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The Compatibility of Artworks and Games

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The Compatibility of Artworks and Games

Introduction

Films, musical works, paintings, photographs, sculptures, and other kinds of things can be artworks. I maintain that in whatever sense something can be, say, a painting and also an artwork, something can be both a game and an artwork. I will discuss what artworks and games are before offering an account of how games can be artworks. Then I will examine Brock Rough's arguments for his incompatibility thesis, according to which artworks and games are incompatible kinds: if something is a game, it cannot be an artwork, and vice versa. I maintain that Rough can only be right in saying that games can't be artworks if films, musical works, paintings, and the like cannot be artworks as well.

Whether games can be artworks should interest not only philosophers, but also those who takes art and games seriously. After all, we ought to appreciate, create, criticize, and understand artworks and games for what they are, not for what they aren't (Rough 3–4). If Rough is right, many have inappropriately evaluated games as artworks when they are not, and those who set out to create art games have been doing something else entirely. It seems that most of the games called artworks are videogames¹, and some auteurs and development studios deliberately aim to create art games. Aaron Smuts (2005), Dominic Lopes (2013), and Grant Tavinor (2009; 2013), among others, argue that videogames are a new kind of art. Tavinor has argued that many videogames qualify as art on cluster theories (2009, 180–90), and Lopes has demonstrated that

¹ It should be noted that videogames and videogame play are often simply called *games* and *gaming* in videogame journalism and common English usage. I will use 'game' as a technical term, not as a synonym for 'videogame.'

videogames can be computer art by virtue of their computer-based interactivity (104–20). Berys Gaut claims that videogames are interactive digital cinema, though he intentionally avoids discussing their status as games (3 n. 7). Additionally, non-digital games such as tabletop role-playing games might be art, as some of their designers profess (Riggs 2016). So I will defend the compatibility of games and artworks rather than, say, videogames and artworks specifically.

What Are Artworks and Games?

Artworks and games are notoriously resistant to definition, but Rough provides a modest claim about the nature of artworks. Whatever else artworks are, they are meant to be appreciated; to do this properly, appreciators must attend to all of the relevant features of the work (Rough 8). Rough demonstrates that philosophers of art, even those who otherwise differ greatly in their positions, widely agree on this (8–10). If someone wants to properly engage with an artwork, let us say that they must adopt an *appreciative attitude* toward it, the attitude of one who endeavors to attend to all of the relevant features of an artwork in order to attain an appreciation of it.

The very possibility of successfully defining games, however, has been cast into doubt most notably by Ludwig Wittgenstein: “if you look at [what we call ‘games’] you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that” (Wittgenstein §66). Wittgenstein’s influential anti-essentialism did not deter Bernard Suits from setting out to demarcate the necessary and sufficient conditions for playing games. Rough and I agree upon Suits’ definition of game-playing:

To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more

efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude]. (Suits 43, square brackets in the original)

These terms require some explanation. A *prelusory goal* is a specific, achievable state of affairs that can be described independently of any specific playing of a game. Achieving checkmate is the prelusory goal of chess, while crossing the finish line first is the prelusory goal of a race. These states of affairs can be described without participating in the game.

Games can be distinguished from one another by their prelusory goals and their *constitutive rules*, which prohibit certain means for achieving the prelusory goal and permit or prescribe other, less efficient means. These prescribed *lusory means* are the means players are permitted to use when playing the game. While *technical activities*, like household chores, aim to accomplish a goal as efficiently as possible, games prescribe relatively inefficient lusory means. For instance, sprinters must stay in their lane and may not trip one another.

The description of a prelusory goal must be separable from the lusory means prescribed to attain them for two reasons: first, this allows us to distinguish the goal of winning from the goal of achieving whatever state of affairs the prelusory goal is. The prelusory goal of crossing the finish line first on a running track is separable from winning the footrace, for I can achieve the state of affairs of having crossed the track's finish line before others without doing so in order to win a race. I could be simply walking along the track, say. Second, the relative efficiency of means is defined in terms of the means' efficiency for achieving the prelusory goal, not the goal of winning; if prelusory goals were defined in part by the means used to achieve them, there would be no way to judge the lusory means inefficient, so the distinction between technical

activities and game-playing would be muddied at best (Suits 38–9). If the prelusory goal of a footrace were to have crossed the track’s finish line by running in only your lane as quickly as you can, then running in only your lane as quickly as you can would not be relatively inefficient means for accomplishing this prelusory goal—they’d be the maximally efficient means, for no other means could achieve the prelusory goal.

Finally, the *lusory attitude* is the attitude of game players, those who willingly adhere to constitutive rules at least in part so that they can participate in the activity made possible by adhering to those rules: playing the game. To have the lusory attitude is to play by the rules—at least in part so that one can play the game at all. I say *at least in part* because games are not necessarily played as ends in themselves. Players can adopt “extra-lusory purposes” for game-playing: professionals, for instance, abide by the constitutive rules of games not only to make possible their participation in those games but also in order to earn money (Suits 156).

Professional and amateur players might have different attitudes toward the games they play; the professional might only enjoy the game as a money-making enterprise, while the amateur might play the game only because they love doing so. Both have the same attitude to the constitutive rules, however: they take up the rules, at least in part, to make possible the activity they wish to participate in (Suits 157). I will argue that the aim to appreciate a game as an artwork can be an extra-lusory goal, but first, a brief note about this definition and Rough’s position.

Suits’ definition is one of game-playing, not of games *simpliciter*. To remedy this, Rough proposes “an amendment to the *lusory attitude* condition, including with it a prescription that

players engage with the set of rules with the lusory attitude” (5). He does not formalize this definition of games, so here is an attempt:

A game is a prescription to adopt (i) a prelusory goal, (ii) constitutive rules that permit lusory means to achieve that goal, and (iii) the lusory attitude towards the constitutive rules and prelusory goal.

Rough maintains that on this definition, artworks and games are incompatible kinds: for any thing X, if X is a game, X cannot also be an artwork—and vice versa. This is Rough’s *incompatibility thesis*. Now that the terms have been laid out, I will explain why an artwork *can* be a game before discussing why Rough believes that this is impossible.

How Games Can Be Artworks

I maintain that games can be artworks in the same sense that films, photographs, sculptures, and other kinds of things can be artworks. Videogames are not the only kind of games that could be artworks: tabletop role-playing games, board games, and other sorts of Suitsian games might be considered works of art. What does it mean, then, for something to be an artwork-game?

On my view, an artwork-game is a game that should be appreciated artistically. First, since an artwork-game is a game, it has a prelusory goal and constitutive rules that prescribe certain lusory means, which are relatively inefficient for achieving the prelusory goal. Further, proper engagement with the game, i.e. playing it, requires one to seek to achieve the prelusory goal by obeying the constitutive rules, that is, by using the prescribed lusory means and not more

efficient ones by, say, cheating; one should play the game according to its rules, else one wouldn't be playing *that* particular game at all.

Second, because an artwork-game is an artwork, proper engagement with it requires the appreciative attitude: one must endeavor to attend to its relevant features in order to attain an appreciation of it. The goal to attain an appreciation of the artwork-game is an extra-lusory purpose. At least some of an artwork-game's artistically relevant features are experienced by playing it with the lusory attitude, so artistic appreciation of the game requires playing the game as a game. In the same way that artistic appreciation of the *Mona Lisa* does not require lifting it off of the Louvre's gallery wall in order to view the other side of the canvas, artistic appreciation of an artwork-game does not require breaking its rules or otherwise parting from its constitutive rules; this extra-lusory purpose is not at odds with the lusory attitude. Other relevant features may have to do with facts about the creators, or the game's relationship with other games—for instance, the inversion, invocation, or subversion of genre tropes—and this appreciative process can occur during play and afterward, as in contemplation of the game and one's experience of playing it. Tavinor suggests that videogames have their own “distinctive modes of appreciation, including competition”; this seems generalizable to other kinds of games (2009, 193).

One could just play the artwork-game without paying attention to its artistically relevant features. But this would not be the appropriate way to treat it as an artwork-game; this would be treating the artwork-game as merely a game. Since it is also an artwork, proper engagement with it as an artwork-game requires something more than merely engaging with it as a game: it should

be engaged with the appreciative attitude, that is, with the intention to attend to all of its relevant features in order to attain an appreciation of the work.

Take pictorial art as an analogy. Recognizing the pictorial content of a work is necessary but insufficient for appreciating that work. If I just want to see what Pope Innocent X looked like, for instance, simply looking at Velázquez's portrait would suffice. But while I might grasp what is represented in the painting, surely I couldn't have a full artistic appreciation of it until I've studied its brushwork, examined its media, considered its composition, researched facts about the artist or the historical context of the work's creation, and so on. None of this appreciative work is necessary to merely grasp the work's pictorial content, but simply grasping its pictorial content is not enough to appreciate the work as what it is: an artwork.

This distinction is like the distinction between bare game-playing—adhering to the constitutive rules of a game only because I want to make possible the activity those rules make possible—and game appreciation, an activity that requires more than bare game-playing. Further, we could imagine that for any given kind of artwork, there are similar distinctions to be made between some mere engagement with it and an appreciative engagement with it. It seems intuitive that this kind of difference exists when we consider not only pictorial art, but also what it means to merely hear a work of music, and what it means to appreciate music as an artwork, for instance.

To attain an appreciation of an artwork-game is *not* its prelusory goal. Here I depart in an important way from Rough's description of artwork-games, which I will further detail in the next section. "The goal that all artworks have that is as close to the lusory goal of winning a game as

one might hope, is to appreciate the artwork by paying attention to its relevant features” (Rough 13). This strikes me as implausible. A game’s prelusory goal is the state of affairs that players strive to achieve, yet players of artwork-games are not necessarily striving to artistically appreciate an artwork when they play. They are striving to accomplish some other, prelusory goal that belongs to the particular artwork-game they are playing. In fact, playing an artwork-game as a game—that is, with the lusory attitude—is necessary, though insufficient, for attaining an artistic appreciation of it. This is because taking the lusory attitude toward the artwork-game is necessary for experiencing artistically relevant features of the artwork. The aim to appreciate an artwork-game as an artwork is not its prelusory goal, but rather an extra-lusory purpose for playing the artwork-game.

Rough might object to my view that an artwork-game is a game that should be appreciated artistically. A game is a prescription to adopt a prelusory goal, lusory means that are permitted by constitutive rules, and the lusory attitude toward these things. So it is supposed to be proper to engage a game with the lusory attitude whenever you engage it. But when we appreciate an artwork-game, surely we’re engaging with it, yet not necessarily with the lusory attitude. I might be reflecting upon my play experience, for instance, which would be an act of artistic appreciation but not one of game-playing.

Surely, though, we can do all sorts of things with games without adopting the lusory attitude toward them. We describe, evaluate, and explain games without adopting the lusory attitude. If this objection worked against the artistic appreciation of games, it would work as an objection

against the description, evaluation, and explanation of games as well. But this is absurd. Games can be appreciated artistically without being engaged with the lusory attitude.

Having demonstrated how a game could be an artwork, I turn my attention to Rough's incompatibility thesis and his arguments in favor of it.

Rough's arguments against the possibility of artwork-games

In order to argue that something cannot be both an artwork and a game, Rough asks us to imagine Artwork-Game X, an object that is supposed to have all the properties of a game and all the properties of an artwork (13). Rough aims to show that this is an incoherent notion, that it makes no sense for an object to have the properties of both an artwork and a game.

Since Artwork-Game X is both an artwork and a game, it must have a prelusory goal, as all games do. Rough argues that although we typically don't speak of artworks having a goal, what artworks have "that is as close to the lusory goal of winning a game as one might hope" is to "appreciate the artwork by paying attention to its relevant features," which he calls *appreciating* or *understanding* the artwork (Rough 13).² Since prelusory goals cannot be defined with reference to the means used to achieve them, we isolate the state of affairs, *having an*

² It may sound as if Rough means that the prelusory goal of artworks is the *activity* of appreciating it, but I don't think this is what he means. A prelusory goal is a state of affairs, not an activity. Unfortunately, the word *appreciating* can take both meanings, so we must distinguish between, on the one hand, engaging in the appreciative process of attending to a work's relevant features and, on the other, having an appreciation of the work as an outcome of that appreciative process. Artwork-Game X's prelusory goal is the latter; Rough calls this either *appreciating* or *understanding* the work, but I will say *having an appreciation of Artwork-Game X* in reference to Artwork-Game X's prelusory goal. So the prelusory goal of Artwork-Game X is having an appreciation of it.

appreciation of Artwork-Game X, from the activity of appreciating Artwork-Game X, which is the means used to achieve that goal.

Games prohibit efficient means for achieving their prelusory goals in favor of less efficient, lusory means. The creator of Artwork-Game X can set whatever rules they'd like that make the achievement of appreciating the work more difficult than it could otherwise be. Rough suggests that "the artist could obscure elucidating elements of the work" or require audiences to perform "outlandish and time-wasting tasks," for instance (14).

Artwork-Game X is an artwork and a game, so proper engagement with it requires both the appreciative and lusory attitudes. In sum: Artwork-Game X has the prelusory goal of attaining an appreciation of it, comprises constitutive rules that permit less efficient means for achieving that goal while prohibiting more efficient means for doing so, and requires audiences to take the artistic and the lusory attitudes toward it. Remember that I disagree on that first point; I do not believe that an artwork-game has the prelusory goal of attaining an appreciation of it, and I offer that artwork-games do not share any particular prelusory goal or kind of goal in common by virtue of their being artwork-games. Now I will discuss Rough's four arguments for the incompatibility thesis.

1. Artworks Cannot Have Prelusory Goals

In his first argument for the incompatibility of artworks, Rough claims that because there exists no separable goal for artworks, no artwork can be a game. He reasons as follows: the prelusory goal of a game must be separable from its lusory means. The goal of an artwork is to

have an appreciation of it, which requires audiences to attend to the work's relevant features. This is the minimal claim about artworks that Rough establishes as widely-held and uncontroversial, that the appreciative attitude is necessary for the proper appreciation of artworks. The lusory means of Artwork-Game X are relevant features of that work because they are surely features that bear on the correct appreciation of the work (Rough 16). But to attain an appreciation of Artwork-Game X, one must engage in the activity of appreciating it, and this requires attending at least to its lusory means. In this way, the prelusory goal of Artwork-Game X is inseparable from its lusory means, thereby violating a condition of what it is to be a prelusory goal; therefore artwork-games can't be games.

Rough says that this creates a dilemma for his opponents. On the one hand, one might accept that the lusory means are not separable from Artwork-Game X's prelusory goal, which means that putative artwork-games preserve their artwork status at the expense of their game status. On the other hand, we could deny that appreciating the lusory means is part of the prelusory goal, "thus preserving the game status of Artwork-Game X, but undermining its artwork status" (Rough 17).

I have already argued that attaining an appreciation of an artwork-game is not the prelusory goal of that artwork-game. If this is right, then there is no problem: the lusory means of Artwork-Game X are relevant features that bear on the correct appreciation of Artwork-Game X, but artwork-games' prelusory goals vary. Because an artwork-game's prelusory goal depends on its particular content, there's no reason to say that all artwork-games' prelusory goals are

inseparable from their lusory means by virtue of their being artwork-games. So Rough's first argument fails to establish an incompatibility between being a game and being an artwork.

2. Artworks Lack Inefficient Means

Rough's second argument is that because Artwork-Game X is supposed to be an artwork, it cannot have inefficient means: "whatever means are proposed as lusory means for an artwork must fail to be inefficient" (Rough 17). The prelusory goal of an artwork is to have an appreciation of it. Part of attaining an appreciation of an artwork is attending to its relevant features, including, if the artwork is also a game, the lusory means undergone in the endeavor to attain an appreciation of the work (Rough 17). But those lusory means must be used in order to attain an appreciation of the artwork, so they are necessary means. Rough therefore calls them "the maximally efficient means available" (18). The constitutive rules of games must establish inefficient lusory means for the achievement of the prelusory goal, but the means for achieving Artwork-Game X's prelusory goal cannot be inefficient, so Artwork-Game X fails to be a game.

My first objection may be predictable. While it is true that games' lusory means must be inefficient for the achievement of the prelusory goal, Artwork-Game X's prelusory goal is not to attain an appreciation of Artwork-Game X. Artwork-games' prelusory goals are varied. That artwork-games have lusory means does not entail that they are necessarily maximally efficient for the achievement of their prelusory goals.

Whether or not the prelusory goal of artwork-games is to attain an appreciation of them, I'm not convinced that their lusory means are the only means available for doing so. The lusory

means contained within Artwork-Game X, which one must use when playing Artwork-Game X, are only a part of what must be used to appreciate it, and they are also objects of artistic appreciation, besides. There are other artistically relevant features of the artwork-game that do not pertain to its play, such as facts about the creator or creators of Artwork-Game X, their expressed reasons for doing so, when and how it was created, facts about its medium or presentation, and a host of other aspects relevant to appreciation of the work. Additionally, relationships between the content of a work and features like these are relevant to appreciation of the work. For instance, the chronic illness that plagues the protagonist in the videogame *Hyper Light Drifter* (Heart Machine 2016) takes on new significance for players who know that the game's creator and lead artist, Alex Preston, created the game in part to express his own experience living with congenital heart disease and its complications. These considerations show that the lusory means are not the maximally efficient means available even for attaining an appreciation of Artwork-Game X; it might be necessary to play the artwork-game according to its rules, but this is insufficient for attaining an appreciation of it. Even if it's true that the lusory means must be used in order to attain an appreciation of a work, this would demonstrate nothing about their relative efficiency *as lusory means*.

3. The Appreciative and Lusory Attitudes Are Incompatible

Rough argues that the appreciative attitude, which proper engagement with artworks requires, is incompatible with the lusory attitude necessary for game-playing. One cannot engage with Artwork-Game X as a game and also have the aim of appreciating it as an artwork, Rough

claims. Because Artwork-Game X is an artwork and a game at all times, it cannot be properly engaged with merely as a game. But games must be able to be played for their own sake, so Artwork-Game X cannot be both an artwork and a game. Being an artwork, it would be inappropriate to engage with it with only the lusory attitude; being a game, it must be appropriate to engage it with only the lusory attitude. “These attitudes do not overlap, thus it cannot be that one is sufficient when both are necessary” (Rough 19). This absence of overlap signals the incompatibility of the appreciative and lusory attitudes.

Rough’s argument rests on the claim that for something to be a game, it is sufficient to engage with it with just the lusory attitude. This is true. But artwork-games aren’t just games—they’re also artworks. So I disagree with Rough: The lusory attitude is sufficient for engaging with an artwork-game *qua* game, but insufficient for engaging with it *qua* artwork. Consider the earlier example of pictorial artworks like Velázquez’s portrait of Pope Innocent X. Examining the painting and recognizing its content is sufficient for engaging with it *qua* portrait, but because it is an artwork, more is required—e.g. examining its brushwork, composition, use of color, and so on. Paintings are pictures, but not *just* pictures, just as some games are games, but not *just* games; they are also artworks. This isn’t to say that part of the artwork-game is an artwork and another part of it is a game. Rather, an artwork-game has an artwork aspect and a game aspect, just as Velázquez’s portrait has a pictorial aspect and an artwork aspect.

My move only works if I have shown that the appreciative attitude does not conflict with the lusory attitude. On the Suitsian definition of games that Rough and I agree upon, extra-lusory purposes, such as the goal to make money or to appreciate an artwork, must not conflict with

one's intention to play by a game's constitutive rules at least partly to make possible the game-playing activity (Suits 156). Suits includes this condition to exclude cases that seem like game-playing but really aren't, like that of the seeming sprinter: imagine a woman who sprints along a racetrack not in order to participate in the race going on around her, but because there is a time-bomb hidden at the finish line that she wants to defuse (156–8). If the woman could choose more efficient means than running along the track to accomplish this goal, she would, but there are none available. Even though it looks as if she is participating in the race, she's really just trying to defuse the bomb in time.

The goal to appreciate an artwork-game is not at odds with the lusory attitude in this way; I maintain that when playing an artwork-game, one *must* engage it with the lusory attitude in order to properly appreciate it artistically. I explained this in my account of how games can be artworks: the artistic appreciation of a game involves appreciating the facets of the game that can be experienced through legitimate game-play, that is, by adopting the lusory attitude toward it, and perhaps other features of the game that do not conflict with the lusory attitude condition. This makes intuitive sense; artistic appreciation of the *Mona Lisa* requires examining the painting as presented by the artist and not, say, examining the wood behind the canvas. So I think Rough has it backwards: appreciation of an artwork-game requires one to play with the lusory attitude, partly in order to make possible the game-playing activity and partly in order to

appreciate the artwork-game. The appreciative attitude is still reason to play the artwork-game *as a game*, so the appreciative attitude does not interfere with the lusory attitude.

Suppose my argument so far turns out to be wrong. Say that Rough is right to say that it must be sufficient to engage a game with only the lusory attitude, and that if something prescribes adopting some extra-lusory goal as a necessary condition for proper engagement with it, then that thing cannot be a game. I contend that if Rough is right about this, then his argument shows that being an artwork is incompatible with being any other sort of thing. If his argument is successful, it is a general argument against identifying anything with an artwork.

Consider again the example of a painting that is a work of pictorial art. Paintings and other pictorial works represent things in a certain way. If something does not represent in this way, it isn't a pictorial work. And to properly engage with a picture, it suffices to grasp its pictorial content. (Imagine that you hand me a painting and say: "Look at this painting and tell me what it's a picture of." I quickly glance at it but am unable to report its pictorial content. You'd be right to scold me for not *looking* at the picture properly.) Further, the photograph is an artwork, so one must adopt the appreciative attitude in order to properly engage with it. Is this artwork-painting possible on Rough's view?

It can't be. We can construct an argument analogous to his argument for the incompatibility of the appreciative and lusory attitudes. The appreciative attitude, which proper engagement with artworks requires, is incompatible with the grasping of pictorial content necessary for painting-viewing. One cannot engage with a painting *qua* picture and also have the aim of appreciating it as an artwork. Because an artwork-painting is an artwork and a painting at all times, it cannot be

properly engaged with merely as a painting. But paintings must be able to be viewed for their own sake, so artwork-paintings cannot be both an artwork and a painting. Being an artwork, it would be inappropriate to engage with it only in order to grasp its pictorial content; surely there is more to be done than simply recognizing what it depicts. Being a painting, it must be appropriate to merely recognize its pictorial content in order to properly view it. “These ... do not overlap, thus it cannot be that one is sufficient when both are necessary” (Rough 19). This absence of overlap signals the incompatibility of artworks and paintings.

This argument should work against other kinds of artworks: reading is necessary but not sufficient for the proper engagement of poem-artworks *qua* poem-artworks since, being artworks, they also require an *appreciative* kind of reading. Further, I appreciate an impressionist painting by not only recognizing its pictorial content, but also by attending to the details of the artist’s brushwork in order to see how they have communicated certain impressions and sensory effects in the painting. Importantly, it seems that sometimes you can’t attend to both the content represented and to the details of their representation at the same time. But both are necessary for the artistic appreciation of impressionist paintings. But it would be absurd to conclude from these considerations that impressionist paintings, music, and photographs can’t be artworks just because these activities don’t overlap. If Rough shows the incompatibility of artworks and games, he shows the incompatibility of artworks and anything else.

To conclude, consider a game that is an artwork. To appreciate it as an artwork, I adopt the appreciative attitude toward it, which requires me to play the game with the lusory attitude. But more than this is required in order to appreciate it properly; perhaps I should study its design, the

set of possible moves or scenarios permitted by its rules, the way that the game's fiction and themes are expressed through or manifested in its gameplay, and so on. Again, it's not clear that all of this can be accomplished solely through playing the (Suitsian) game; a contemplative or reflective experience may be necessary to the process of artistic appreciation. But the appreciative attitude does not interfere with the lusory attitude; the former demands the latter. Rough's objection doesn't seem to work. Moreover, if it did, it would count against the possibility of impressionist paintings, music, and poems being artworks, and this seems implausible.

4. Artworks Do Not Have Goals

Here I address a fourth argument that Rough mentions in passing as he discusses Artwork-Game X's prelusory goal. Rough acknowledges that it sounds odd to say that artworks possess goals at all, even if it is prescribed that audiences adopt the appreciative attitude when engaging with them. "If it turns out that artworks do not have goals, then we get the incompatibility argument for free, so to speak, and no further argument is needed" (Rough 13, n. 24). If games must have goals and artworks do not, then nothing can be an artwork and a game.

Rough moves too quickly in making this argument. Importantly, he does not explain why artworks *cannot* have the kind of goals that games do, even if no artworks happen to have such goals. There is no *prima facie* reason why some artworks can't have the kind of goals that games have; it might be the case that the only artworks that have such goals are artwork-games. It seems more plausible to maintain that artworks *need not* have goals, so that artwork-games

would be artworks that also have goals: prelusory goals. It's likely that artwork-games are simply new, or undertheorized, so it is a contingent fact about the history of artworks and art theory that there has been little discussion of artworks that have goals in the sense that games do. Consider this: A new artistic medium may be invented in the future, and no artworks at present have the features distinctive of this future medium. But this doesn't show there can't be artworks in this medium. Similarly, before film was invented, nobody spoke of moving pictures as artworks, yet this doesn't show that films aren't art. Rough's argument is unpersuasive.

Games and Game-Works

Videogames' status as artworks might be at stake in this debate, but Rough rightly notes that videogames are not necessarily Suitsian games. It might even be the case that *no* videogame is a game on Suits' definition, so *all* videogames could, potentially, be artworks (Rough 20). It certainly is plausible that many videogames are not, in fact, games. Entries in the *Microsoft Flight Simulator* series, for instance, were marketed as videogames for Windows computers, but may be better understood as interactive simulation software instead, even if they are intended for hobbyists' recreation. I share Rough's suspicion that many videogames are not Suitsian games themselves; they might be software that strings Suitsian games together between video and other non-game content, or they might be sets of related Suitsian games that share the same computer

software, as in the case of games with multiple difficulty settings.³ But it suffices for this discussion that many videogames either are Suitsian games or comprise such games.

It's interesting to see the views of authors and commentators on this matter. Berys Gaut says that *Façade*, an interactive drama created by Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern for Windows and Mac OS, is a "computer work" (Gaut 146), an instance of "interactive digital cinema," and "not [a videogame] on the narrow construal of 'game'" (Gaut 12). In an interview with a videogames magazine, Mateas and Stern said that though they originally wanted to distinguish *Façade* from "games," they "stopped caring whether it's called a game or not," since their aim is "creating interactive experiences that offer the agency of games but the character richness and structure normally associated with stories" (Mateas and Stern 34). Some products called or understood to be videogames might actually not be games at all, and these two creators seem not to personally regard their work as a game, but are comfortable with having their work be regarded as a game by others. For the purposes of this discussion, I will say that *Façade* is not a Suitsian game.

So *Façade* and *Microsoft Flight Simulator* are two examples of computer programs that are in many ways like games, but are not actually games. I believe this is what Rough has in mind when he says that his incompatibility argument does not rule out what he calls *game-works*, which are works that have "rules, means, and goals similar to a game's but [are] meant for appreciation beyond or differently from what the lusory attitude prescribes" (20). The difference

³ If two games have different rules, they are not identical games. Videogames' difficulty settings will often alter properties like the amount of health players and enemies have, how much damage is dealt by players and enemies, or the amount of time players have to complete their task. When these sorts of rule alterations are available for players to choose from, players are choosing between distinct Suitsian games.

is that game-works do not prescribe the lusory attitude, so they are not games, even though they strongly resemble them. Further, game-works might even have audiences adopt “something like” the lusory attitude and at least, for a short time, treat the game-work “*as if* it were a game” before going on to appreciate the game-work as an artwork (Rough 21). But Rough is careful to distinguish that this lusory-like attitude does not render a game-work a game, since a game “requires that we actually take the lusory attitude towards it, not that we act only *as if* we had that attitude” (21).

Game-works, Rough maintains, are game-like works. For Rough, game-works could be made of board games, party games, role-playing games, or videogames. Rough seems to consider the videogame *This War of Mine* (11 bit studios 2014) to be such an artwork. Inspired by the nearly four-year-long Siege of Sarajevo during the Bosnian War, this single-player videogame has players manage civilian survivors trapped in an urban warzone. Players must balance their time between improving and repairing the shelter and making sure that the survivors are rested, well-fed, and mentally well; additionally, each in-game night provides the opportunity for players to scavenge for supplies or raid other groups of survivors, though the player’s own shelter is similarly vulnerable to attack if survivors are not tasked to keep guard. In the course of managing their band of survivors, players are forced to make morally-fraught decisions about what is obligatory and permissible in the pursuit to survive during times of war. Depending on the

choices players make, their survivors can survive the siege or may all die of disease, hunger, suicide, thirst, or might be killed in combat with other survivors or soldiers.

This War of Mine presents artistically significant intellectual challenges that require critical thinking about ethical issues on the part of players. Additionally, *This War of Mine* has been lauded for its subversive representation of war in a medium rife with uncritical glorifications of military combat and for its convincingly bleak portrayal of civilian life in wartime (McCarter). It's easy to see why Rough would suggest that it is likely a work of art. "At the very least," he clarifies, "it is a work of a kind that requires a kind of engagement and appreciation that requires more than merely engaging with it as a game" (Rough 2). What makes *This War of Mine* a Roughian game-work, and not merely a game, is the apparent impropriety of playing the game only to win: if a player wanted only to survive "without consideration of the morally ambiguous aspect of the work," they'd have missed the point of the work (Rough 2).

I agree with this last point of Rough's; when playing *This War of Mine*, I might allow some of my survivors to die of starvation in order to feed others so they may live until the end of the siege. But if I do this only to have 'won' the videogame, and not as a serious choice undergone after a period of moral deliberation, I'd not be engaging the work in the appropriate manner. This admission is compatible with the account of artwork-games I have provided. My objection is that this new category of 'game-works' is not needed to account for instances such as *This War of Mine*. These artwork-games require non-lusory kinds of thinking, moral deliberation for instance, in tandem with the lusory attitude. The lusory attitude is just the prescription to aim at a goal while obeying the constitutive rules and using the lusory means; this attitude does not preclude

moral deliberation, nor does it demand trying to accomplish the goal as efficiently as possible with no recourse to any other considerations, for instance moral ones. Of course one could just play *This War of Mine* to win it, but it's good for more than just gameplay. This is part of what makes it an artwork. As Lopes suggests, videogames can also be artworks through their play, for example, by tying the thematic content of a game's narrative with its gameplay and its audio-visual features (113–18). A virtue of the design of *This War of Mine* is that its artistically relevant features are intrinsic to the playing of the game. One might play rather callously and revel in stealing food and medicine from ailing, elderly neighbors in order to survive, but this devastation is still presented and the moral choice is made through gameplay. These are artistically relevant features of the artwork-game that are experienced during the game-playing activity.

My final departure from Rough's account of game-works is minute. I have already explained why I share Rough's suspicion that many videogames are not Suitsian games proper. But those reasons were specific to videogames as a medium. What of the board games, party games, and role-playing games that might be called artworks? Might they be game-works? My explanation is simple: these are simply games, and games can be artworks too.

The concept of game-works might still have some attraction, however. What of videogames that are certainly not Suitsian games, for instance, *Façade*? But there already exists a name for things like *Façade*: computer art. “[A]n item is a computer art work just in case (1) it's art, (2) it's run on a computer, (3) it's interactive, and (4) it's interactive because it's run on a computer,” writes Lopes (27). And Lopes dedicates a whole chapter of his book on the

philosophy of computer art to explaining how videogames are works of computer art (102–120). Space does not permit me to fully render his account, but I can settle for saying that it's plausible that the category of computer art describes this last vestige of potential game-works. It's unclear what the new terminology adds to our understanding of game-like artworks.

Conclusion

After defining the terms of the debate, I offered an account of how some games can be artworks. I have considered and rejected each of Rough's arguments for the incompatibility of artworks and games, and I have shown that his view implies an absurd conclusion: that if artworks and games are incompatible kinds, then artworks are also incompatible with impressionist paintings, music, and photographs. I have also shown how we can account for Rough's 'game-works.' There is no need to separate artworks and games or to subordinate one status to the other; some things are both artworks and games.

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