting reality. Additionally, Keever (2022) challenges Barad's notion of "agential-separability" (Barad, 2007, 140), which posits objectivity as stemming from the resolution of ontological uncertainty but still acknowledges a human-influenced dichotomy between subject and object. Keever (2022) argues that this does not completely move beyond human-centric thought, as it does not fully articulate how subjectivity contributes to shaping material conditions. Ultimately, Keever (2022) suggests that agential realism doesn't completely break with anthropocentric tradition, as it continues to revolve around human engagement with reality.

It is here I propose an intervention to address the lingering elements of anthropocentrism and dualistic thought within game studies and posthumanist theory at large. By integrating Karen Barad's concepts of agential realism, entanglement, and intra-activity with Nishida's notion of pure experience (1911/1992), his metaphysics of *basho* (1926/2012a), and his concept of action-intuition (Nishida, 1933/1970), we deepen the challenge to anthropocentrism. This synthesis promises a more philosophically robust framework to examine agency, materiality, and reality, particularly within digital spaces.

From Pure Experience to Nothing

Nishida's work is rarely discussed within posthumanism, and yet his whole *oeuvre* is concerned with the overcoming of the subject-object split through a highly syncretic approach drawing in equal parts from Zen Buddhism and Western philosophy (Krummel, 2012). As explained by Shizuteru (1995) Nishida's ultimate concern was to understand "reality 'before the opposition of subject and object' as the point of departure, while sticking to the most immediate and concrete facts and further maintaining that they become the original self-awareness of the subject that is 'without I' in its adaptation to these facts" (34).

In his foundational work, *An Inquiry Into The Good* (1911/1992), Nishida introduces the concept of 'pure experience', drawing on the American pragmatic philosopher and psychologist William James and the intuitionism of French thinker Henri Bergson to describe the undifferentiated reality preceding the distinction between subject and object. From this fundamental reality, conceptual thought, reflection and judgment arise, allowing the subject to emerge. Nishida asserts that subjectivity develops within the realm of experience, stating, "it is not that there experience exists because there is an individuals, but that an individual exists because there is experience" (Nishida, 1911/1992, xxx). Nishida (1917/1987a) successively developed the concept of self-consciousness (*jikaku*), trying to reconcile the subjective nature of pure experience, which exists before self-awareness, with objective knowledge. Self-consciousness, for Nishida, is an introspective state that unifies the act of reflection with the subject reflecting. It fuses "thought and experience, object and act" (Nishida, 1917/1987a, xxv), laying the groundwork for all knowledge.

While self-reflective awareness challenges the conventional separation between the knower and the known, Nishida (1917/1987a) acknowledged that it also risked an endless regress of self-reflection. To surmount the limitations of both transcendental subjectivism in *jikaku* and the psychological subjectivism in pure experience, he introduced the concept of 'place', or *basho* (Nishida, 1926/2012a). John Krummel (2012) explains that *basho* is a foundational unity encapsulating dualities such as subject-object and observer-observed. Nishida was influenced by phenomenology in his development of *basho*, particularly by Edmund Husserl, though he also critiqued Husserl for objectifying consciousness as a transcendental ego, while Nishida (1926/2012c, 56) sought instead to describe the pre-reflective consciousness conscious of itself. To escape dualism and objectification, *basho* is understood as a primary 'place' of experience. One cannot grasp this conceptually without falling into what Nishida called 'object logic'. The *basho* is ultimately something that must be experienced bodily through action-intuition prior to the subject-object split. *Basho* is the pre-differentiated unity of "reality-cum-experience" (Krummel, 2012, 13), existing before any split whatever, the foundational 'place' allowing self-consciousness and all knowledge to emerge. *Basho* signifies an indivisible link between experience and reality, a dynamic place that underpins and contains cognition as well as emergent subjects and objects. I argue *basho* could further inform Barad's framework already popular within posthumanist game studies by identifying the ground where intra-action unfolds.

Nishida posits *basho* as a logical necessity to overcome the subjectivism of his early theories. He is inspired by Plato's (c. 360 BC/1888) idea of *khôra*, which in the *Timaeus* is described as a *triton genos*, a platial third kind, neither the eternal realm of eidetic forms, nor the impermanent material world, but the receptacle where the former are received and embodied within the latter (Nishida, 1926/2012a). Nishida's *basho*, while reminiscent of the *khôra*, reflects different philosophical and religious perspectives. Plato's *khôra* mediates between ideal truth and material illusion, suggesting a transcendent ontology where true Being is eternal. In contrast, Nishida's *basho*, inspired by Zen Buddhism, suggests an immanent meontology, the ontology of non-Being. Additionally, and differently from Plato, who dealt with the interaction of eternal forms with the impermanent world, Nishida's goal was to transcend dualism, creating a unified field incorporating both the subjective and objective.

Nishida (1926/2012a) conceptualizes *basho* as the coexistence and mutual reflection of universals and particulars within entities. Moving away from Neo-Kantian logic and Aristotelian substantialism, he argued that predicates, rather than subjects, mirror universals. For instance, in the statement "red is a colour," 'red' exists within the broader universal or *basho* of 'colour', which encompasses both 'red' and 'non-red' hues yet does not contain the concept of 'colour' itself. Meanwhile, the universal 'colour' is also reflected within each individual instance of 'red'. In other words, the *basho* of colour is the necessary ground for any colour to exist at all. 'Colour', meanwhile, will be a part of a different, 'more universal' *basho*. Robert Wargo (2005) offers the metaphor of the force field to describe the *basho* in less logical terms. According to field theory, objects are not simply 'in' space, rather the relations between objects and space are the determinations of the place within which they exist. Simply put, objects lose their substantiality and are seen as accumulation of energy "related not in space, but in the energy field of which they are part" (Wargo, 2005, 102). Objects are then nothing more than determinations of the field as a whole, which is not just the sum of the relationships of the energetic accumulations, but instead is what establishes the ground for the various relations. "As a result", Wargo (2005, 102) explains, "if one were restricted to the field, one would encounter only particular concentrations and there would be no particular concentration that one could call the field".

Nishida constructs a hierarchy of *basho*, culminating in the fundamental universal, the *zettai mu no basho*, or place of "true nothing" (Nishida, 1926/2012a, 68). This concept represents a realm beyond objectification and is the ultimate context for all determination. Following this hierarchy, one progresses from existence as Being, i.e. as substance and presence, to a domain contained within 'nothingness'. Nishida, influenced by Buddhism, understands 'true nothing' as *Śūnyatā*—not a void, but the foundation of all existence and the intrinsic nature of Being (Yusa, 2002). Masao Abe (1992, xxiii) describes this culmination as the field of consciousness, where the hierarchy of universals ends in 'place' or nothingness. The *zettai mu no basho* is "a self-differentiating undifferentiatedness, a unity of transcendent contradictories" (Krummel, 2012, 18), a place containing all universals and particulars. In this field, each universal is a locus for its particulars—such as the place of 'colour' being the field for 'red', 'green', 'blue', and so on. The *basho* is Nishida's philosophical resolution to dualistic distinctions, uniting matter and meaning, Being and nothingness, subject and object, in an attempt to provide "an adequate account of the whole of experience" (Wargo, 2005, 4).

Nishida's *basho* holds significant value for posthumanist thought, potentially addressing criticisms like Keever's (2022) regarding agential separability and lingering anthropocentrism within Barad. While there are several points of contact between Barad and Nishida, a key difference lies in their ontological grounding. Barad's (2007) framework operates within a materialist ontology, rooted in quantum physics, where relationality unfolds through specific material-discursive practices, i.e. reality emerges through the ways in which entities are measured, observed, and defined - herein lies the agential cut: distinctions between entities are made within a field of entanglement. Nishida instead advances a metaphysical approach, where the *basho* posits a deeper, pre-ontological unity in which all entities - subjects, objects, and even relationality itself - emerge from a ground of nothingness. Unlike Barad's (2007) intra-actions, which rely on specific practices to produce entities, Nishida suggests that entities and relations arise as self-differentiations within the field of nothingness, a process that precedes not only interaction but existence itself. This difference means that objectivity does not arise through an agent's cut, but from the immanent unfolding of nothingness - a continuous, non-substantial field giving rise to all distinctions. Ultimately, Keever (2022) argues that Baradian posthumanism does not move beyond anthropocentrism by remaining fixated on human engagement with reality. Integrating Nishida with posthumanism, we see that the point is not to think 'away' human engagement with reality, but rather to understand how human and reality itself originate together within a unified field of nothingness and split only following a process of self-differentiation of this primary field.

Basho transcends Western metaphysical limitations for understanding reality beyond dualistic thinking, signifying the foundational ground where experiences are anchored. For Nishida, there is no transcendent eidetic reality where true eternal essences reside, as opposed to the everchanging illusory phenomenal world of matter. Rather, the phenomenal world *is* reality as the setting for a relational and inessential "co-dependent origination" (Maraldo, 2011, 152). Reality is a field of nothingness, allowing distinction only as self-differentiation, with the self here being fundamentally different from the ego, not the self as a subject but the self as the ground of the subject (Shizuteru, 1995). Reality in this sense does not necessitate a privileged transcendental subject or God, functioning instead as an agency without an agent. Once more, we see that this philosophy resembles agential realism, in that distinctions arise through relationality rather than existing independently, but it also goes beyond it by providing a more radical approach to entanglement and intra-action, suggesting the primordial field from which intra-action itself arises, i.e. consciousness as a place of nothingness. Objectivity, in this view, is thus part of a continuum of experience rather than something originating only in opposition to a subject, as in traditional Western epistemology.

Following Nishida, we envision a state of intra-being where divisions between self and other, subject and object, human and non-human, being and nothingness are fluid and negotiable. His meontology may challenge the uninitiated in Buddhist metaphysics but encourages an intuition, what Nishida (2012a) refers to as a pure act "for unity of contradiction" (94). This intuition refers to the *basho* where any division occurs as a self-contradiction or self-differentiation of a unified field of nothingness, offering a challenge to anthropocentrism. This no-thingness is not an absence but an enveloping field facilitating the dynamic relationship of observing, observed, and observer, providing a profound basis for existence and cognition.

To sum up, Nishida attempts to overcome the Western philosophical tradition founded upon the separation of subjects and objects. In such tradition, reality stands against a rational subject, who observes, represents and knows it in a detached, objective manner. Contra this, Nishida argues that reality is primarily something experiential and undifferentiated, unfolding within an unsubstantial field of consciousness defined by relationality, i.e. nothingness, prior to any subject-object split. This is what we understand as the self. Any secondary objectification, conceptualisation, and judgment involves self-differentiation of the unified field.

The Basho of Videogame

Incorporating Nishida's non-dualistic philosophy we recognize the entwined nature of reality without making the human subject central. Nishida's shift from the grammatical subject to the predicate in analysis illuminates the dynamic interplay within reality, helping to overcome the strict subject-object divide. In game studies, this translates to a shift from "(video)games *are*" to "*is* (video)gaming", emphasizing the mutual emergence of subjects and objects from a shared meontological field. This approach addresses Keever's (2022) concerns with Barad's (2007) framework by offering a view of objectivity that emerges immanently and not from a transcendent observer's cut. Nishida also advances beyond the anthropocentrism of alien phenomenology by questioning what precedes object formation. It is not enough for approaches influenced by ANT, OOO or assemblage theory to say that (video)games are a coming-together of various entities including human bodies, code, graphics, sounds, bits of plastic and silicon chips, and so on. Nishida would see such descriptions as a series of judgments cleaving a fundamental non-distinct unity. Describing videogames as "rules, avatars, story, hardware, code, player, genre, (…)" as per Bogost's (2012) ontography, would be a fracturing of a fundamental unity for Nishida. Saying "videogames are…" is an answer to the question "what are videogames?". By asking this question we remain trapped in "object logic" (Nishida, 1945/1987b), assuming that there is some essence of videogames. Thinking about videogames as networks, assemblages, or arrangements, recognising their complex nature is still a type of ontological thinking that assumes a truer, deeper, "more eternal" reality behind the illusion of the videogame as an individual, whole, substantial entity.

Nishida instead would invite us not to interrogate what videogames are but to witness *that* they are. Knowledge of videogames, in the Nishidian sense would involve not their abstraction but their existence within experience. This type of knowledge is different from that associated with the objective logic of the sciences and instead relies on a type of intuition relying on the logic of *sokuhi* or the "logic of contradictory self-identity" (Nishida, in Yusa, 2002, 300). Robert Carter (1989) describes this as "the absolute identification of the is, and the is not" (59). This may be symbolically represented as 'A is A; A is not-A; therefore A is A'. The logic of contradictory self-identity moves us from seeing things as self-contained, substantial objects (I see the thing), to recognizing the no-thingness that undergirds everything (I see that there is no 'thing'), to finally acknowledging that,

yes, in fact there is something phenomenally there in front us. The thing is transformed insofar I do not seek its essence in a distant world of eternal forms beyond the illusory phenomenal one, but rather recognize that the phenomenal *is* real (as is change, flux, impermanence, and so on). Nishida here moves from ontology (A is A) to meontology (A is not A), finally recognizing the non-duality of the two, allowing us to move from a logic of either/or (either a thing 'is' or 'is not') towards one of both/and (a thing both 'is' and 'is not'). The result should be a renewed appreciation for the phenomenal reality of the thing, *that* it is. Thinking about the contradictory self-identity of videogames, we start with 'I see a videogame' (a statement we may associate perhaps with ludological and formalist approaches interested in finding an essence of videogames, but amongst which I would also include alien phenomenology insofar as it relies on object logic); we proceed to 'I see that there is no videogame' (a statement we may associate with posthumanist approaches of the Baradian flavour); we finally recognize that 'there is in fact videogaming', and it is real in its phenomenal manifestation as experienced within its *basho*.

Videogames, from Nishida's perspective, are thus *events* apprehended within consciousness, which is not reducible to brain activity or neurological mechanisms, but is rather the field where the notions of 'brain' and 'consciousness' become possible to begin with. Within this field videogames unfold taking form out of the nothingness of consciousness in the present moment. *There is no videogame.* What there is the experience in the *here* and *now* of something arising as form out of formlessness which then becomes a videogame. In this framework, the player is not as a separate entity but rather an integral part of the unified field of the *basho* of videogaming. Player and videogame are not distinct as subject and object; they only manifest as such within the empty self's unitary field. The individual's identity is fluid, encompassing multiple roles simultaneously—a social being, a player, a character (Conway & Trevillian, 2015)—within the contradictory self-identity logic, embodying the both/and structure. Thus, I can be Andrea *and* the player *and* Lara Croft, embodying various identities at once.

I propose a theory of the *basho* of the videogame, envisioned as a dynamic, relational field-event. Within this field, elements like game mechanics, code, hardware, and player expectations indeed intra-act and co-determine each other. However, simply listing these elements, as in alien phenomenology, does not surpass object logic. Acknowledging that these elements have no substantial existence outside of their intra-actions, as done in Baradian approaches, progresses us past Cartesian views, but we may go further. With Nishida, we shift focus from intra-actions to the field where these occur - the *basho* of the videogame - moving beyond the subject-object split. This is different from how Barad (2007) conceptualizes phenomena, i.e. entities originating through their intra-actions as specific material-discursive entanglements. Thinking of *basho* as an event points to a deeper metaphysical unity preceding the relationality of entities. While Barad's phenomena arise from the interplay of material and discursive practices, Nishida's event emerges from the undifferentiated field of nothingness, where distinctions between subjects and objects are not only absent but unnecessary until they arise through a self-differentiation within consciousness. The 'videogame', then, is seen as the primary context for the emergence of players and other entities, allowing gameplay subjectivity and objectivity to emerge. We apprehend gameplay as an *event* within consciousness, a "pure act" of intuition (Nishida, 1926/2012a, 54), resonating with Nishida's earlier concept of pure experience. In these moments, the contradiction between subject and object of knowledge is resolved within the *basho*.

The Heart-Mind of Play

Nishida's concept of *basho*, arrived at through logical abstraction, encountered criticism from his student Tanabe Hajime for overlooking the historical, embodied, cultural, and political dimensions that mediate our existence and interaction with the *basho* of nothingness (Sugimoto, 2011). Nishida responded in *Logic and Life* (1936/2012b), discussing the dialectical nature of the historical world and our reciprocal shaping it through tools, technology, and action-intuition within our tangible environment. This shift might appear to move from meontology to ontology, from nothingness to a historical world of things. Yet, it does not fall back into Cartesian dualism, rather it resonates with Martin Heidegger's (1927/2012) concept of being-there.[4] This framework enhances our understanding of players, viewing them not as Cartesian agents acting unto an environment but as posthuman entities transformed through ongoing intra-actions with their surroundings.

In this later work, Nishida develops the concept of *basho* identifying it with the historical world wherein individuals are implaced. He introduces action-intuition as the fusion of practical engagement (action) and self-awareness (intuition). Nishida understood intuition not as a Cartesian disembodied insight but as an active participation in a concrete world, stating, "The world that determines itself as the *basho* of action-intuition is the world that is concrete" (Nishida, 1936/2012b, 114). Action-intuition, in this view, is a dual process: we give form creatively to the world and are also formed by it, an intra-active existence that Fujita Masakatsu (2020) describes as "seeing things by means of action" (409). Action-intuition refers to the world's self-awareness forming itself through our creative actions (Krummel, 2012, 33). Our world, which influences and is influenced by us, is identified with the *basho*.

Nishida suggests self-awareness springs from an awareness of our bodily self, with action-intuition lying "in the fact of the body" (Krummel, 2012, 33). Our bodies are entwined with the world, with individual actions being part of the world's broader activity. This dialectical relation means we shape and are shaped by the world (Krummel, 2012, 34). Nishida (1936/2012b) views the historical body as a lived, creative force that is more than biological, engaging with and transforming its environment, like a cybernetic system. Technology is pivotal in action-intuition, with *technē* allowing the historical body to reshape its world, which in turn reshapes us. Nishida states "the human body must be technological" (1936/2012b, 115), aligning with thinkers like Marshal McLuhan (1964/1994) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945/2005). He posits that by using tools, the body extends its capabilities, interweaving self and environment (Nishida, 1936/2012b, 154). Thus, the body and its tools merge, both becoming elements of the world-body continuum.

I proceed to apply a Nishidian framework to a case study, but before doing so I shall reiterate: videogames do not exist as separate entities but as *events* within a unified field of consciousness preceding the subject-object split. In this view, the focus is not on the player and the game as distinct, but on gameplay as an event including both prior to their separation. The *basho* of the videogame is a self-determining process within consciousness, with the player's 'appearance' being a manifestation of the subject-object split within this unified field. Recognizing the primacy of the unified filed does not negate awareness, rather it reconnects us to the pure experience where subject and object are still undivided.

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[4] As argued by Gavin Rae (2014), Heidegger casts a major, yet unacknowledged influence, on posthumanist thought. In the specific, Heidegger's project of destruction of the binary logic of traditional metaphysics, his attempt at overcoming anthropocentrism and Cartesianism, and his early accounts of technology in *Being and Time* strongly resonate with posthumanist notions of originary technicity, and are a major influence on Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, who are a more 'canonical' influence for posthumanism.

Let us look at an example. *Jetpack Joyride* (Halfbrick Studios, 2011) is a 2D mobile game of the infinite runner genre, where the character controlled by the player runs for as long as possible while avoiding obstacles. In *Jetpack Joyride*, the player controls Barry Steakfries who breaks into a secret laboratory to commandeer a machine gun-jetpack hybrid. The player controls Barry as he automatically runs and flies through the laboratory, collecting coins, avoiding obstacles and obtaining power-ups. The controls are simple, players tap on the touchscreen to ascend or descend to avoid obstacles. When playing, individuals enter a *basho* understood as a context setting the parameters for meaning, i.e. a world. Within this concrete *basho*, for example, the smartphone is not (only) a device to contact people and browse the internet but is primarily a means of projecting intentionally within a digital space. Said digital space, if approached through object logic is nothing more than a mix of pixels, code and electrical signals, but within the *basho* of *Jetpack Joyride* it is instead a navigable space. The *basho* also provides context and meaning for why this is an action worth engaging in: numbers are not just abstract digits but become 'scores' measuring player performance, which may be optimized.

Within this *basho*, players incorporate tools and technologies, both hardware (smartphone, headphones, perhaps glasses) and software (Barry Steakfries becomes an extension of the player's intentional acts, and the various power-ups that he picks up are also incorporated by the player). Through these technological incorporations, players' action-intuition modifies the environment which modifies them in return. For example, coins can be found in great number in the digital space, and they are picked up when touched by Barry. These coins may then be used to purchase gadgets, character skins, power-ups and other bonuses. These bonuses may impact what type of actions and movements are perceived as possible, the number of coins that a player may collect, and so on.

The gameplay of *Jetpack Joyride* involves simple controls that are challenging to master. Novices may struggle with the game's rhythm, determining the precise moments to ascend and descend to avoid obstacles, especially as the game speeds up and the obstacles become more frequent. However, with practice, players move beyond conscious timing to a more intuitive experience, defined by feeling rather than conceptual thinking (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). This intuitive state is akin to Nishida's concept of pure experience, where action flows without conscious deliberation - agency without a distinct agent.

Tensions arise when referring to intentionality alongside agency without agent. We must, however, remember that within Nishida's framework, intentionality is not a projection of an isolated subject, but rather something arising from the relational dynamics within the *basho*. Agency without a distinct agent refers to the fact that, within the *basho*, actions and decisions are not merely the result of a conscious agent imposing their will on the game, rather they emerge from the player's embodied engagement with the game's environment unfolding through action-intuition. This intuitive state resolves the tension between intentional acts and the absence of a distinct agent. Within action-intuition, the player does not consciously decide every movement, rather the game "plays itself" through the player, since intentionality is embedded in the self-differentiating *basho*, rather than within a separate, distinct subject. In other words, from a Nishidian perspective, agency is not a property of a subject acting on an object, but rather an emergent process within the self-differentiating field of experience.

We may compare pure experience to what in gaming discourse is commonly referred to as 'flow'. Flow, associated with the name of positive psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, is typically understood as an engrossed state during an activity that balances challenge and skill, marked by concentration, merged action and awareness, loss of self-consciousness, a feeling of control, an altered sense of time, and intrinsic reward (Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi, 2014). Players may

sometimes describe it as 'being in the zone' (Soderman, 2021). Nishida (1911/1992) parallels this, describing a state where "an incomprehensible power beyond the self functions alone" (174). However, Csíkszentmihályi (2002) defines flow as a subjective state, while pure experience precedes subjectivity; it is the "true union of subject and object" (Nishida, 1911/1992, 174-175). In other words, within pure experience it is not that the player acts onto a gameworld and experiences flow once they have become skilful enough, but rather the *basho* "plays itself". Actions unfold without effort and feel right, there is no need to cogitate and represent mentally to oneself the action one wishes to perform. This intuitive cognition through praxis (Fujita, 2020) is not that of a thoughtless automaton but is rather an integrated heart-mind (*kokoro*) experience, combining thought, feeling, and emotion (Carter, 1989, 117). In pure experience, the dichotomy between thinking and feeling dissolves, leading to actions that express thought-feelings in the moment.

In these moments, players are not yet divided into subject and object; neither the gameworld nor its components are seen as distinct objects. The experience is one of nothingness—a unified consciousness expressing itself through *kokoro*, the intuitive heart-mind. This emergence occurs before any subject-object split, as a self-determination within the field of consciousness. Subsequent splits might occur; for instance, encountering an obstacle might prompt a reflective strategy, or a notification might shift the device's role from gaming to communication. I may also in these moments self-consciously reflect on my gameplay experience, objectifying and comparing it to previous sessions, or reflecting on how much fun I had, how much I like, or dislike, the game. These moments of self-conscious reflection, however, differ from the direct knowing of pure experience, which is not about *what* or *how* the game is, but *that* it is.

Conclusion

This essay has navigated posthumanism and game studies, forging links with Nishida Kitarō's philosophy. It represents a cross-cultural dialogue, uniting distinct philosophical traditions. In doing so, it responds to the posthumanist invitation to engage with ontologies and epistemologies beyond the Western canon. This discussion sheds light on the intra-active, co-creative relationship between player and videogame, transcending traditional notions of interaction. The *basho* serves as an important concept through which we may extend beyond posthumanist approaches within game studies that are still Cartesian at their core. Often still, scholars present games as self-contained, substantial entities, while players are assumed to be isolated subject, acting through their mind, and somehow using their body as a machine, with the consequence that the body and what it can do falls completely out of focus. Yet, as Nishida (1933/1970) himself pointed out the "'cogito ergo sum' should be rephrased, such that it is not a matter of 'I think therefore I am' but rather 'I act therefore I am'" (91). A number of posthumanist thinkers have already adopted and advanced this position, as elaborated previously in the literature review. This article adds to this body of scholarship by integrating Nishida's work within posthuman game studies.

Through Nishida we also add to agential realism, by allowing us to intuit the place where intra-action unfolds. This place is the *basho* of videogame, where all the various components of the videogame assemblage intra-act and come into being, the necessary ground from which any isolated entity emerges at a second moment of objectification. The *basho* intended as such may seem like a deworlded abstraction. Nishida realised this too, and by referring to the *basho* as a historical world which moulds, and is moulded by, an embodied individual able to extend their body through tools through action-intuition he addressed those concerns. In many ways Nishida was describing a quintessential posthuman condition, where the boundaries between environment and human are

malleable, if they can even be said to exist, and where the technological blends with the biological in service of the phenomenological. It is in the world, engaged in concrete action, that we intuit the unitary condition of subject and object, "through the standpoint of the active self" (Nishida, 1933/1970, 91), as opposed to that of the detached Cartesian/humanist subject.

This exploration adds to the posthumanist discourse within game studies, challenging the dominance of Western philosophical paradigms and inviting us to consider a more global, interconnected philosophical heritage. I finally wish to stress once more in this conclusion the importance of interdisciplinary thought and the possibilities that emerge when we allow diverse philosophies to inform and transform our understanding of human experience, and invite scholars and players alike to delve deeper into the spaces where our selves merge with the Other.

Acknowledgements

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