The Aesthetics of Play: Creativity and Art in Videogame Performance

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ABSTRACT

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Although game players produce works of aesthetic appreciation, much like musicians or actors, the product of their play is not considered to be art. By approaching this inconsistency from an analytic aesthetic position, while paying close attention to sports philosophy and videogame studies, this work demonstrates why we should consider gameplay as potentially artistic. Not only would this give us a more consistent understanding of our intrinsically valued activities, but perhaps bring about a new appreciation for the creative labour that videogame players produce on a daily basis.

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Introduction

My interest is in the intrinsic valuation of playing games. More specifically, the value players bring to their play through creative and skilful engagement with games. The philosopher Bernard Suits explains that to play a game is to strive towards a goal, while following rules that proscribe efficient means because "they make possible such activity" (55). To study gameplay is necessarily to study an activity that is an end-in-itself, a raison d'être, a meaning-making experience. While games are not often framed in this way, this perspective offers a fruitful avenue of exploration, opening new ways of thinking about games and lived experience. In particular, I intend to show how game studies can explore the ways people shape their intrinsically valued ludic activities, which in turn should lend us insight into ideas about creativity, artistry, and meaningfulness.

The strongest of the claims I hope to make is that expert—as well as everyday—videogame play has artistic value. Game players, much like players of music or the stage, are meeting all kinds of criteria that we might require of interpretive artworks. The stance I take is an analytic one, which makes it possible to parse art from non-art by determining a set of criteria that point to how we value things intrinsically. These criteria are multitudinous and rarely necessary or sufficient, but by leveraging different definitions, I hope to produce some kind of framework for detecting shared artistic properties. At stake in calling gamers artists is something greater than improving our use of analytic terminology or providing a counter to the demonizing claims politicians, activist groups and the media make about games. By reframing game players as even just creative, we stand to offer them new ways of

understanding their meaning-making practices. If players understood themselves as interpreters with a capacity to co-create artworks with a group of game designers, and in turn have designers create games that enable players to produce creative interpretations, we might see new kinds of play. Essentially, I hope to explore what it means to play creatively, and how to further this art-making practice.

What is more, it might be beneficial for players to know that they are producing aesthetically valuable works. The popular discourse about videogamers is often very disparaging, presenting their play as meaningless at best, and at worst dangerous, addictive, and anti-social. Even in the most recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling in favour of videogame, protecting them under the First Amendment, Justice Scalia footnoted,

> Reading Dante is unquestionably more cultured and intellectually edifying than playing Mortal Kombat. But these cultural and intellectual differences are not constitutional ones. Crudely violent video games, tawdry TV shows, and cheap novels and magazines are no less forms of speech than The Divine Comedy … Even if we can see in them "nothing of any possible value to society … they are as much entitled to the protection of free speech as the best of literature." Winters v. New York, 333 U. S. 507, 510 (1948). ("BROWN v. ENTERTAINMENT." 9)

Games here are not met with the same kindness that musicians, painters and actors receive for engaging in creative acts. Hopefully, this work will contribute to a positive discourse about gameplay allowing players to feel proud of themselves for the creative output, rather than guilty for "wasting time".

This work is divided into five chapters. The first chapter offers a review and analysis of previous academic work attempting to link games to art. This review

covers a line of inquiry taken by sports philosophers from 1970 to 1990. In order to avoid redundancy in argumentation, it is not an exhaustive representation of the back-and-forth dialogue between each of the thinkers involved. Instead, it offers a selection of turning points and advancements in exploring the possibility of classing sports as art forms. This dialogue will act as an entry point for my own inquiry, providing a set of findings I will reject. Sports are a powerful place to start because they have a rich history of thought surrounding them, one largely ignored by game studies (save for Emma Witkowski's body of research, in particular see "On the Digital Playing Field"). What makes sports philosophy so relevant is that it offers an analysis of games, which for most intents and purposes extends to other kinds of games. Formally, sports resemble videogames in more salient ways, especially with regards to my thesis, than cinema or literature. So, while historically, literature and cinema have been starting points for qualitative games research, this work hopes to come from a different tradition to produce new ways of thinking through games generally and videogames specifically.

The second chapter will define the analytic terms most pertinent to my argumentation. In order to justify the relevance of sports philosophy to games more generally, I will define the term "game" so as to allow sports, board games and videogames to have commutative properties. I will also offer a hybrid definition of art, drawing from institutionalist definitions and ontological claims made by aesthetic analytic philosophy. With the difficult terms "game" and "art" unpacked, I will then offer a set of criteria for detecting whether players are artists.

The third chapter will offer an analysis of games and art from the perspective of the analytic aesthetic tradition. It will define "interactivity" and "creativity" and deploy these to show where we might begin to look for artistry in gameplay. What is more, it will provide context for this body of research, motivating this thesis's attempts to contribute to the advancement of knowledge.

The fourth chapter will offer an analysis of expert—as well as my own amateur—videogame play and attempt to show how certain instances of play meet enough criteria to be deemed creative. In addition, it will present hypothetical case studies where all but one of the criteria are met, in order to show the necessity of each criterion, but also to help demonstrate the significance of the thesis's claim.

Chapter 1: Sports and Education Philosophy Looks at Art

In his 1970 paper "Sport, the Aesthetic and Art," the philosopher of education Louis Arnaud Reid inquires into the nature of the relationship between sports and aesthetics. Before he begins his ontological analysis, he defines sports as "physical activities in which there is some definite practical aim or end to be achieved" (246). He then places games on the same spectrum as sports, but suggests that these additionally require some kind of opponent to be present[1]. Some activities then, such as tennis or basketball, are both games and sports, whereas others, such as high jumping or sprinting, are closer to pure sport. Sports, for Reid, in particular those such as gymnastics, diving, and figure skating, offer a better chance at demonstrating aesthetic and artistic possibility because they are judged for the manner in which goals are achieved. While Reid does not rule out the possibility of games being artistic, drawing examples of arguments from W. J. Anthony's essay, "Sport and P.E. as a Means of Aesthetic Education," he does question their validity:

> Sometimes the aesthetic character of *form* in games is emphasized—grace, economy, speed, skill, style, strategy, or drama (sometimes 'tragedy'), or sublimity. Toynbee writes: 'Games demand a sense of positional play, a pattern of design in movement, flowing and continuous, but basically creative and alive… Each match pattern and design is unique.' Moore and Williams write that in modern football 'space, creativity, effort and rhythm' are major factors. … If we are going to assess these strong claims, we must get as clear as is possible within the scope of a single article what we mean by the 'aesthetic' and by 'art'. (246)

[1] While I disagree with his definition of games, his work remains pertinent to my own research because he is only being unnecessarily restrictive. Given my own use of Bernard Suits' definition, games require no such additional distinction, therefore allowing Reid's analysis of sports ontology to apply to games more broadly and remain pertinent to my own object of inquiry.

What Reid is indicating by using the terms 'aesthetic' and 'art' is that while sports might elicit certain positive aesthetic properties, such as a piece of driftwood might, they do not necessarily exhibit *artistic* properties. Reid explains that there is such a thing as an "aesthetic *situation*" that minimally contains a person holding "aesthetic attitudes" (247-248). For Reid, an aesthetic attitude is one of contemplation that may occur calmly in front of some driftwood, someone else's painting, or perhaps of one's own musical performance. Reid distinguishes between everyday contemplation of mundane things and aesthetic contemplation by adding that what is contemplated is done so for the sake of contemplation. The contemplated object produces a meaningfulness, which Reid does not define. He does, however, explain that anything can be aesthetically contemplated, but that we do so in hopes of an aesthetic payoff, a satisfaction at the discovery of positive aesthetic properties. So while any given piece of driftwood or music might be contemplated aesthetically, not all pieces will be aesthetic, i.e. demonstrating positive aesthetic properties. Reid sets up this conception of the aesthetic in order to later show that sports plays, while offering up positive aesthetic value during contemplation, can no more be considered artworks than could a piece of interesting driftwood.

It is important to note that Reid is neither assuming that all art is aesthetic, nor that all aesthetic objects are art, for the term encompasses things we would not want to call art, such as a landscape, or a bird's flight. He explains that while "to some spectators a game may appear dramatic, it is quite wrong to assume that the players in the game are like actor-artists on the stage, who are performing a drama to be apprehended aesthetically" (249). He is keen on insisting that because there is no

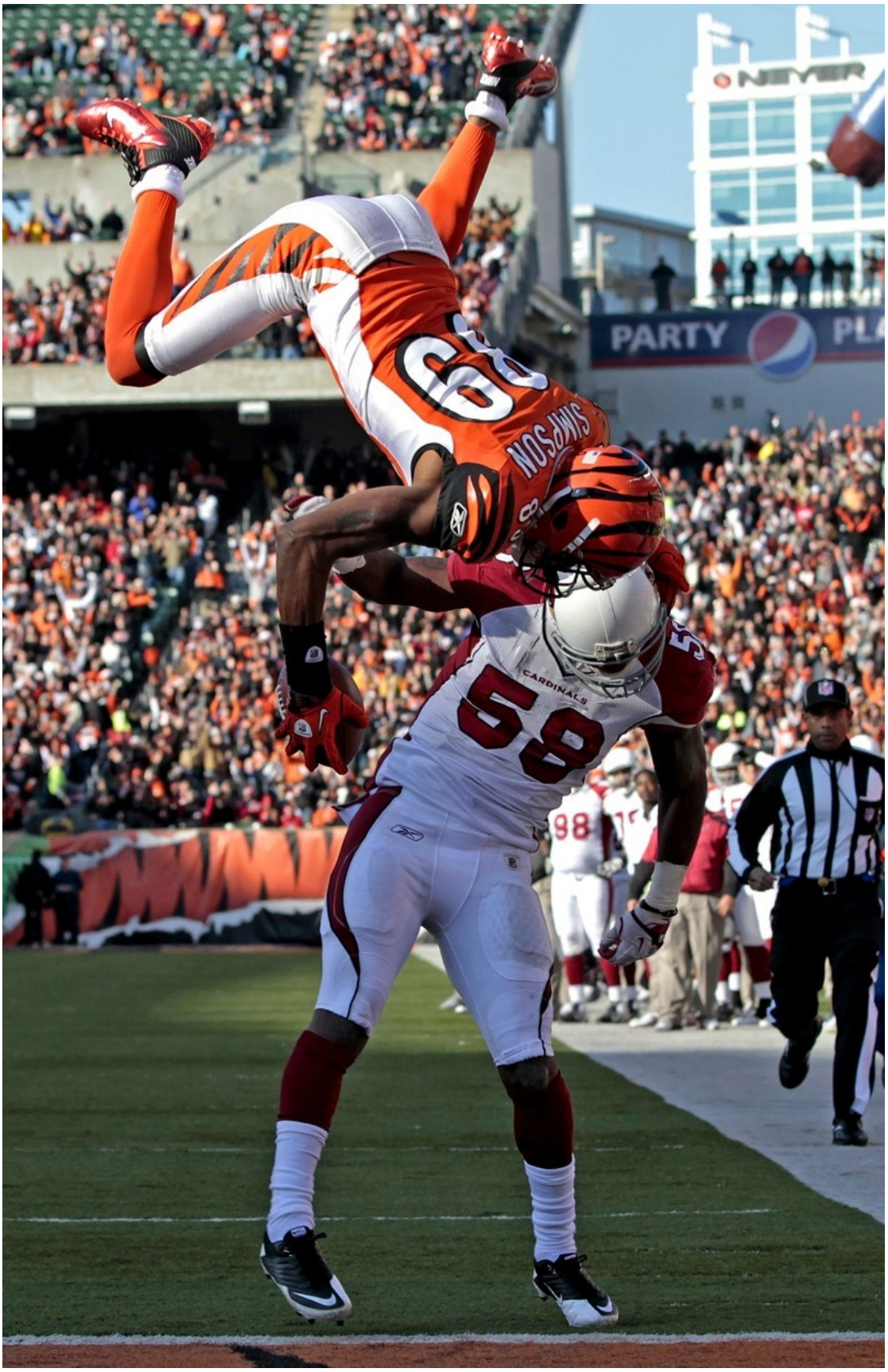
intent to create a work for aesthetic contemplation, we should make a distinction between sport-playing and art-making. For Reid, this is an essential property of art that he is willing to put forward, but not argue for. He later reduces the strength of the claim by stating that the art-maker need not say explicitly that they are making a work for aesthetic contemplation, nor even understand it as such. Reid simply insists that some consideration for the aesthetic appreciation of the work must affect the resulting artifact.

There are two ways of countering Reid's refusal of the footballer-as-artist. The first is to show that, even in its muted form, his claim about artistic intention is largely untenable, as there are plenty of objects said to be works of art that were created with other kinds art-making properties (attributes which we point to when calling an object art) and intentions. The analytic aesthetic philosopher, Berys Gaut, offers the convenient example of "primitive" societies, which he explains, "tend not to have anything like our concept of art, but we accept some of their products as art, and probably much that we now accept as 'folk art' was never intended by its makers as art" ("Art" 32). While these are not the products of an artistic intention, they meet other criteria that we deem sufficient. Take, for example the caves at Lascaux, with their paleolithic paintings. These possess positive aesthetic properties, offer formal complexity and coherency, exhibit some point of view, are an exercise of the creative imagination, and are artifacts produced by a high degree of skill. These are classed as prehistoric artworks, and yet it is unlikely that these millennia-old paintings were made to be viewed as art objects. The criteria I used to describe the other artistic properties of the paintings come from Gaut's cluster definition. While we might argue

about—and need to define—what these criteria mean, they should be sufficient in showing that there are other attributes that might make a work artistic besides having been produced with the intent to make a work of art. The second and perhaps preferred way to deal with Reid's claim is that, once he reduces the strength of the argument by explaining the artist need not explicitly think of their practice as artistic, or even have an idea of art, he ceases to be internally consistent. By reducing what he counts as intentional art-making to something so vague, he allows his own description of the intentionality of the athlete to account for his or her artistic practice. It is, after all, entirely possible that an athlete might worry about her appearance in a given sporting event, be it in the way they dodge an opponent or score a goal.

Consider basketball's tradition of creative slam dunks, or the recent feat by National Football League player Jerome Simpson, who front-flipped over an opposing defender into the end zone. The announcers helpfully describe the event in the aesthetic terms of other sports:

> Announcer Thom Brennaman: It is one thing to leap over a guy; it's another thing to finish the flip on your feet!
>
> Announcer Brian Billick: You don't get style points in the NFL, but that ought to be worth eight. My goodness, that is… I just hope the league doesn't come back and outlaw this. ("Cincinnati Bengals vs.")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As Billick indicates, the aesthetics of Simpson's play will go unrewarded by the game, but it was nevertheless done with an interest for the aesthetics. Brennaman praises Simpson's ability to land the flip, which is a superfluous addition; so long as Simpson's body ended up in the end zone, he would have scored the touchdown. Billick later jokes that Simpson would have gotten a 10 in the Olympics, pointing to those sports that do grade the manner in which goals are met. While these announcers are an excellent source of information pertaining to Simpson's jump, we might also turn to his own testimony. Simpson gave an interview to a crowd of sports reporters, explaining his thought process and understanding of the flip:

> Reporter: You stuck your landing, how much do you think that accentuated the play?
>
> Simpson: (Jokingly) That was one of the key points, me sticking the landing. If I didn't stick the landing I don't think it would have been as exciting, but I stuck the landing like a gymnast. A lot of guys said they gave me a 10 on it, but I think it was probably like a 9 because I touched the ground a little bit. …
>
> Reporter: So if you don't touch the ground it is 10?
>
> Simpson: (Laughing) Yeah, if I didn't touch the ground, it would have been a 10. …
>
> Reporter: We've heard how athletic you are; your teammates talk about it, you talk about it. Do you surprise yourself when you do something like that?
>
> Simpson: Yeah, that was probably the most surprising of all the plays in my career.
>
> Reporter: When did you know that you were going to do it, Jerome? When did you know that you were going to have to do something like that to get in?
>
> Simpson: To tell you the truth, it was an instinct. I just saw the guy, and it looked like he was going to hit me and I really didn't want to get hit. So I just used my athletic ability and my jump ability…

> Reporter: Have you ever done something like that before on the field during a game?
>
> Simpson: I have jumped over a guy before, but never done the flip.
>
> Reporter: You have done that in practice and stuff with guys pre-game?
>
> Simpson: Nah, I just made a play, man. It was off instinct. And I just helped my team. I just want to do everything possible to win games for this team.

Importantly, the flip itself was not superfluous; had Simpson not jumped, the defender would have, in all likelihood, stopped the touchdown. To say, however, that the act was purely instrumental, and not done in some part for the sake of it, would be to misinterpret the events: Simpson opted to gracefully land on his feet rather than his face, rear, side, etc.

The first objection that I immediately need to contend with, then, is that there are in fact two parallel activities going on in Simpson's jump. First, he is playing football, and second, he is performing stunts for his and the crowd's amusement/aesthetic appreciation. The reason for making the claim that he is doing two disjointed things simultaneously stems from football's supposed failure to account for the quality of Simpson's gesture. There is no such thing as the 8-point touchdown, as Billick jokes. However, given that there were several ways for Simpson to get from point A (in front of the defender and the end zone) to point B (behind the defender and in the end zone), and the fact that he chose an aerial route and executed his jump to its completion, rather than to the completion of the play, means that inside of perfect play, there is room for interpretation. Clearly, his gesture had positive aesthetic qualities; it was an exercise of creative imagination, exhibited an individual's point of view and required a high degree of skill. These are items i, v, vi, vii, and viii of Berys Gaut's (2005) ten proposed

candidates for a cluster account of art. We might say that Simpson's act was original (Bllick suggested that it might be outlawed), valued (both in the game and outside of it), and demonstrated an inspired skilful deployment of expertise and training.

Although one might argue that Simpson only somewhat intends the resulting actions, especially as he explains the role of instinct in his play, this should be no different than the kinds of instinct we expect of other artists who make quick decisions while making their works. Consider, for instance, improvisational actors who must attempt to create dialog and act out scenes at a moment's notice. Surely, they are working through instincts honed by training. After all, both are intentionally doing something—in this case, playing—and have practiced to the point of being able to do so well. Even though the problems of aesthetic intentionality have been accounted for, they are not sufficient for Reid, who later claims that art objects must have some expressive element. He writes, "Thoughts, ideas, experiences, feeling about things… are present in the artist who is making or about to make, and the making somehow 'expresses' them through the use of a medium" (250). Reid cannot make this argument, however, as he fails to provide sufficient logic to withstand any scrutiny. Reid himself states,

> Painters like Kandinsky or Mondrian, or composers of non-programmatic music, do not overtly expound exactly nameable life-themes. Yet 'abstract' patterns of shape and colour, patterns of sound of different pitch in different timbres, are in themselves expressive… even though it is impossible to say *exactly*… what they express. (251)

Reid defends the vagueness of his words by stating that another one of art's properties is that it can only be understood during its embodiment. That is, one is not able to explain a piece of music, one must hear the piece of music being played to understand it. "The meaning of a dance, similarly, is known only in the dance itself. And

'understanding' here is itself a living event, a living-through-experience of the work in its full concrete-ness." (251). The problem with Reid's critique of games as likely failing to be art, then, is due to a very prescriptive, rather than descriptive claim that Reid has concocted. Namely, art must express things that are only intelligible during the experiencing of the artwork. Reid cannot prove that music meets the criteria of expressing something, because doing so would invalidate the claim that art communicates in a medium-specific way! This is a problematic stance to take, because its claims prevent it from ever being supported adequately. What is worse, because Reid cannot describe what it is that art communicates, he must admit failure in his attempts to determine what can and cannot be art. By the very nature of Reid's claim, I might say that Jerome Simpson's front flip communicates some meaningful X about Y, but that it is indescribable and therefore meets both of Reid's criteria. Unfortunately, this gets us—and Reid—nowhere.

With his objections in mind, Reid attempts to class the athlete as a craftsman, not an artist. In order to do so, he rejects the philosopher R. G. Collingwood's distinction that the craftsman follows a recipe to reach a predefined object, whereas the artist begins construction without knowledge of the final product[2] (1938). Jerome Simpson's actions would have a chance at being artistic under Collingwood, given that his decision to make the flip was unexpectedly reached midway through his attempt to reach the end zone. Reid can conceptualize ways in which many athletes would be distinguished as artists under Collingwood, and so he decides to generate a distinction between practical and aesthetic production. For Reid, the craftsman has a practical

[2] This argument will be supported later with Berys Gaut's use of the term 'flair.'

aim, whereas the artist has an aesthetic one. Although we have already shown that it is not obvious that athletes never have aesthetic aims that run complementary to their productive ones, it is interesting to note that in testing the hypothesis of whether players can be artists, Reid borrows terms but rejects their definitions because they do not match his desired results. Despite the *post hoc* criterion, it would still not do to deny game-players the possibility of being deemed artistic.

Reid is ready to consider skating, diving, and gymnastics as potentially artistic, because he understands them as intending to produce displays worthy of aesthetic contemplation. He points to the mode of actions and how "the *way* in which they are done has to be judged by a person" (255). By this he means that it is not only important that a gymnast make her flip, but that she do so symmetrically, efficiently, and stick her landing. On the other hand, football's rules do not care that Simpson stuck his landing. In the first case, Reid presents a parallel with everyday art practices, where the manner in which art is made is central to its artfulness. The argument goes like this: A musician who played every note of a musical piece with the appropriate rhythm would be a candidate for artistic consideration. However, it is entirely possible that this musician would failed to meet the standards that the music appreciation community upholds, for various reasons. For instance, she might not have made use of her limited freedom to interpret the piece in a meaningful way. So while the musician met all the goals required of her by the score, the manner in which she did so was judged to be insufficient. In contrast, the soccer player who scores a goal, following each of the rules, will always be judged as successful. Without any interest for the manner in which the goal is scored, both on behalf of the judges and the players, it is

impossible to find the space for art to happen. This distinction, which I will show cannot hold, leads Reid to claim that, so long as the manner in which games are played remains irrelevant to achieving the lusory goals, they will likely not satisfy the criteria that he has set out. This argument will be taken up by several sports philosophers, such as David Best and P. J. Arnold, because in some ways it meshes with their intuitions. While it is certainly promising to hold definitions that match our intuitive understandings of the world, there are times when this is a misleading approach.

This final insight, distinguishing between two kinds of sports, is too quick and unconvincing, but David Best, in his essay "The Aesthetic of Sport" continues Reid's argument, refining certain points and reframing the objects in question as 'purposive' and 'aesthetic' sports. The latter care for the manner in which actions are accomplished, whereas the former simply require that the rules be followed. For Best, it is important to distinguish between these to find a way to argue for some sports being essentially aesthetic and others being aesthetic only as an ancillary property. In figure skating, for example, properties such as rhythm, expression, symmetry, gracefulness, effortlessness, etc. are all considered to some degree with each feat performed by the athlete. Best, however, fails to defend his argument against two destructive criticisms. The first is that, according to Best's description, all sports could be construed as "purposive" and that therefore there is no distinction worth making. If we return to the gymnast who makes the flip, we might stop listing goals after explaining that he or she must flip, but that would be an inaccurate description. In truth, the additional requirements of symmetry, efficiency and a clean landing are all additional goals to keep in mind. Simpson's flip could be described as having only the

touchdown as a goal, but that would be too quick as well. Simpson must avoid grabbing the defender's facemask, touching the sideline with his foot, dropping the ball, etc. The divers, dancers, gymnasts, figure skaters and synchronized swimmers simply have more—and different—goals to keep in mind.

When attempting to score the most points, the supposed "aesthetic" athlete will still be attempting to meet constitutive goals of her sport. To get a point in these sports requires meeting certain criteria, so if remaining symmetrical grants the athlete additional points, the athlete will internalize that goal, along with a series of other goals that she knows the judges are looking for. On the other hand, even in "purposive" sports, athletes are regularly encouraged to stylistically achieve the proposed goals. Spectators come to games to see superstar athletes, who are more creative, graceful, and cunning than other players, and these superstars in turn make more money as they draw more fans. This relates to Henry Lowood's claim that, so long as games are spectated by audiences they will hold the potential for artistic play ("Players are Artists"). My response to this line of thought is simply that a given player will necessarily be aware of his or her own play, and will in turn have the potential to appreciate it in some manner. The minimal requirement of one spectator will always be met, and, as such, it should only matter that the player appreciates her performance along the lines that we expect someone to appreciate art. This claim is not unlike Peter Kivy's argument in *The Performance of Reading* that artists can spectate themselves—and, indeed, must—to improve. [3]

[3] I will expand upon this further below.

Secondly, Best also fails to defend the claim that "purposive" sports are spectated for some of the same reasons that "aesthetic" sports are. An important allure of competitive sports is the aesthetic value found in the interpretations of how best to play the sport. To say that the aesthetic properties in "purposive" sports are ancillary is to miss the point that these are designed objects meant to elicit visually interesting play. Best's argument is that the rules do not account for the grace, beauty, ease, etc. of the goal, and as such, these properties (which still occur!) remain irrelevant to the sport. This claim, I argue, is untenable, as purposive sports are watched for their aesthetic value as well. Even if they are mediated by radio, there is still aesthetic interest in listening to the announcer's appreciation of the play. And while there are other properties people appreciate, which account for them caring about the scores of games they did not see, or the statistics of their star players, this should not save Best. His understanding of sports is fundamentally flawed if he purports that the aesthetics of sports are irrelevant.

Of course, it is not an essential property of sports that they bring their players to perform aesthetically, but since many are created for spectatorship, they compete with each other to be the most interesting to spectate. Survival of the aesthetically fittest is a fact many sports contend with regularly. For instance, the National Basketball Association added the shot clock to help prevent uninteresting games from occurring. Once a team receives the ball, they have 24 seconds to attempt a goal (either by hitting the rim of the opposing basket or by simply scoring) before the ball is passed to the opposing team. If they had not done this, a team who took the lead could simply stall all play from continuing and win the game by reducing the effective

play time by several minutes. They would do so by passing the ball amongst themselves to run out the clock. The Professional Golfers' Association, which ensures that golf's rules remain up-to-date, recently changed the rules governing the shape of the grooves on a golf club. They explained that u-grooves (grooves shaped like the letter u rather than the letter v) were allowing professional golfers to give spin to balls in bad positions such as the rough. This effectively meant that the rough, or long grass, was not penalizing the golfers for their inaccurate shots that had placed the balls there in the first place. This, in turn, meant that golfers could hit longer shots with less risk, allowing the following shots to be easier (the distance to the hole would be shorter), enabling them to play near-perfect games of golf. Because it is difficult to increase the relative difficulty of a golf course, and it is easy for technologically advanced golf clubs to decrease golf's difficulty, the PGA has to mediate these two forces. This not only keeps the game tactically interesting, but varies play, as different parts of the course and different kinds of shots are experienced. In turn, this makes golf pleasurable to watch, which is important in ensuring that the multi-million dollar golf industry continues to remain profitable. Likewise then, the claim that a violinist is simply following the rules set out by some music designer, and that any aesthetic properties she produces are irrelevant, is obviously false. Composers make music because it is worth playing and listening to. Game designers will often make games for the same reasons. Granted, there are economic forces prompting both of these entities to make aesthetically valuable works for play, but this should not necessarily detract from our appreciation of either work.

Peter J. Arnold effectively ends this era of inquiry into sports-as-art by summarizing the different arguments put forward over the previous two decades. Much like Reid, he espouses the view that humans may at times perceive things with an aesthetic attitude. “To put the point another way when an object is perceived aesthetically it carries its own intrinsic satisfaction or reward regardless of its function of utilitarian value” (162). With many works of art, the intent is to produce moments of intrinsic satisfaction. Arnold is conscious of the many theories put forward that value art along different axes, including formalism, conceptualism, emotionalism, etc. and uses these to demonstrate that there are many ways to value art objects intrinsically. While he does not find there to be any solid definition of art in all the ways that it is used, he opts to describe it as “something that exists not only in the mind but is a product that has been creatively and skillfully brought into the world most frequently in an intentional and purposeful way to be aesthetically appreciated” (163). Instead of disputing this claim, later I intend to show that gameplay meets these first criteria. Gameplay is creatively and skillfully bought into the world, but the intent behind game-playing is (so far) rarely understood as producing something for aesthetic appreciation. It is not impossible for the creators of gameplay to feel this way, but I believe that more could, and that it would, in fact, be beneficial for players to believe that they are producing aesthetically appreciable works.

Arnold is keenly aware that aesthetic properties do not ensure that an object becomes a work of art, and likewise that an artwork does not necessarily provide an aesthetic experience. Arnold goes on to indicate that there are three logically distinct categories of games: “i) those that are non-aesthetic, ii) those that are partially

aesthetic and iii) those that can be considered art." (164). Arnold points to Best's work on 'purposive and 'aesthetic' sports as a starting point. Because purposive sports do not care for the manner in which the goals are achieved, Arnold explains that any aesthetic moments that do occur in these sports are fortuitous and conceptually distinct from the act of playing the sport itself. Essentially, for these, he reiterates the claims of Reid and Best, which I have already disputed. Admittedly, aesthetic appreciation is not the only way that people value sports, given that it is still possible that people appreciate an ugly performance of a purposive sport, perhaps because of factors like nationalist rivalry or extreme weather conditions. Regardless, this should not stop us from claiming that spectators often anticipate aesthetic play from the athletes playing in purposive sports. In addition, while spectators might care more that their team win, rather than play in creative ways, the same can be said of musical appreciation. Some would rather that a given musician play the correct notes at the appropriate time, rather than creatively interpret the piece in question.

With partially aesthetic sports, Arnold hopes to distinguish gymnastics, diving, synchronized swimming, and other sports where the manner of achieving the goals set out by a given competition is judged. The rules alone do not convey what an ideal gesture is in one of these sports; it is up to the judges to assess ideas of ease, symmetry and unity in a given performance. In many ways, Arnold is reproducing Best's errors in assuming a) that there are essential differences between these first two kinds of sports, b) that the latter are more aesthetically interesting, and c) that the former are at best accidentally aesthetic. Without reiterating the problems with these positions, it is worthwhile to examine Arnold's third category—games that are not just

aesthetic, but artistic.

In order to justify his claim that certain sports are artistic, Arnold summarizes and rejects several philosophical arguments that would prevent him from making an argument. He even cites two of Best's arguments, as to why sport is not art, while also successfully rebutting them. Best's first objection is

> … that art, unlike sport, allows for 'the possibility of the expression of a conception of life issues such as contemporary moral, social and political problems.' Such a possibility, he [Best] argues, 'is an intrinsic part of the concept of art' by which he means 'that without it an activity would not count as a legitimate art form'. Secondly, he argues that in art, unlike in sport, the object of one's attention is 'an imagined object', that it is imaginatively constituted.' (171)

Neither of Best's claims actually hold against scrutiny. In many ways, the first is a larger claim than the indefensible one Reid proposed earlier, namely that art must communicate some kind of idea. Many art forms, such as Richard Wagner's absolute music, do not exhibit the opportunities to express "moral, social and political problems." Best himself concedes this point admitting that it cannot be a necessary condition of all art forms. Given this, we might consider that videogame play can go without it as well and be considered an art form.

While Best's second claim is somewhat confusing, Arnold elucidates the point by explaining that Best thinks art forms should have conventions that allow their depictions to communicate things other than the state of the world. An actor might pretend to be injured, and we will accept that the actor is fictionally hurt, but if a soccer player fakes an injury, we will either believe him to be truly hurt, or to be a bad sportsman. Of course, Best is attempting to produce necessary conditions to art, which spells disaster for him, as he cannot justify his proposition. Once again, absolute music

(which is created without the intent to represent anything) does not meet this standard, but remains regarded as art, therefore nullifying Best's claim. Of course, there are many other examples of art that do not express ideas. In the Western tradition this is most often associated with formalist art movements, which are more interested in the material, visual and sensorial features of the work. With these arguments contended with, Arnold still suggests, like the others, that figure skating offers a paradigmatic case of sport as art.

Figure skating, explains Arnold, requires costume design, sound design, lighting design, choreography, and the skill to adequately perform this choreography. Because all of these are part of the final score in some way, and because of figure skating's similarity to dance, which is already classed as an art form, it is impossible to deny that figure skating is an art. Arnold speaks of a recurring problem he sees in attributing art-making properties to sports, describing it as a "logical gap between the aesthetic element and the overall purpose to be fulfilled" (173). This is the biggest challenge he offers, namely that a given athlete will sacrifice or modify any performance to produce results that will be judged as better. With figure skating, because aesthetics are being judged, the athlete will not be able to sacrifice aesthetics for a more optimal performance.

Jesper Juul, in his classical definition of games writes that their results must always be objectively measurable (121). While this is more of a prescription rather than a description, it elucidates the everyday understanding that players and sports fans have of games. What counts is the number of goals scored, not the quality of goals scored. It is almost with religious fervour that game designers, players, and

spectators demand certainty from their games. With sports such as figure skating and synchronized swimming, the players are at times given expressive freedom to choreograph routines to music, often frustrating fans of other sports. They might even be expected to wear costumes and facial expressions that match the performance that they are attempting to produce. Arnold writes that "An envisaged performance must take account of such factors as balance, shape, space, dynamics and form so that they are articulated and embodied in the performance in the way intended" (174). While these sports do have guidelines and restrictions, there is freedom enough to be creative. This is different from diving, which Arnold classes as partially aesthetic, given that it is essentially a technical sport of incremental perfection. Although grace and efficiency are prized, they are measured in terms of symmetry and splash size, offering little in terms of freedom.

So far, it has been shown that sports are observed within an aesthetic context. In other words, spectators and players watch games with interest in their aesthetic value. It has also been shown that there is no need to distinguish between purposive and aesthetic sports because sports are necessarily both. Furthermore, it should be noted that sports do not meet the criteria of certain paradigmatic cases of artworks, specifically due to their inability to communicate ideas, and the fact that athletes do not play with the intent to create a work of art. However, it has also been shown that these criteria are not necessary, as many genres of artworks fail to meet them as well. It has also been shown that, although sports are not played with the intention to make an artwork, they should not be disqualified from being artworks. While sports philosophy of the late twentieth century offers interesting queries into the nature of

sports and art, it has been shown that the relevant philosophers do not have adequate definitions of artworks, which in turn leads them to make conceptual errors in their attempts to prove that sports are not candidates for artistic appreciation.

Chapter 2: Defining Art, Games, Play and Artistic Gameplay

I will deploy research from many distinct fields with separate—and, at times, contradictory—assumptions, in order to demonstrate how gameplay can be considered artistic. However, in order to draw from these fields insights and apply them to my own work, it will be necessary to standardize certain terms so that they may be applied to the same objects and work commutatively. By building on the insights of various disciplines, I will show that players have the potential to play their games artistically. This is not to say that persons might make artworks playfully—although that is part of it—but that playing a game is similar to playing a musical score or playing out a script. Given that the aesthetic value of these two interpretive activities is often said to be artistic, the goal of this work is to demonstrate that gameplay is also artistic at times. Of course, not all games will afford the opportunity to be performed artistically, and for those that do, they may still have players who do not interpret them in such ways as to make art[4]. This is not unlike music playing or acting, where there are scores and plays without much artistic value and where there are players who produce performances without artistic value. The most important concepts to contend with, then, are "art" and "game." I have already touched on concepts of art in the previous chapter, but will offer a more robust explanation of my position below.

Interestingly, the definitions of both games and art have met with much debate. What is more, both terms have been subject to strong skeptical arguments claiming that the project of defining them is bankrupt. In order to speak to these objects broadly

[4] I will use the terms "perform" and "interpret" interchangeably, in the same way that they are commonly used when describing the work of musicians or actors.

and clearly, the first order of business will be to propose a definition for each of these concepts, to demonstrate their advantages over other possible definitions, and then to contest skeptical positions.

The definition that I have adopted is drawn from Suits' work *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, a philosophical treatise in the form of a hypothetical Socratic dialogue between Aesop's Grasshopper and what would have been his disciples, had he any to begin with. Suits is voiced by Grasshopper as he answers questions that he assumes the reader/disciples might pose in the face of his presented definition:

> … to play a game is 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]" (55).

Many scholars will cite a shorter version of Suit's definition: "Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome obstacles," but this version lacks some of the nuances that make it useful (see Kirkpatrick 56). While Suits' definition is pretty standard in most ways, given the necessity of goals and rules, he is the first to capture the requirement of intrinsically valuing the actions required by the game structure. Games are intrinsically valued activities, such as art for art's sake—or even, as Socrates explains, sex—but with the additional requirement that there be rules and goals voluntarily accepted to enable such an activity to even exist (Plato *Protatogoras* 353e). Without this intentionality accounted for, we run into situations where people are going through the motions of games, but perhaps without the intent to do so, or worse, under duress. The same, of course, can be said of both art- and love-making,

which require a mental component in order to count. One could, for instance be the victim of sexual assault, and to an outsider appear as though one was making love, but, because the cognitive state of the assailed is not appreciative of the act, we would want to describe it instead as rape.

Of course, Suits was not the first to consider the implications of cognition on gameplay. Mark Twain offered a similar insight into play in his book *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*: "If [Tom] had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would now have comprehended that Work consists of whatever a body is *obliged* to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do" (20). In the fiction, Tom is aware that the act of whitewashing a fence is work, and cannot bring himself to conceive of it differently. He is, however, capable of convincing his friends that whitewashing a fence is an intrinsically valuable activity, and so they paint the fence willingly, even paying Tom for the privilege. The physical activity does not change, but the mentality of the actor does. Importantly, Suits' definition presents a challenge, whereby it must be shown that the intentionality required to play games does not preclude the kind of mindset we might expect an artist to have.

Despite Suits' definition, game scholar Jesper Juul has offered what he calls a classical definition of games. Juul's definition attempts to locate game-making properties within the construct of the game, rather than in the attitudes of the players involved. This is a significant difference, and one that I will show cannot be supported. He accepts that liminal cases must exist, but is still forced to include 'simulated stock market trading' and 'arguing over what's for dinner'—though unwittingly, in the latter case—as games, while excluding children's make-believe

games, such as ‘cops and robbers’ or ‘cowboys and Indians.’ Juul understands rule-based games very well, and is aware of a lack of academic work on their mechanics and complexity. He is interested in the ludological properties of games, and would put an emphasis on their non-narrative elements, creating a definition interested in the medium-specific qualities of games in order to do so. Much of Juul’s work demonstrates some of the ways in which rules position players to approach the fictional elements of a game in different ways, and vice versa, but there is always an emphasis on rules.

Juul’s first criterion is that games must have rules that are clear enough to be understood by each player, and that each player respect them. Suits, too, requires that rules exist, but that these rules exist for a specific reason. They proscribe certain actions that would make the game’s goals easier to achieve, but also stop us from valuing the activity intrinsically. For instance, choosing to run in an Olympic race is to accept the proscription of drugs, of using a powered vehicle, or of injuring opponents. Even if one got rid of all of these rules and played a very loose version of racing, there would still need to be at least some rules surrounding the location or time of the game’s start (Suits 76). These would necessarily prohibit certain efficient acts, such as starting the race before the others know they are in it. By stipulating that rules must act in this way, Suits avoids one of Juul's pitfalls, which is to allow non-game rules to help bring games into existence. For instance, there are tacit rules in certain social interactions surrounding the use of profanity, bodily gestures, or subject matter, but they do not turn everyday conversations into games. Juul does not specify what kind of rules games need to have, and as such, runs into problems when describing people

who follow everyday rules, rather than game-specific ones. The reason for this is simply because he offers no way to distinguish between the two. However, what concerns us most is when Juul continues his definition, explaining that Bernard Suits' term, "lusory attitude," is equivalent to his requirement of rule-respecting because it is an attitude that must exist for the game to exist. He explains that if no one respects the rules, then the game cannot occur (38). However, Juul's reading of Suits is an oversimplification; an important element of the lusory attitude is that it is taken up for the sake of making the activity possible, *because that activity is understood as something intrinsically valuable*. The lusory attitude, for Suits, requires an understanding that the activity is worth doing for its own sake, in addition, perhaps to other ulterior motives (146). For instance, if I am tortured into playing a game of chess, then I am in fact not playing a game, but acting under duress.[5] Juul's definition does not include any set of motivations that players must have, other than the motivation to respect the rules, which can come solely from instrumental desires (such as making money, building muscle mass, or avoiding ludicrous forms of torture). Suits does not deny that instrumental attitudes can exist while playing a game. He only requires that the players, at the very least, in addition to any other attitudes, value their activity intrinsically for it to be considered as a candidate for game status. The importance of intrinsic value in a game definition cannot be overstated. Without it, Juul's definition allows for too many activities to become games, defeating his attempts to make a restrictive definition. In addition, too many activities that would normally be called games cease to be understood as such. By positing Suits' lusory

[5] That is assuming that one does not value playing chess when under duress.

attitude, it is possible to distinguish between work and play that at times involve the same set of actions and visible conditions.

Juul's second criterion is that games must have both variable and quantifiable outcomes. Juul's major use for the first part of this criterion—variability—is to distinguish between simple games (such as tic-tac-toe) played by experts and the same games played by non-experts. Unconvincingly, Juul makes the claim that the former is not a game because the only available result is a draw; the moves are all predetermined by each player's knowledge of the best course of action. In contrast, the latter is a game, because the players do not know how best to proceed and will, at times, win, lose, and draw until they master the game's mechanics. However, it is not difficult to imagine that even an expert tic-tac-toe player playing an expert—though imperfect—opponent might attempt a series of unconventional moves (such as X in the corner, rather than the centre) to throw her opponent off or make him lose focus in order to gain an advantage. Yet even taking into account that tic-tac-toe is rather simple, dull, and ends in a tie almost every time, it does not follow that it is not a game—only that it is a bad one for most purposes. An alternative suggestion to Juul's criterion is that a good game will likely have an appropriate level of difficulty that allows for the players to attain results that do not frustrate them. "Bad" or "simple" games are still games for some players, so long as the players engage with the games with lusory attitudes. Juul has only found a contributing element to the likelihood of players holding a lusory attitude, rather than finding an ontologically relevant element of 'gameness.'

The second half of this second criterion, quantifiability, requires that games end with results that can be numerically represented. However, what Juul is really

claiming is that games must have results that can be objectively understood and compared. According to this criterion, an activity whose goal was to make an individual happy could not be a game, because happiness is (currently, at least) immeasurable. Essentially, the reasoning that leads Juul to add this element is that the games whose results are unclear are problematic, and therefore not games (39). Without stating anything more than the fact that a game whose result is disputable is difficult to deal with, Juul decides to exclude them. However, it is easy to imagine a game with two individuals competing to see who could make their respective husbands happier. They might decide to go about this by adding arbitrary constraints (such as doing so blindfolded, while holding geese) because these will make the game interesting to them. These individuals, as understood by Suits, are playing a game because they are engaging in an activity wherein they voluntarily seek to overcome otherwise unnecessary obstacles, where these obstacles make the activity possible, all the while valuing the activity for its own sake (In this instance, perhaps they despise their husbands and would do nothing for them otherwise) (55). Finally, we might add that they accept the impossibility of comparing results, and that neither will ever know who "won." Because the outcome of this game is indeterminate, and thus unquantifiable, Juul would have to disqualify it. This is a problem, given that both individuals would believe they are playing a game, have goals, and accept a set of rules.

It would seem that more evidence would be required than simply stating that a difficulty in determining a winner outright excludes certain activities from being games just for the sake of including a definitional element. Such a position seems

unreasonable, since it suggests that an entirely new concept must be invented for describing this game-like, albeit odd, behaviour. Other important activities that this part of Juul's definition excludes tend to be children's games of make-believe, but also improvisational comedy contests, and many forms of role-play. Not only does Juul fail to give an alternative understanding of these, but he fails to logically demonstrate why these are ontologically distinct from the games he does accept. Importantly, Suits' theory can accept these activities as games, so long as their players hold the correct attitudes, and that these activities have rules.

Juul's third criterion is that the variable outcomes of a game must be valorized to differing degrees, where the more difficult outcomes tend to be valorized to a greater degree (but not necessarily) (40). This position seems superfluous, given that it is already included in Suits' lusory attitude, which Juul claims to adopt, not to mention in everyday situations where people already care about the results of their actions. Given its relative innocuousness, this criterion need not be disputed. Similarly, because the fourth criterion demands that players put effort into the game to affect the end result (games of pure chance such as roulette are excluded), but that no games of pure chance will be further discussed, this criterion's exploration may also be foregone. The reason for rejecting games of pure chance in this thesis's analysis is simply because they do not provided players with opportunities to make creative decisions that affect the game. Given this limitation, and my interests in pursuing player creativity as a motivating reason to deem gameplay artistic, games of chance remain irrelevant to my argumentation.

The fifth criterion requires that players be emotionally attached to the outcome of the game, where a "player may feel genuinely happy if he or she wins" and where a spoilsport is someone who "refuses to seek enjoyment in winning, or refuses to become unhappy when losing" (40). This criterion is another reiteration of Suits' requirement of a prelusory goal, which is to say the desired state of affairs sought by the player, achieved by following rules (50). Given that the player seeks these affairs and plays the game for its own sake, this criterion is either unnecessary to require that the player be emotionally attached, given their stipulated commitments and intents, or, more importantly, erroneous. Consider the player, who finally completes the greatest game she has ever played, and ever expects to play. She might not even experience a brief moment of happiness before a dismal realization—that there is nothing left for her to do—sets in. Another example: *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream 2010), a game written and produced by David Cage, tells a dynamically-produced tragic story, where the worse one plays, the more tragic the story becomes. Playing without error will produce a happy ending, but this is not as satisfactory as playing the game on a difficulty setting high enough to prompt regular errors. In this case, the story can unfold in more interesting (and perhaps cathartic) ways, providing a more pleasurable playing experience. Contrary to Juul's demands, a player might feel sad for having achieved their 'desired' outcome. Winning the game in both of these cases is intricately tied to the incorrect emotional response as stipulated by Juul, but surely this does not preclude them from being games.

Finally, Juul requires that a game must have negotiable consequences, that is, its real-world consequences must always be optionally assigned. Paintball battles can

be games, but live ammunition battles cannot, as their results are more than symbolic and can never be negotiated. However, while playing paintball—or boxing for that matter—bleeding and bruising are common occurrences, and are non-negotiable. What is more, according to Juul, sadness and happiness are non-negotiable, given his fifth criterion, but surely these are "real-world" consequences. Juul explains that it is difficult to say which non-negotiable real-world consequences negate gameplay, because not all of them do, but that a line between them likely exists (41). Surely this is a sign of a weak definitional criterion. The reason Juul puts forward this suspect claim is to distinguish between stock markets and professional soccer. While both have game-like properties and both are engaged with for financial reasons, because soccer can be played by amateurs, only it can be said to be a game. Thus, even when professionals play soccer they are playing a game. However, since working with stock markets necessarily affects the real-world, stock market trading is not a game. This position seems unreasonable, given that some people with money likely do make a game of the stock market. They might attempt, for instance, to lose their money as quickly as possible, hoping to beat their best times or those of others playing such a game. Surely this could not be considered working, or even game-less play. For such a situation, there would be rules and each player would believe that she is playing a game. What is more, someone who has grown to hate soccer, but is still a talented player with a family to feed, might only continue to compete in soccer matches in order to make money. Surely this person would not view himself as playing a game, but rather as working. According to Suits' definition, he wouldn't be playing a game, given that he does not value the activity intrinsically. The relevance of discussing the

negotiability of consequences is quite limited, especially when we consider that Suits' appreciation of attitudes can lead to Juul's desired results without causing paradoxes. With Juul's definition scrutinized, it is clear that those portions that are correct are already present in Suits' work, and those portions that are incorrect are either improved by Suits or simply ignored.

Before moving on to defining art, we must also reject the skeptical position drawn from Ludwig Wittgenstein's family resemblance thesis as it applies to games in his work *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein does not care about games so much as he cares about language, definitions and the way we use them. However, because he uses the word "game" as an example of words we use without precise definitions, it is often claimed that no definition of games can exist. Essentially, Wittgenstein argues that because people normally call several different activities games, and because no set of criteria would be sufficient and necessary to distinguish these activities from other activities that we do not call games, we must turn to a 'family resemblances' approach. Each game will meet some criteria, appearing to have several shared properties with other games. Wittgenstein uses games to illustrate a point he is making about contextualized meaning. Wittgenstein is talking about social convention, which is less useful in an analytic context where one might hope to speak more concretely about some object of inquiry. Should a scholar throw in the towel with regards to defining games, he or she would miss a crucial point of insight later demonstrated by Bernard Suits in his analytic approach. While one must admit that it makes some sense to hold the family resemblances thesis when discussing the

everyday usage of the word game, during analysis, a more nuanced and careful approach will lead to a more precise understanding.

With a conception of games firmly planted, it is now important to put forward some understanding of art that can be tested against. While the first chapter featured refutations of different definitions of art, that was not enough to show positive cases of gameplay as art. To begin, then, we might start with the art historian George Dickie and his early defense of a somewhat popular art historical/institutionalist definition of art:

> (1) An artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art. (2) A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public. (3) A public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them. (4) The artworld is the totality of all artworld systems. (5) An artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public. (Dickie, 1984).

The key feature of this definition is in how the status of artwork is conferred to an object through its relations with different entities, namely to the artist and to the artworld public. The difficulty in attempting to demonstrate that gameplay is art under this definition stems from the fact that virtually no one currently thinks of gameplay as potentially artistic, and even if someone wanted to, they would find no way to demonstrate such a claim using Dickie's definition. Dickie makes it nearly impossible to discover artworks that we do not already think of as art, a troubling position for someone like me who wants to show exactly that. However, Robert Stecker, in his book *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: An Introduction*, explains that because Dickie is unable to specify the difference between art world and non-art world

institutions, many objects such as "official" tourism brochures, or buildings dubbed "historical" meet Dickie's criteria for art (110).

Essentially, Dickie's definition cannot parse between those institutions that are presenting objects because he cannot describe how it is that these art world systems select their objects. Stecker writes that "Dickie acknowledges that his definitions are circular, but denies this is a problem… such a claim seems to be an admission that the definition cannot be completed" (110). In light of this problem, Stecker offers an alternative definition of art that he dubs "Historical Functionalism."

> At any given time, art has a finite set of functions that range from genre specific values to those wide-spread representational, expressive, formal, and aesthetic values enshrined in the simple functional definitions considered earlier. The functions of art at a given time are to be identified through an understanding of the art forms central to that time. However, that does not mean that items that don't belong to a central art form are never art. According to this view, almost anything can be art, but artifacts outside the central art forms have to meet a higher standard. This motivates a disjunctive definition of art: an item is an artwork at time t , where t is not earlier than the time at which the item is made, if and only if (a) it is in one of the central art forms at t and is made with the intention of fulfilling a function art has at t, or (b) it is an artifact that achieves excellence in fulfilling such a function. (100f)

This remedy is useful because it offers the second set of criteria, specifically allowing for objects outside of what we normally consider art to be considered as art if they fulfill artistic functions and maintain certain similar properties. Of course, what these functions and properties are is still underdetermined. Any useful deployment of this definition will need to demonstrate that a given object of inquiry shares the appropriate properties of some predetermined object that is decidedly art. Gameplay artworks for our purposes will be i) objects ii) created by people iii) that fulfill the

same functions as works we already deem to be art, specifically musical and theatrical interpretations. While this definition requires some agreement on pre-existing artworks, it should not be difficult to find paradigmatic cases and show how similar gameplay is to these.

Alan Simpson, in his essay "Art and Games" writes that art and games are often mistakenly conflated in philosophical debate. While he cites and debunks several concepts that both share, he suggests that, because both can be understood through an institutionalist definition (blending Wittgenstein and Dickie to describe games), we might consider that they are analogous. While that in itself seems implausible, Simpson still decides to take the majority of his essay to debunk his own preposterous proposition. Simpson finds Dickie's definition either vacuous or disinterested in the ontology of art and therefore useless to him. Ultimately, games and art are too poorly defined for Simpson, to the point where the project of mapping them onto each other is not possible (275). Stecker's alternate definition, however, does address Simpson's concerns—namely, that we have some properties belonging to the artworks themselves, and not just a series of social networks declaring objects art. The philosopher Peter J. Arnold, also rejects the institutionalist position that Dickie offers, because, according to Arnold's interpretation, it allows anyone to confer art status to anything they please ("Sport: The Aesthetic and Art" 171). If this is indeed the case, then yes, Dickie's definition is worthless, but Arnold has offered a weak interpretation that does Dickie little justice. Without defending Dickie, however, I would propose that Stecker's definition offers solutions to Arnold's problems, given that it requires the appraisal of works to see if they hold certain properties. This definition at the very

least stops anyone from simply proclaiming that a given object is an art work and making it so. Arnold also cites Simpson, explaining that the analogous approach—specifically, that games and art share enough properties to be considered the same—is untenable until better definitions come about. We must, of course, admit that Stecker's definition cannot in and of itself determine whether something is art, because with each instance it must be determined if the work in question coincides with other paradigmatic artworks. This process will always be a matter of determining proximity by degrees, where we might demonstrate that game-playing is close enough to art-making as to shift the burden of proof onto others to show that it is not.

With the concepts of art and game delineated, it is now upon me to demonstrate that certain persons are both playing games and making art. One way to do so, which I will not endorse, is to show that players are i) voluntarily ii) overcoming certain obstacles iii) in order to create a certain object iv) with the intent to have that object fulfill the same functions as other paradigmatic artworks and v) because these obstacles make such an activity possible. The problem with positing these criteria, however, is that they are trivially met. Many artists adopt certain restrictions to their practice in order to make a game out of creating artworks, and many players create objects such as Dungeons and Dragons (Gygax and Arneson 1974) campaigns (improvisational narrative-building) or *Minecraft* (Mojang 2011) structures (virtual sculpture) which easily fulfill the functions of many accepted artworks. If the goal of a game is to make an artwork following some minimal restrictions, then it should not be too troublesome to show that gameplay and art-making are at times analogous. Game studies scholar Celia Pearce comes close to

arguing this point, but stops short of calling gamers artists. She explains that "The key to game narrative is that it is, by definition, incomplete. It must be in order to leave room for the player to bring it to fruition" (146). Pearce is arguing that players retain agency in their play that is relevant to the narrative of their games, and that designers must leave space for them to exercise that agency. This is not dissimilar to music-playing, where the composer offers some leeway to the musician to play out her work. Even in less-open RPG systems, players have some say as to how the story unfolds and how the protagonists will be characterized.

The more difficult—and perhaps more interesting—kind of claim is that players are performing works of art when they play games. This claim is subtly different, but presents a plethora of problems worth addressing. The criteria would then be that players are i) voluntarily ii) overcoming certain obstacles iii) in order to achieve a certain state iv) because doing so makes such an activity possible v) and that their attempts to do so successfully fulfill the same functions as other paradigmatic works of art. With these criteria, we are looking for artistry in play, and not in the artefacts of play—that is to say that the artworks in question will be the actions taken by the player. To demonstrate this, several steps will need to be taken. First, it must be shown that the actions of the players in question are fulfilling the functions of similar actions we call artworks. Second, we must account for the fact that players are simultaneously required to strive for victory and fulfill the functions of artworks. This is problematic because artists are not required to strive towards a specific end, such as victory, and, in fact, adding such a condition to game-players might reduce the artistic

merit of their play. This will be called the problem of subversion. While subverting art practices is entirely possible, games, by definition, cannot be played subversively.

In order to show that gameplay fulfills the function of art, we first need to know what functions art has. Berys Gaut, in his cluster account of art, offers the argument that because art exists in many cultures and at many different times, the criteria for a definition will be neither sufficient nor necessary in their entirety. Rather, he suggests that a set of criteria might be mixed and matched to produce disjunctive definitions, each capable of creating a sufficient set. Gaut offers 10 sample criteria he is somewhat interested in defending, but generally he seems more interested in defending the very possibility of maintaining a cluster definition in the first place. While I do not think that we must subscribe to this definition, the sample criteria he offers are a good starting point for looking at artistic functions.

> The cluster of criteria for art are as follows (1) possessing positive aesthetic properties, (2) being expressive of emotion, (3) being intellectually challenging, (4) being formally complex and coherent, (5) having a capacity to convey complex meanings, (6) exhibiting an individual point of view, (7) being an exercise of creative imagination, (8) being an artifact of performance that is the product of a high degree of skill, (9) belonging to an established artistic form, and (10) being the produce of an intention to make a work of art. ("Cluster" 16)

In this chapter it was shown that Bernard Suits's definition, which requires intrinsic valuation, is not only more accurate than Jesper Juul's "classical" definition, but points to a necessary insight in understanding the very nature of games. What makes it doubly poignant is that that which makes games distinct from everyday life and work is also something that brings it closer to our understanding of art. While art

has been shown to be dependent on cultural valuation, it has still been deemed objectively determinable. We can safely claim that a given object is a work of art if it meets the criteria for which we have accepted other objects works of art. This conceptual move was deployed in large part as a compromise between two competing definitional approaches to art. As a result, the proposed definition offers less insight than we might hope for in a definition of art, and might be too restrictive, as it accepts only those cases in which both definitional approaches agree. So, while these criteria are perhaps incomplete, they start us on a path that can bring us to shift the burden of proof onto others who would claim that game playing is fundamentally inartistic. With the definitions of game and art determined, it is possible to get a grasp on their unruly relationship. While Chapter 1 offered a starting point for development into the possibility of artistic play, it will ultimately come down to Chapter 3's exploration of contemporary analytic aesthetic analysis to determine how, when, and why games become artworks.

Chapter 3: Aesthetic Philosophy Looks at Games and Sports

Exploring what he claims to be a paradigmatic case of creativity, Gaut demonstrates how imagination aids in both creating and understanding metaphors. Creative imagination is central to Gaut's thesis. To construct a metaphor, one must bring together two disparate concepts. Imagination is the mental process most suited to this endeavour, given that in imagining something, we need not commit ourselves to its truth ("Creativity and Imagination" 161). To be creative, one must pass the first test of originality and create a unique metaphor, and while this task is not trivial, originality alone would not lead to the kind of creative 'making' that Gaut and others are after. An additional condition is that the metaphor's combination of disparate elements should guide one towards valuable thoughts. Gaut's example, "men are wolves," allows readers to think in perhaps useful ways about the character of men ("Creativity and Imagination" 165). However, the reader is not expected to hold it true that men are actually wolves. Imagination allows one not only to construct, but also to contemplate, statements such as "men are wolves," because one is not committed to the truth of the proposition. At no point does the reader believe that men are wolves, but in imagining men as wolves, she may begin to find salient similarities between her conceptions of men and her conceptions of wolves. The creativity involved in playing a videogame is not metaphor-generating, however. It would be somewhat absurd to expect players to connect disparate concepts and bring them to fruition during play just for the sake of expressive desires. Seeing as people do not regularly create metaphors for personal consumption, it is best to look elsewhere for creativity.

In order to deal with the problems encountered in the debates between the previously discussed sports philosophers, it will be necessary to turn to aesthetic philosophers, specifically with regards to both creating a defensible distinction between so-called "aesthetic" and "purposive" sports and with regards to demonstrating that aesthetic and athletic performances are not mutually exclusive. With those problems solved, it will then be necessary to determine some model to explain how players produce aesthetically interesting performances and provide some criteria for discovering those performances.

From the perspective of aesthetic philosophers, the key concept that distinguishes sports like figure skating and sports like diving could be found in what Lacerda and Mumford call "genius" (183) or what Gaut terms "flair" ("Creativity and Imagination" 170). Both of these terms point to an innovation that is intentional but unpredictable, in other words, which does not use, as Gaut explains, a recipe:

> A recipe consists of a set of instructions for taking some steps that, if followed correctly, produce a pre-determined outcome. We can generalize the notion of a recipe to that of a routine: a routine is a set of rules that, if followed competently, produce a pre-determined outcome. Following these rules may be difficult and require a lot of training and skill. But as long as one simply follows a routine, one is not being creative, even though one may need to be highly skilled to do so. ("Creativity and Skill" 91)

For example, the Olympic high jump, which has had relatively little innovation, tests different people performing nearly identical gestures with greater or lesser force. However, in 1968, Dick Fosbury demonstrated flair/genius when he invented the technique that would make his the highest jump at the Olympics. Going over the bar in an entirely novel way, Fosbury rotated his body to have the abdomen face upwards

rather than downwards as he went over the bar. As it stands, any improvement will be either in the physique of the player or in the quality of the execution of the technique known as the Fosbury flop—that is, until something new and unforeseen comes along.

For Gaut, a creative act is one that is original, valuable and that demonstrates flair. Fosbury's jump was creative because i) it was the first of its kind, ii) it allowed him to win the Olympic gold medal and iii) no recipe existed to follow and subsequently produce the technique, and thus the jump required some insight on his part. The idea of flair/genius is central in showing at least one way of distinguishing between those athletes that meet the minimal goal of skilfully creating performances worthy of aesthetic appreciation, and those that do not. While, admittedly, there might be other ways of being aesthetic while playing sports, it is not obvious what these would entail,

nor is it necessary to determine them in order to demonstrate that at least certain players are aesthetic.

Lacerda and Mumford critique Arnold's claim that an athlete will sacrifice the aesthetics of her performance in order to meet her goals. They explain that, in order to outperform other athletes, one would need to display extra freedom. Freedom, in this case, is somewhat banal—namely, the freedom to jump higher—but it is nevertheless a kind of freedom. Having greater technique, such as Fosbury did, enabled him to garner one extra inch of freedom over his competitors, and thus meet the goal of his sport. This extra freedom did not come easily, they explain; it required some kind of creative thinking. If it had not required creativity, it would have been trivial to discover and would have been standard practice from the start. From here, it is easy for Lacerda and Mumford to show that even if Fosbury's jump was "uglier" by some arbitrary aesthetic standard, it would also be more aesthetically valuable, insomuch as it displayed freedom through creativity. They borrow the term genius from the art world to describe athletes like Fosbury who are "able to innovate new successful strategies that have an influence on those who follow and try to emulate them" (191). Although there is little issue to take with Lacerda and Mumford's stance, it is not very compelling to claim that the source of aesthetic value in an athlete's performance could stem from her discovery of how to move more quickly or jump an inch higher. Gaut, however, does point to another source of aesthetic value in athletic achievement that we could look for.

When Gaut describes creativity in his essay "Creativity and Skill," he explains, much like Lacerda and Mumford, that besides instrumental grounds, creativity is

valued for the freedom that the creator exhibits. What Gaut does, then, is explain why we would value freedom—and in so doing so, demonstrates that he is thinking of an altogether different freedom:

> … creative persons exhibit a kind of freedom, they are not bound by routines, but they can stand back from them, consider whether they are for the good, and act in a way that is goal-directed but not routinized. Creative persons, then, are free in the sense that they are not bound by the established practice of routines. Creativity manifests a certain kind of freedom in the domain of skills; and freedom is something we value for its own sake. (101)

The difference between Gaut's reading of creativity generating freedom seems less trivial than Lacerda and Mumford's assessment. Whereas they attributed intrinsic value to jumping an inch higher, I am compelled to support Gaut's attribution of value to freedom of thought[6]. The ability to think creatively and select those ideas that are useful is an intrinsically valuable act. It is the same kind of value-attribution we might accord to Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain," which broke with the routine ways of producing artworks by selecting something that someone had already made and displaying it in an unusual way.

Gaut discusses how it is possible to come to think creatively, drawing from Albert Einstein's claim that "combinatory play seems to be the essential feature in productive thought" ("Creativity and Skill" 101). He describes a process where one juxtaposes different ideas in novel ways in hopes of producing something interesting. Gaut explains: "This is not blind, accidental process; it can involve considerable skills. Neither is it a matter of routines. Some play is free play. Free play can involve the transformation of one kind of procedure governed by routines into another, and so be

[6] Gaut is careful to note that his concept of free thought is not the kind that would challenge a determinist view of the world. Rather, he draws from Christine Korsgaard's idea of reflexive freedom.

the exercise of creativity" (101). The importance of "skill" in this context relates to the likelihood of producing something valuable that is also original. For example, skilled painters can manipulate paint in more ways than unskilled painters, and are therefore more likely to develop novel techniques that we might value as being creative.

So far it has been shown that certain players creatively overcome voluntarily accepted obstacles in order to meet their pre-lusory goals. It has also been shown that this creativity is valuable beyond being functionally superior with regards to achieving these goals, but that if contemplated aesthetically will hold positive aesthetic value. This value comes from a social and philosophical praising of free thought—meaning thought that goes beyond convention—but instead produces new ways of thinking and doing. While sports have so far stood in as a paradigmatic case of games, videogames, as I will demonstrate, share the same properties.

Grant Tavinor writes, in *The Art of Videogames*, that players take on roles similar to those of the cinematic director, scriptwriter and editor, but at no point does he claim that players can be artists. Tavinor explains that there might be some similarities between games and music in the way they are played; "the videogame might be a kind of algorithmic script from which the player extracts an object of appreciation through their playing" (58). However, he goes on to state that it is unclear whether the playings of games are "apt to be judged for their aesthetic merits in a way that performances of symphonies, dance pieces, or jazz standards are" (58). Tavinor sees two problems. First, "when critics evaluate games, they tend to refer to features that are likely to be standard to a large range of playing, and not those specific to a single idiosyncratic playing" (70). Second, games conflate the audience and the

performer. This is strange for Tavinor because we normally assume that performers perform for someone other than themselves. However, Tavinor explains that he is uncertain what to make of this situation and that further research could be done (59). With respect to the first objection, I see no reason why we could not include two kinds of appreciations: one for games, and one for their playings. Surely it is possible to appreciate Shakespeare's plays as texts and not performances. In the same way, it should be possible to appreciate a videogame distinct from its playing, in the way that videogame critics do. Of course, the situation with videogames is unique, because current business models for theatre and music composition have the creator either produce an interpretive performance, sell it to a performer or group of performers, or collaborate with a performer or group of performers. The distinction between work and its interpretations rarely needs to be made in these cases, but nevertheless can be. With respect to Tavinor's second point, the analytic aesthetic philosopher, Dominic McIver Lopes shows in his work on interaction and computer art how we might deal with the conflation of the roles of performer and spectator and demonstrates that they can be filled by a single gamer.

Lopes writes, "a work of art is interactive just in case it prescribes that the actions of its users help generate its display" (36). By making this claim, Lopes can distinguish between two types of art/receiver relations: those where the receiver is encouraged[7] to input something that changes the work's apprehendable properties, and those where it has been said that the receiver creates her own meaning with the work, either by performing non-prescribed acts (e.g. re-writing parts of a book to suit her

[7]Lopes makes sure to use the concept of "prescription" to differentiate between, say, navigating a hypertext and slashing the *Mona Lisa*.

taste) or acts that change the apprehension of a work without changing its apprehendable properties (e.g. reading a book in reverse order, to feel post-modern). It is not enough to think and respond to a work for it to be 'interactive;' as it is now defined, the work must communicate to the receiver that he or she must take a part in generating its display (which can, at the very least, mean, according to Lopes, its "visual or sonic properties, its textual make-up, or how it unfolds in time" (42)). Lopes later states that user[8] and audience member are two roles that can be taken on by one person. He writes, "Quite often the roles of audience and user are played by the same person, who attends to the work partly by attending to herself" (83). Lopes suggests the following set of necessary and sufficient conditions for determining whether someone is a performer. He writes,

> A person plays the role of performer in generating a display of a work only if he or she (1) generates the display (2) as a result of knowing what features it must have in order for it to be a display of that work and (3) with an intention to generate a display which has those features, so that (4) an audience attends to the work partly by attending his or her doing (1), (2), and (3). ("A Philosophy of Computer Art" 79)

While useful, these clauses need some clarification. First, because performing is a role, it is possible to be a performer and an audience member, for one can take on multiple roles, and each is a role with non-conflicting clauses (81). This is important because many videogames are played alone, meaning that it must be demonstrated that players must attend to their own actions, in order to be simultaneously understood as performers and audience. Second, because one can accidentally produce the sounds of a piece of music, or intend to play a piece without actually knowing the notes, and

[8] According to Lopes, "a person plays the role of user in generating a display of a work only if he or she (1) generates the display, (2) exploring the work, so that (3) an audience attends to the work partly by attending to his or her doing (1) and (2)" (82).

because we would not want to call a person doing this a performer, the second and third criteria are inserted to ensure that there is a certain knowledge and intent. Of course, for videogame players to be considered performers, they will need to meet these criteria too. The sports philosopher S. K. Wertz posits, however, that players should not spectate their own play: "If a participant in a game does adopt such a point of view [delightful contemplation], then he or she becomes a spectator while playing. That has disastrous consequences; the player is out of the game's action and is, mentally, on the sidelines" (108). While this might be the case at times, the philosopher Peter Kivy explains that often, performers will perform for themselves during rehearsals. It is important that they attend to the performance in order to improve it. This, in turn, minimally means that it is both possible and profitable to attend to one's own performance (15). With videogames, it is even more likely than in sports to witness one's performance, because its results are displayed on the screen that the player attends to. This understanding of interactive works is sufficient to meet Tavinor's concerns that most videogames—if, in fact, they are being performed—are being performed for the self. While Kivy suggests that certain performances cannot be done to the self, such as those involving deceit, there is nothing suggesting that one cannot perform a piece of music for the self and that, in fact, it would be impossible to rehearse a given piece of music were it not also possible to contemplate oneself rehearsing it (14). Kivy's goal is to demonstrate that reading is a performance art for the self. Without positing such a strong argument that holds no appreciable object, we might still benefit from his argumentation. Given that many videogames are played

alone, it is helpful to at the very least know that, so long as there is a personal contemplation, we might have an aesthetic situation.

And while Tavinor's objections are answered by Lopes' work, Lopes himself never mentions that persons interacting with interactive works are artists. To define the term 'artist,' Lopes writes, "A person plays the role of an artist in doing an action just in case the action is done with an intention to make a painting, a song, a poem, … and the work wouldn't have some of the properties it has were it not for the action" (73). While Lopes appears to be positioning himself to declare players as artists, given that they interact with certain games that are artworks, granting their displays properties they would not otherwise have, he explains that the artwork and the display are not to be conflated; that a rendition of a music piece written by Schoenberg is not the music piece itself, but a performance that grants listeners access to Schoenberg's work. Likewise, in *Defense of the Ancients 2* (Valve 2012), the player does not attempt to make *DOTA 2*, nor give any properties to *DOTA 2* that it would otherwise not have. What Lopes does not consider, however—perhaps because he is only interested in computer art and computer artists—is that players are granting themselves access to the game designer's work by performing and interpreting it, and that this is an artistic act. Players are not computer artists, because their works do not meet Lopes's criteria for being interactive works computed on a computer. Rather, theirs are artistic practices mediated by a computer computing another art object's responses to them as input. So, while Lopes does not grant players the role of computer artists, he does not deny, or even mention, the possibility that they are still artists.

In this chapter, creativity, a core component of artistry, was defined. The term's definition was pulled from Berys Gaut's work, which offers three criteria, specifically, originality, value, and flair. This last item was discussed alongside Lacerda and Mumford's use of the term genius. Both terms point to the production of some non-recipe-based product. Creative activity was shown to produce two kinds of intrinsic value that stem from freedom of movement and freedom of thought. It was then shown how interactive artworks such as videogames allow for players to take on multiple roles, such as spectator and user. Finally, it was shown that artists are necessarily capable of attending to their own artistic performances, which in turn allows us to consider solo gameplay a candidate for artistic appreciation.

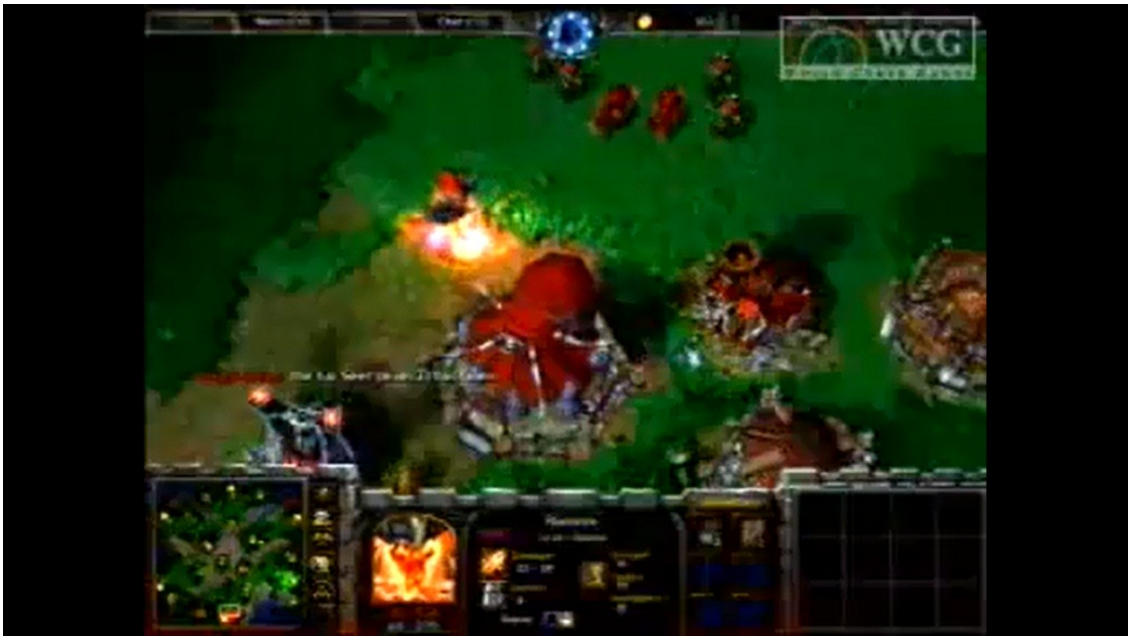
Chapter 4: Videogame Studies Look at the Art of Playing Videogames

Henry Lowood's presentation at the Art History of Games conference, held in Georgia in 2010, furthers his text *It's Not Easy Being Green* where he continues to discuss the prowess of the star player Grubby in the 2004 *Warcraft III* (Blizzard 2002) finals. Lowood describes Grubby's victory at the World Cyber Games in two ways. First, he gives an overview of the events:

> About six and a half minutes into the game, spectators observed the following: the armies were skirmishing around Grubby's main base. After some back-and-forth, WelcomeTo's army fell back. His main hero, a 'Farseer' was badly wounded, so WelcomeTo used a town portal scroll to teleport his army back to their home base. This they did, and a few seconds after landing, the Farseer toppled over, dead. WelcomeTo was unable to recover from this loss, and a few minutes later, he conceded the game. ("It's Not Easy" 93)

Lowood explains that only a few expert players grasped the nuances involved in the victory. To understand what went on, one would have to understand several minute details in the rules. First, Grubby's Farseer had earlier found a Wand of Lightning that allows one to cast a spell called lightning shield, which creates an area of effect surrounding a targeted unit for a few seconds, where all adjacent living entities take damage over time. While WelcomeTo's Farseer was injured, he assumed that his own item, a Town Portal Scroll, would allow him to start a 3-second timer during which the caster—in this case the Farseer—would be immune to damage, and at the end of which all allied living entities would be teleported back to the safety of the main base. However, during the 3 seconds that it took for the teleportation to be cast, Grubby realized that he could cast the lightning shield on WelcomeTo's second hero, the Firelord. This, Grubby knew "instinctively"—writes Lowood—meant that

"WelcomeTo's heroes would land together in their base; instead of finding safety, the wounded Farseer died from standing next to his charged brother greenskin…" ("It's Not Easy" 93). Lowood's goal in this work is to demonstrate that narratives do emerge from videogame play, and that those narratives are performed by the expert players involved. He writes, "*Warcraft,* in other words, exhibits a tension between the developer's notion of game story-lines, authored and continuous, and player-generated stories based on game performance and experience." In the picture below, the Farseer has just died as the Firelord, seemingly safe in the base, has blue orbs floating around him, indicating that he has a lighting shield on him.



Whether or not players are actually generating stories, something Jesper Juul claims is not the case in "Games Telling Stories?," what interests me here is the creativity involved in Grubby's act, and the aesthetic value we might attribute to it. In this case, it is not clear that Grubby is demonstrating some kind of narrative-

constructing genius, but rather some strategic/tactical genius deployed through his dextrous hands. Interestingly, Lowood's presentation at Georgia Tech three years later shifted his attention to art and aesthetics in videogames by turning to David Best's work on the aesthetic in sport. Lowood challenges Best's division of sports between purposive and aesthetic by turning to basketball and Dave Hickey's analysis of Julius Erving's famous "baseline scoop" play against Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in the 1980 NBA finals. His essay, "The Heresy of Zone Defense," is about the opportunity for artistry in purposive play as a result of there being an audience to react to it. In this case, the reaction was "joy, at the triumph of civil society in an act that was clearly the product of talent and will accommodating itself to liberating rules" (Hickey 1).

Hickey makes the argument that basketball continues to redefine itself in the face of aesthetically uninteresting strategies. He explains that

> The "illegal-defense rule" which banned zone defenses, however, did more than save the game. It moved professional basketball into the fluid complexity of post-industrial culture—leaving the college game with its zoned parcels of real estate behind. Since zone defenses were first forbidden in 1946, the rules against them have undergone considerable refinement, but basically they now require that every defensive player on the court defend against another player on the court, anywhere on the court, all the time. (2)

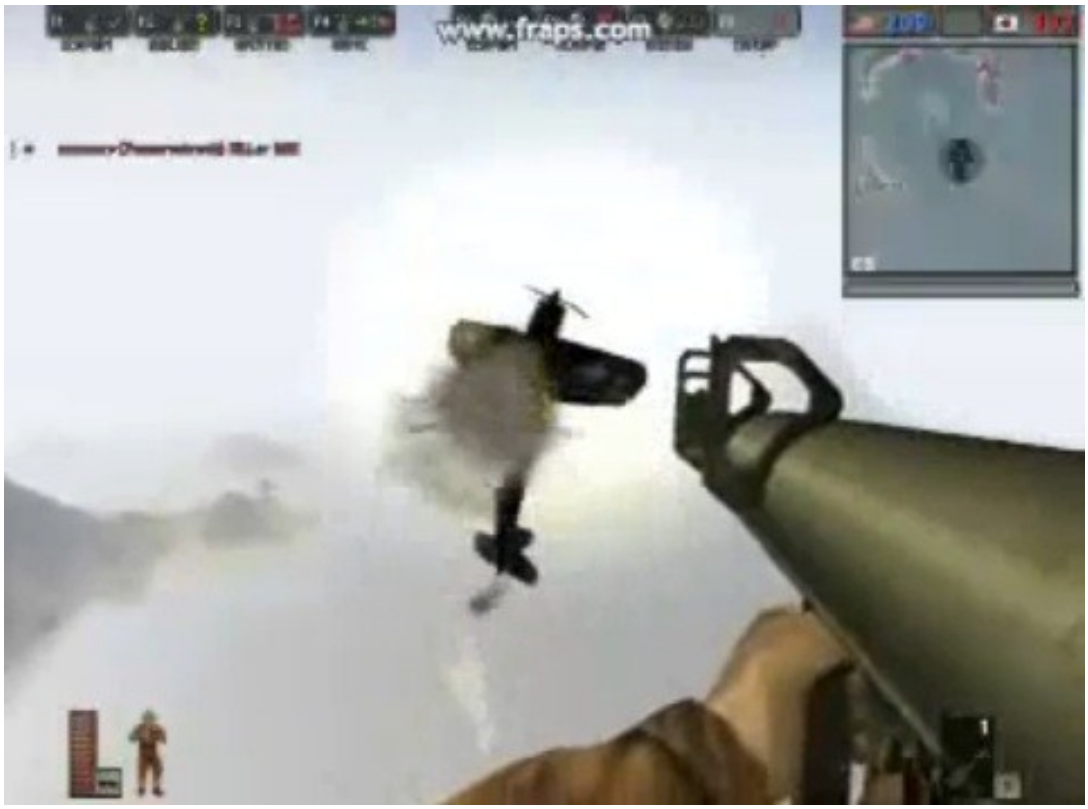
Hickey's work is an answer to Best's claim that aesthetics will always play second fiddle to efficiency by essentially stating that efficient means will be engineered by game designers in such a way as to be, at the very least, interesting. What is more, he is willing to defend the point that the value in basketball is in appreciating the athletic genius of those athletes who go beyond the norms to demonstrate creativity in play. By proposing that society ensures that the rules of the sports it spectates are liberating rather than governing, Hickey makes a claim similar to Gaut, where what matters is a lack of recipe in the production of aesthetically interesting works. So long as the rules do not prescribe a routine way of playing, basketball players are free to innovate and perform in creative and aesthetic ways. However, Hickey is only confident that this is currently the case because sports are spectated, and thus there is a demand for rules that provide opportunities for genius to emerge.

Lowood, too, is building a case for art to emerge in gameplay when there is enough wiggle room between the player and the purpose. Innovation in execution, tactics and strategy is akin to art-making for Lowood, but only in *spectated* play—it is not the case for solo activity. If this were the case, Lowood claims that we would have to concede too many activities to be artistic, including many scientific discoveries. It would seem that he has misinterpreted Hickey. Where Hickey thinks that spectators force game rules to allow for aesthetic outcomes, Lowood appears to argue that

spectators imbue a given performance with aesthetic value. If this is in fact his position, it is not unlike Reid's claim that artworks must be aesthetically contemplated, combined with Wertz's position that players are not sufficient spectators. Given that I have already disputed Wertz's claim, I will also take issue with Lowood's. If players are attending to their play—which of course they must, if they are playing any game without a trivial solution—then they should be considered spectators. Videogame designers, just like sport designers, make games that will be aesthetically pleasing in some capacity, and ensure to a degree that when players attempt to play the game, it displays interesting properties through their play. Drawing from Hickey, then, we might at least posit that it is likely that gameplay will be aesthetic, and in cases where it is not, the game in question will be ignored. Scaling back a bit, it must also be said that players become physically and intellectually invested in attending to the tasks that their games propose. One does not have much conscious attention available for aesthetic appreciation in the middle of a first-person shooter firefight. To say, however, as Wertz does, that players will fail to play well if they attend to the aesthetics of their performances, is challenged by the widely available feature of capturing replays. While there are many videos available on blogs and on YouTube.com, my favourite example is described as follows:

> I've posted some amazing kills in games on here before, but surely – *surely* – nothing tops this *Battlefield 1942* stunt. It's not just technically amazing, but shows some ridiculous imagination.
>
> Being chased by an enemy dogfighter, our hero starts his plane off on a vertical, 360º loop. He then ejects out of his craft halfway through said loop, pulls his parachute, equips a rocket launcher, blows his pursuer out of the sky, then *lands back in his own plane*.

Holy. Awesome. (http://www.inquisitr.com/88248/video-hands-down-the-greatest-videogame-kill-ever)



In the replay of *Battlefield 1942* (Digital Illusions CE 2004), the top watermark indicates that the person is using Fraps, a third-party software that offers a loop buffer allowing players to retroactively record their gameplay, to create the video. This likely indicates two possible situations—with variations. First, the player uses the software to have an indication of the frame rate per second, but also at times uses the video buffer of the software to retroactively record events that occur on screen. Or second, the player is using Fraps to record a planned stunt that he or she attempts to do repeatedly, but shows us only the successful attempt. Either way, even if the player did not have the capacity to appreciate the aesthetics of their actions fully while playing, he or she must have had some sense of the accomplishment, otherwise he or she would not have gone back to re-watch and then post the recording of the game. What is more,

these impressive feats are not wholly uncommon. In a recording of DICE's more recent game *Battlefield 3* (2011) on YouTube, entitled "Battlefield 3 - Jet Swap," the player's plane is indicating that missiles from the ground are locked on, in addition to there being an enemy plane hot on his tail. In a stroke of genius, the player pulls upwards, reaches an appropriate altitude and ejects, deploying his parachute. He pulls out a scoped rifle and finds the plane chasing him to be pulling upwards right below him. He stabilizes his crosshair on the cockpit and fires a single headshot, killing the pilot. Unbelievably, the plane's momentum brings it just close enough that he is able to glide towards it and board it. In the end, the missiles will hit their target, but with the player long gone, having thwarted them and the dogfighter in a span of 13 seconds. In addition to demonstrating the mental capacity to judge aesthetic value, this example indicates some sense of what we are talking about when we talk about creativity. The blurb points to both skill and imagination as key ingredients to this performance.

Not unlike Lacerda and Mumford's use of the term genius, which describes the ability to think beyond the accepted limits of a game, I would suggest we adopt the term 'virtuoso' to indicate having both the genius to conceive of an idea and the inordinate amount of skill to perform the genius idea. The term, then, is just shorthand for someone who satisfies the criteria of creativity, but also does so because they are more capable than their contemporaries. Not all activities performed skilfully can be virtuosic, especially when these have particular goals in mind, and few means of achieving them. It is unlikely, for instance, that a stenographer can offer a virtuoso performance, because there are no appreciable differences in means used to get from point A (blank page) to point B (page of recorded words). The missing feature, I

suggest, is creativity, which I would define along Berys Gaut's terms—namely, that the act is original, valuable and demonstrates personal style. Julius Erving's scoop basket was all of these, while also being extremely skillful, which makes his actions virtuosic. The importance of the spectator, with respect to the creative act, is that they are often the ones making value judgements. This is what Lowood discusses with respect to Grubby's play, where only the very astute observers could truly appreciate his performance. While Lowood requires that some observer take an aesthetic contemplative stance and have the capacity to appreciate the play, I would argue that even if only Grubby ever saw the play, and only Grubby knew what he had done, it would still be virtuosic, because Grubby is enough of an audience to appreciate his own mastery. If Erving had pulled his baseline scoop move against Kareem Abdul-Jabbar one-on-one, without spectators, and Abdul-Jabbar had blinked, leaving only Erving cognizant of what he'd done, it would still be a virtuosic play.

In sum, it has been shown that players are capable of playing creatively, that they produce aesthetically valuable performances, and that spectators attend to the aesthetic value of their performances. While Arnold suggests that games have win conditions, and that these may promote less-aesthetic victories over aesthetic defeats, this has been shown to be false. However, there is an argument to be made that does risk undoing the project of calling players artists. Namely, because players are attempting to meet pre-lusory goals and are agreeing to meet these with voluntarily accepted constraints, they differ from everyday artists. Whereas an artist's primary goal is to create art, she is free to do whatever she thinks will produce art. If she wishes to play Beethoven artistically, she might play all the notes, but she might also

do something transgressive, and play every third note. A key part of art-making as it is practiced today involves having the opportunity to break those rules one wishes to break. Rules and goals are not constitutive of art-making in the same way that they are part of games. At the same time, there are also artistic traditions with artists working inside them. Take, for example, classical painters who opt to make paintings by applying paint to surfaces. Even if they are creatively applying paint using their personal techniques—be they pointillist, impressionist, abstract expressionist or minimalist—each follows the constitutive rules they set out to follow, namely to apply paint to a canvas. There are also those artists, like Robert Rauschenberg, who cheekily glue chairs to their canvases and call their works paintings. They do not fool me. Their mixed-media artworks are striking, creative and valuable, but they are not paintings. They might critique painting practices, or be in a metaphoric dialogue with the tradition of painting, but never do they meet the requirements of painting.

Another example is that of the musician, who, by accepting to play Beethoven's music artistically, accepts the rules Beethoven laid out in writing his score. One might try to make an artistic statement by playing every third note of Beethoven's 9th Symphony, the work might be creative, aesthetically valuable, and demonstrate great skill, but it will not grant access to Beethoven's artistic genius, and it will not count as a rendition of Beethoven's work. In the same way, if one opts to play soccer, one opts to play according to soccer's rules. If one chooses to play soccer with one's hands, then one ceases to play soccer, for one has given up on following soccer's voluntarily accepted obstacles.

Whether or not we can consider games as traditions within which players may opt to be creative in producing performances for aesthetic appreciation is unclear. Players, perhaps like many musicians, actors, painters, etc. who are confined and constrained by their medium are lesser artists, but I have no desire to argue such a line of thought. The question that remains, however, is why we should care that players are creative. While there might be emotional or conceptual payoffs to be gleaned from attended-to play with an aesthetic attitude, there might remain another, stronger argument.

Margaret Boden writes that there are two ways of thinking about creativity, psychologically and historically, and that each is worth considering for different reasons. The first, she explains, is P-creativity, which "involves coming up with a surprising, valuable idea that's new to the person who comes up with it. It doesn't matter how many people have had that idea before" (2). This kind of creativity has the potential for being regularly producible among game-players and ultimately valuable to them. In contrast, Boden proposes an often more socially valuable instance of creativity: H-creativity. "But if a new idea is H-creative, that means that (so far as we know) no-one else has had it before: it has arisen for the first time in human history. ... For historians of art, science, and technology -- and for encyclopaedia users, too -- H-creativity is what's important" (2). These two approaches to creativity should mesh with our understanding of virtuosity and artistic gameplay. The argument I would put forward is that some virtuoso performances are psychological, where the player performs in such a way that they perceive the performance as novel and demonstrating great skill.

Chapter 5: Case Studies

Successful Art

With a set of clearly defined criteria and objects of inquiry, the process of determining whether or not gameplay is artistic should be a matter of analyzing instances of recorded gameplay and determining through appraisal and analysis which, if any, segments match up to the definitions stated. Because I have argued that there are strongly creative acts that rely on historical originality as well as unusual skill, I have decided to use footage of *DOTA 2*'s The International, a tournament that was held for a game still unreleased to this date. The players of the tournament were selected for the skill they showed playing the original *DOTA*. In addition, the tournament had several games with knowledgeable commentators who were able to attest to the quality and originality of the play. Because the tournament was for a game that almost none had played much of, it was more likely to offer historical originality. The caveat to this statement, however, is that *DOTA 2* is so similar to *DOTA* that much inspiration could be gleaned from the prequel, and so I left it to the commentators to indicate the frequency with which they had seen a given play before.

In addition to these recordings, I recorded my own play using Fraps. I was able to play *DOTA 2* because I was among several thousands of players who were given free access to the beta in order to allow Valve to detect any errors in coding or balancing. My reason for doing so was to attest to Margaret Boden's P-creativity, which requires some insight into the player's psyche. Basically, I attempted to play *DOTA 2* as I saw fit and hit record whenever I was proud of my performance. While

certain recordings were worthless, demonstrating poor play on my opponents' part, or blind luck on mine, some of the recordings capture me producing personal feats I had previously never accomplished.

To begin the analysis of professional play, I will set and play out the scene which occurred in 2011 at *The International*. It is the second game in a five-match, million-dollar purse final between China's EHOME and Ukraine's Na'Vi. It is minute 27, and the game, while tied in terms of resources accumulated, is hardly a stalemate. In a perhaps overly aggressive act, all five Na'Vi players decide to push the central lane to reach the third-tier tower in hopes of destroying it, laying the ground for a future attack that might end the game. At the same time, EHOME has two players attacking a tier-two tower at the bottom of the map, making it a five vs. three fight in the middle lane. Despite this early numerical advantage, the three players hold off Na'Vi long enough for their forces to reassemble and fight five vs. five. While Na'Vi manage to kill two enemy players, they take heavy casualties, losing three of their own. The remaining EHOME players try to bring that number to four as they pursue Chen, played by the Na'vi's Puppeh. His death is near certain, as he is far from full strength and running from three players, one of whom has a spell that will hold him in place long enough to be killed. The spell in question—belonging to the Nature's Prophet— is called Sprout. It creates a ring of trees for a few moments around a given target. The downside to Sprout is that it has a cool-down period of some seconds before it can be cast again. Having just cast it, the Nature's Prophet must just stay within range of Chen for a couple seconds, and seeing as the two characters run at the same speed, it should not be hard to do so. This is where things get complicated.

Chen has an ability that allows him to control the mind of a neutral creature,—called a creep—and in this case, while Chen flees from the Nature's Prophet, he walks by a group of creeps, among whom is an Ursa Warrior. This creature has the ability to clap his hands to slow down any nearby foe. The problem Puppeh faces is that he loses a split-second to take control of the warrior, so while the slow-clap will be effective in creating distance between him and the Prophet, he has allowed the prophet to catch up by casting that same spell. Not only that, Puppeh must now control two characters, Chen and his Ursa. Despite the complexity of the situation, Puppeh does something that, in all likelihood, has never happened before. He tells his Chen to move a certain distance away, uses the clap the of the Ursa to slow down the Prophet and then in a stroke of genius, realizes that because the Prophet is slowed, the Ursa can take a path that will place him in front of the Prophet and bump him so that he must walk around it, buying Chen the single second he needs to get away. Puppeh executes the play perfectly. Here is how the announcer framed it:

> Puppeh picked up an Ursa Warrior, he just wants to get this done.
> The sprout is almost back. Puppeh has no mana.
> The sprout will hold him.
> *The sprout needs to hold him!*
> *Whoa! It's blocked by the Ursa Warrior!*
> What micro coming out from Puppeh. The man is a *genius!*

The creativity contained in this act might seem somewhat trivial to the uninitiated; after all, this play was just a small dodge in an hour-long game. It could even seem accidental to a novice *DOTA* player. After all, it is possible that the Ursa Warrior walked in front of the Prophet on its own. But to an experienced *DOTA* player, this play is inspiring, for not only did it carry great risk of failure (the Ursa might have been a moment too quick or too slow in both clapping and bumping), but it required an

inordinate amount of dexterity to execute (there is, in fact, no way that an Ursa would move the way it did on its own) and featured the use of the game's properties in unforeseen and extremely situational ways. Such a play could perhaps never again be relevant, as the Ursa was luckily there, the terrain features were ideally placed, the relative speed of the heroes required the play occur, etc.

It is time now to demonstrate how it is that Puppeh meets the criteria I originally set for artistic play. It is, of course, trivial to show that he is i) voluntarily ii) overcoming certain obstacles iii) in order to achieve a certain state iv) because doing so makes such an activity possible. In terms of the game's constitutive rules, Puppeh overcomes the obstacles of having to kill for gold, and conversely survive to both deny giving gold to his opponents and continue killing for profit. Of course, Puppeh also chooses to abide by the rules of the code and not deploy hacks that allow him to use extra abilities, get extra gold, lock his opponents out, etc. He does all of this in order to reach the goal of defeating EHOME in multiple small skirmishes to the point where they can no longer defend their ancient. To clarify, each team has an ancient, a fixed structure in their section of the map, which can be attacked and destroyed given enough time. What stops people from bee-lining to the structures to destroy them is their inability to survive the ancient's defenses, which must be destroyed piecemeal over the course of the game in order to gain income and experience to strengthen one's hero. By the endpoint of the match team Na'vi has managed to create a noticeable difference in gold accumulation through consistent minor victories. In turn this allows them to win a larger battle, as their heroes were slightly stronger. This battle knocked out enough enemy heroes for enough time, at which point Puppeh and his team

attacked and destroyed the ancient. Finally, Puppeh and his team do so for the sake of an activity that we must infer Puppeh values. Even though he is playing for a portion of a million-dollar purse, he has also been shown to play *DOTA* on a regular basis for several years without cash incentive. It is also important to note that Suits' definition does not preclude other motivations for playing a game. One can engage with a game for various functionalist reasons and still be considered to be playing so long as one satisfies the definitional criteria in part.

The more difficult part, of course, will be to show that Puppeh meets the fourth criteria, namely that his attempts to play successfully fulfill the same functions as other paradigmatic works of art. While I cannot offer a hard and fast definition of art, I can show that gameplay can exhibit those properties normally ascribed to artworks. In doing so, I hope to satisfy the second half of Stecker's disjointed definition. Drawing from Gaut's cluster definition, I will demonstrate that Puppeh's play meets these functions: possesses positive aesthetic properties; is intellectually challenging; is an exercise of creative imagination; and, is an artifact of performance that is the product of a high degree of skill. In addition, should someone be convinced that these claims allow one to call one's play art, then it can also be shown that an additional function is met, namely that the object is the partial result of a desire to make a work of art. This additional function would only be required if it was determined that the previous four were insufficient. However, therein lies a conceptual problem: it is entirely possible that I might fool people into thinking that their practices up until now were artistic, when really they were lacking some of the necessary criteria, but then, from that point on, they might actually make art, given their newfound awareness of the nature of their

practice, which in turn allows them to meet new additional criteria. That, of course is not my intention, although it might be desirable.

Drawing from Gaut, and Lacerda and Mumford's ideas surrounding the aesthetic value of freedom, it is possible to show that Puppeh's play holds positive aesthetic properties through his demonstration of intellectual and physical freedom. The latter comes from Puppeh's ability to micromanage his play to a point where he is able to do things that most could not. Puppeh's mastery of the game essentially enables him to act freely in appreciable ways. The announcer explains as much when he shouts with excitement upon witnessing Puppeh's "micro".[9] While I have no qualms with calling this a kind of freedom, and that this freedom holds aesthetic value (as was shown above), a more meaningful freedom can come from an understanding of the cognitive process involved. Puppeh was able to take into consideration the relative speed of Chen and the Prophet, the layout of the forest, the use of the mind-control spell, the use of the Ursa's clap, and finally, the use of the Ursa's passive physical presence in the virtual space. From these properties, Puppeh was able to produce not only the one possible solution to his problem, but did so without following a recipe, simply because no one had ever considered using those ingredients in that combinatory manner before. Puppeh's ability to take all of these things into consideration and then act on them by choosing a series of gestures that are optimal and unexpected, is what has value in appreciation and what fundamentally separates Puppeh's play from play more generally. In addition to holding aesthetic properties,

[9] Micro, short for micromanagement, is a term deployed by the videogaming community to describe those actions that require quick reflexes and high levels of dexterity. This is in contrast to macromanagement, or macro.

insomuch as his actions are done with flair, they are also valuable and original. This, in turn, qualifies Puppeh's play as demonstrating the use of creative imagination.

If we then look at the checklist, Puppeh satisfies each of the criteria set out for creativity. In addition to being historically original, the play was thoroughly valued by the spectators, the commentators, by Puppeh, and by his team, for it saved them from giving resources to EHOME in game and brought them closer to the million-dollar purse—which they did eventually win. Most importantly, however, Puppeh did not follow a recipe to accomplish his play. Given the risk of a failure and the outside-the-box thinking required to come up with the play, it is doubtless that Puppeh meets Gaut's criteria for creativity. The announcer, as it turns out, is correct when he declares that Puppeh is a genius—or, at the very least, makes a play displaying genius, as per Lacerda and Mumford. Even though Puppeh's performance was an exercise of the creative imagination, this is not sufficient to make it artistic. In addition to that attribute, we might say that his performance was the product of a high degree of skill, but even then we are short on sufficient criteria, for we would be forced to include a multitude of things into the canon of art. The assumption to make here is that the fewer objects we include, the more likely the argument will be sound and useful. To further distinguish Puppeh's play, then, we might consider its positive aesthetic properties. The way Gaut deploys the term aesthetic in this circumstance is quite narrow: "roughly, beauty and its subspecies" ("Art" 43). He also describes the aesthetic as, "properties which ground a capacity to give sensuous pleasure" (28). Puppeh clearly meets this criteria, given that his performance was spectated by those seeking some kind of sensuous pleasure, and clearly delivered when the announcers

shouted with excitement. Given that Puppeh's play displayed beauty produced through skill and creative imagination, his play should be considered artistic.

My interest in showing that players can be creative extends beyond the professional level. In hopes of demonstrating that everyday players can perform original acts, be they historical or psychological, I played 256 hours of *DOTA 2*. While I found that most of my play was either poor or uninteresting, a few moments shone through. The one I wish to discuss happens quite late in my recordings, around 220 hours in. Playing as the Witch Doctor, I have so far had a very unexpected game. I have managed to kill several enemies without dying, much to the chagrin of those players on my team who need the those kills to get the gold they need to get the items that make them viable later in the game. In a moment of extreme boldness, I go alone to see if a rune is available in the middle river of the map. Normally, this would be foolish, as I am a support character unable to survive or kill on my own. However, given my string of luck, I have managed to buy myself some items that have made me sturdier than usual, although still exceedingly weak in comparison to combat heroes. What is more, I do not have a useful means of escape. As I near the stream, I spot a haste rune, with the enemy Beastmaster and his pet sitting beside it. I do not know why he is waiting, but decide that he might be distracted, and so I attempt to steal the rune from underneath his nose. Unfortunately, my guess is wrong. He picks up the rune and uses his most powerful ability to stun me. He then uses a magic spell that takes away half my health, and begins to attack me with his axes and his pet. I could try to run away by activating my magic boots, but because he has picked up the rune of haste, and because his pet shoots poison darts that slow my movement, he can catch

and kill me. Instead, I cast Paralyzing Cask, a spell that does a small amount of damage and stuns the enemies it hits for one second, while also bouncing 8 times between the nearest enemies on the map. Immediately, I cast my ultimate spell, Death Ward, which creates something of a magical turret, able to deal lots of damage to any nearby heroes, given enough time—at the cost of my temporary immobility. Seeing as the Beastmaster is alone with his pet, the Cask is able to bounce between the two of them, causing them to be stunned for a total of 4 seconds each. Because I cast my Death Ward so quickly, that is all that is needed, and in 5 seconds he is dead. My team commends me for my play, and I am elated to have not only come out alive, but also to have killed the Beastmaster.

The action was not terribly complex; it involved resisting the urge to run, and casting two spells in the appropriate order. The speed with which everything occurred was lightning quick; my actions after recovering from the Beastmaster's initial stun span less than 2 seconds. In many ways, what happened was partially instinctual. I had only 3 seconds to decide what I was going to do (the duration of the Beastmaster's stun). Regardless, my actions are original, so far as I had never thought of using the spells I had, in that combination, in that situation. I want to equate this play to a kind of low-value art. Something that matters to me, and maybe to a few people watching, but nothing so important as to interest broader society. If art is a scalar concept, where something is *pro tanto* either "more" or "better" art depending on how original, skilful, aesthetic it is—or any other criteria—then my play might be mundane art with minimal value. The concept of *pro tanto*, or 'insomuch as,' is useful here to simply consider art in a piecemeal way. This is not something we would normally want to do,

but in some circumstances such as this, it is perhaps valuable. Berys Gaut, for instance, attempts to show that art is better insomuch as it is more ethical in his work *Art, Emotion and Ethics*. I am not making such a claim here, but I do wish to simply imply that we can consider the partial qualities of an artwork—regardless of the other properties—in a hypothetical manner, and say that the positive properties can be increased in a way that increases the positive properties of the artwork in general.

It is not a given in all cases, of course; one can imagine a work of art that might become worse as it became more aesthetically positive. Imagine an artwork created by the Dadaist artist, Marcel Duchamp. Imagine that its form and presentation critiques sellable artworks in galleries by making something so revolting that no one could ever put it in their home and feel comfortable there, and imagine the work derived its artistic value from that critique. Now imagine that, over time, Duchamp incrementally improved the pleasurable visual aesthetics of the work. In this case, it would not incrementally improve the artwork, because although it was getting better—insomuch as it was beginning to express ideas of beauty—this change would undo the value the work derived from its critique of sellable art. However, in the case of videogame play, it could be safe to say that as the skill involved in the act of play increases, and as the originality of the act increases, the value of the act also increases. The reason we might say this about videogames has to do with its inherent restriction that the players must attempt to meet the goals of the game. Whereas Duchamp was allowed to subvert the art world and approach art in a surrealist manner, it is unclear whether this could be done in a game. Playing a game artfully forces a requirement on an artwork, namely that the work be created while attempting to win the game. To

create subversive art, one must subvert the rules, but doing so with artistic play is tricky. One always risks failing to meet the criteria of playing a game.

Failed Art

Now that I have shown how we might consider expert and everyday gameplay art, given the correct circumstances, it behoves me to show the instances where gameplay fails to meet the criteria of art-making. To do so, we might look to the definition of artful gameplay and demonstrate cases where some of the necessary criteria are missing. As stated above, these are the four criteria I have outlined: i) voluntarily ii) overcoming certain obstacles iii) in order to achieve a certain state iv) because doing so makes such an activity possible v) and that their attempts to do so successfully fulfill the same functions as other paradigmatic works of art. The first three are essentially defining the activity as a game. As a paradigmatic example of art-making gameplay, let us imagine the *DOTA 2* player who performs some manoeuvre that is creative (original, valuable, and who arrives at the result without following a recipe), but that also furthers her towards meeting the goal of the game.

The first criterion requires the consent of the person making the art/playing the game. Involuntarily acting out an activity—such as being tortured into following the rules of *DOTA 2*— or interacting with it accidentally, or unwittingly, will not count as playing a game. While there are many examples to show why this is important, I will stop at one. We could imagine a cat walking on a keyboard while playfully pawing at a computer mouse, and on screen see the same result as a professional player's greatest artwork. However, we would not want to call this cat a *DOTA 2* player because it is

oblivious to the fact that it is interacting with that game system, even if it is interacting with it.

The second criterion requires that the players attempt to achieve their goals by being inefficient, i.e. by accepting certain obstacles. For instance, if the *DOTA 2* player enabled a hack that made her move twice as fast, and this enabled her to be creative and win the game, it would not count. That player would not be playing *DOTA 2*, in the same way that we would want to disqualify athletes from their sporting competitions for cheating if they bribed judges or took performance-enhancing drugs. While these people might conceivably be making art, they are not making art while playing that a game.

The third criterion requires that players attempt to achieve a certain state: the goal of the game. If a *DOTA 2* player played artistically without trying to win the game, then at best we might consider her to be making art while acting inside of a system of rules designed for play. We could not say that this player was playing *DOTA 2*, because she had failed to meet one of criteria we ascribe the game-players, namely that they attempt to pursue certain goals. While I admit that this case is trivial, there is a more difficult claim I would like to make. Not only must a player have lusory goals in mind while playing a game; she must honestly attempt to achieve these goals. If a player knowingly worsens her chances of winning by attempting to play artfully, then she should not be considered to be playing a game artfully. The player in question might be playing sub-optimally while still playing artistically, however, so long as she is unaware of a better way to proceed.

The fourth criterion requires that players play artfully for the sake of playing, although not necessarily for the sake of playing artfully. The claim is not that artists must make art for art's sake, but rather that players must play games for the sake of doing so. Not only, then, do players need to intend to meet certain goals following certain restrictions, but they must want to do so because those restrictions make such an activity possible. While this rules out people who only play artfully for the sake of money or fame, it is not to say that players who value money and fame in addition to playing through an activity made possible by restriction are not players. This criterion exists to differentiate between certain kinds of work and play. It is entirely possible that mundane, un-enjoyable, or unvalued acts meet the first three criteria, making this fourth one essential. However, it also points to an interesting liminal case. One could imagine an artist who decides to make a work of art while playing basketball. They might train very hard to achieve certain skills, learn every strategy and tactic they can find and practice every day. They might be so good as to be included in the NBA, all the while never actually caring about basketball, but rather about making art while attempting to win at basketball. In this case, they would satisfy each of the criteria, except for the fourth, which requires that they value the act of playing intrinsically. In this case, the artist values art-making, in the same way that we might imagine a professional athlete valuing money, and not the game itself.

Finally, the fifth criterion is in some ways a placeholder for many more criteria. It purposefully leaves the idea of "the functions of paradigmatic art" vague. These functions change as cultures change over time and space. Earlier, I provided ten of Berys Gaut's proposed criteria for a cluster definition of art as a starting point for

thinking about what art's functions might be in our culture. The point of doing so was to enable us to break down artworks into the properties that we think make such objects art. If, for instance, a given artwork A is an artwork because it has the properties L, M, N, and O, and that a given play in a game also had those properties, then it should be considered art until someone else can prove otherwise.

Conclusion:

With this thesis, I intended to show how we might explore the ways people shape their intrinsically valued ludic activities and to show how those activities might be considered at the very least creative and at the very most artistic. The strongest of the claims I hoped to make was that expert—as well as everyday—videogame players produce artistic value. Game players, much like players of music or the stage, are meeting all kinds of criteria that we might require of interpretive artworks. These criteria are multitudinous and rarely necessary or sufficient, but by leveraging different definitions, I hoped to produce some kind of framework for detecting shared artistic properties. While the question of artistic gameplay is relevant to the advancement of analytic aesthetic thought, it has real-world applications as well.

Videogame play has been socially positioned next to the lowbrow activity of daytime television cartoon viewing—it is largely understood to be a time-filling and mind-numbing exercise undertaken between bouts of productivity. After all, the two have many surface similarities, including their association with children, genres of fiction, crafted images, and the use of the television set. My worry is that these activities are not necessarily the same, and that repeatedly framing games in such a

way is doing a disservice to players, games and the meaning-making practices of everyday life. The best I can hope for from this thesis is a prompt, or a call, for players to play games artfully. Players have every reason to play beautifully, creatively, skilfully, with the intent to make art, with formal complexity, to express their points of view and even their emotions. What is more, this thesis pleads for game developers and designers to consider players as artistic collaborators. In turn, they could position their customers as performers ready to play out something not unlike a script, score, lyrics, choreography, jazz standards, etc. Not only can we start playing and conceiving of our play differently with the games we already have, but start producing new kinds of games to play in new kinds of ways.

It is a cliché to say that videogames are a medium in their infancy. Designers and academics alike will open talks using such a statement to apologize for lowbrow, violent, sexist, racist, and otherwise underperforming aspects of games. Often, the offer of hope comes from technological development, not of new or better machines, but in producing new modes of representation. The comparison is regularly made to cinema, which slowly incorporated montage techniques into its repertoire. While games are certainly growing their set of communicative mechanisms, benefitting greatly from advances in user interface research, for example, this strikes me as an overly cinematic path towards "adulthood." Instead of remediating cinema, we might take on a new perspective and strive for a future of games to resemble improvisational theatre or jazz performance. To do this, game designers will need to relinquish some of their artistic burden—and players will need to take that burden on.

Historically, game designers have sought to take on the greatest amount of artistic responsibility, due to the inadequacies of their players. For example, game critics will at times complain because a game does not force them into an adequate narrative pacing. It is not unusual in a game for the world to sit on the brink of destruction, while the protagonist/player considers the value of rearranging their inventory and starting a side quest. My response to this kind of accusation is to blame the player rather than the game designer. In this mundane example, the player who opts out of the fiction must contend with the dissonance that follows, for they failed to meet the aesthetic demands laid upon them. In turn, the impact that this thesis has on game criticism is also quite significant. Game critics are reviewing their own performances of works of art under the pretence that they have the skills to give themselves access to the underlying structure. Imagine if Broadway reviewers went home with the scripts of the plays they were critiquing and acted them out themselves to produce objects of analysis. Surely, that would be altogether different than what they do now. No critic in any other medium than videogames is tasked with such interpretive and appreciative feats, and yet few seem to notice this when they complain about game journalism.

Finally, I would like to make clear that this work was intended to be descriptive, rather than prescriptive. I have taken the liberty to show how we might leverage this new description of game play for current and future games, but these views are too quick and too near-sighted to imagine the full artistic potential of games and game criticism. I do not think that all games will benefit from allowing aesthetic collaboration with their players, nor do I think all players will benefit from

aesthetically interpreting their games. The philosophical goal at all times was simply to show how it was logically possible to play a game artistically, specifically by interpreting its systems and performing through them with the intent to win, and, in fact, that it was already happening—and that it could happen in new, and perhaps more salient ways, in the future.

Post Script:

Certain committee members raised excellent questions with regards the argumentation of my thesis. I will take this space to explain in further detail why some of the things are argued the way they are and how those arguments could be improved in the future.

With regards to creativity in games, one committee member suggested that it seems to be the case that artful play has only been accounted for with regards to movement. He explained that in sports and some videogames this is a reasonable position to hold, but that a game of chess appears to be impossible to play artistically. My response is to point to the section following the discussion of Lacerda and Mumford, where I unpack Gaut's explanation of freedom of thought as an alternative value to freedom of movement. During the defense I explained in greater detail that a chess move's creativity will stem from the non-recipe based *decision* to move a piece. How the piece is physically moved should have no bearing on any artful interpretation of chess play.

With regards to my definition of games, that same committee member felt that I should have used a different definition of games to compare to Bernard Suits'. The claim was that Juul is attempting to define game objects, whereas Suits is attempting to define game instances. My response to this is that Suits' definition does not allow for game objects and this is specifically why they must be compared. There is no such thing as a game without a player, even though we talk as though these objects exist. Instead, we should think of game objects as rule sets which might have props. These

rules and props might make certain kind of games playable, but are not in and of themselves games.

With regards to attributing art-hood to gameplay, two committee members found that the institutional definition I used was too weak, and the position is general did not receive enough consideration. Neither believed that Stecker's definition was truly hybrid and that in fact it was an ontological definition in disguise. The argument they put forward is that for a given work to be considered an art-work it must exist in a discourse held by artists. Because videogame play does not exist in the context of the art-world, it cannot be art. Instead, it must be relegated to the world of craft. While I disagree that we need to have such a narrow definition of art, I do agree that videogame play is not that kind of art and will not be that kind of art until people start playing games to enter into a discourse with the art world. That said, I have every intention of promoting that kind of play, given the possibility of an artistically productive future in doing so.

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