



## Discussion Note

# Response to Michael Ridge

Brock Rough

This discussion note is a response to Michael Ridge's "The Compatibility of Games and Artworks". (Rough, 2017) <http://dx.doi.org/10.5617/jpg.5915>

I want to thank the Michael Ridge for careful attention to my argument and for the opportunity to offer some clarification. The main response concerns the supposed constitutive nature of prescriptions and whether incompatibility arises from them. First, however, a handful of brief replies to other points the Ridge raises.

Ridge makes a common mistake about art, suggesting that all objects that reward aesthetic contemplation are artworks and vice versa. This suggestion is false (cf. sunsets, people, wallpaper) and leads to a misunderstanding of my view. Ridge misunderstands my point when he takes my view that artworks have the prescription that we ought to appreciate them to mean that that appreciation is necessarily aesthetic. This is not my claim. Nor do I hold that it is possible to appreciate all artworks aesthetically, since some do not have aesthetic features. Thus all the talk about Ferraris being artworks because of they support aesthetic appreciation does not address my argument in the way Ridge thinks it does.

Ridge provides a nice taxonomy of possible views of the ontology of games. He contends that I am "clearly not talking about games qua abstract types," because, "abstract entities obviously cannot be artworks for the trivial reason that they are not invented or created by anyone's agency." Let me be clear, I am talking about games qua abstract entities, though they may not be the same as abstract types. This position is in line with many philosophers of art, and is in the same vein as, for example, what Jerrold Levinson takes some artworks to be and how Amie Thomasson argues that there are abstract artifacts that are creatable (e.g. musical works, laws, money, educational institutions, languages, fictional characters, etc.).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Jerrold Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is" in *Music, Art, & Metaphysics*, Oxford University Press, 2011 (original 1980), 63-88 and Amie Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics* Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Ridge's most substantive point is about whether my arguments about goals and prescriptions really do show an incompatibility between artworks and games. The discussion focuses on the possibility that other objects have multiple goals and prescriptions. I cannot but agree, but my argument is strictly about games and artworks, and makes no claim to generalize; that things other than games and artworks may exist in myriad compatible ways has little impact on the narrow claim of incompatibility I make.

“One might well be able to reflect on and appreciate the rules of a game in terms of their elegance and other aesthetic features without following or even accepting the rules, and thus without adopting the lusory attitude.”<sup>2</sup> I could not agree more. What this also means, given the artwork prescribes such contemplation, is that a different set of rules constitute the artwork than constitute the game. As Suits has it, and I follow, games are objects that are partly constituted by their rules.<sup>3</sup> Different rules, different games. Thus, as the game and the artwork are not identical, they are, following Leibniz' principle of the identity of indiscernibles, not the same object.

Ridge adds, “One could then still play Artwork-Game X without engaging with it as an artwork, and one could also engage with it as an artwork without playing it.”<sup>4</sup> Again, I cannot but agree. That one can treat something *as if it were* different things, however, does not make it those different things. Sitting on a chess board does not make it a sofa, nor does playing checkers on a picnic tablecloth make it a checkerboard. Continuing on the topic of attitudes, Ridge writes, “All Suits' theory entails is that the lusory attitude is sufficient for engaging with a game like X qua game.” This is, strictly speaking, incorrect. Suits' theory, modulo adjusting it from describing activity to object, also has it that the lusory attitude is constitutive of the game as an object. As it is a constitutive part, any other metaphysical claims that undermine its sufficiency, like the requirement of an artistic attitude, also undermine it fulfilling its ontological role. Thus where that definitionally sufficient component is rendered insufficient, the object is, by definition, not a game.

Ridge also raises an interesting point about multiple prescriptions. He claims that Duchamp's *Fountain* is still a urinal, but admits that one is no longer allowed to urinate in it. This is an odd claim, as all I take a urinal to be is roughly something of a certain shape that comes with a permission to urinate in it.<sup>5</sup> I think this maneuver highlights a general confusion in the response, between the prescriptions that constitute the object

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Ridge, “The Compatibility of Games and Artworks”.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, Broadview Press, 2014

<sup>4</sup> Ridge, “The Compatibility of Games and Artworks”.

<sup>5</sup> This permission can of course be overridden or blocked by other restrictions. For example, just because a urinal carries with it this permission, this does not grant me further permission to trespass into a building to use one. Importantly, however, these kinds of overriding restrictions are external to the object, not internal to it, as is the case with *Fountain*.

itself and other prescriptions that operate at a more general, non-constitutive manner, like moral norms, or Ridge's case of artistic norms overriding urinal norms. It may be that a child is punished by not being allowed to play games, but this has no bearing on the ontological status of *Monopoly*, even if the parental restriction overrides the game's prescription that one play it with the lusory attitude.

Ridge also raises an important methodological point that I find important to reiterate here. "Unless there is some specific reason to think being a game and being an artwork are incompatible that we should presume that they are compatible. "Compatible unless proven incompatible" seems like a reasonable methodology."<sup>6</sup> Again I find myself in agreement. Such a consideration, in fact, was why I made the argument in the first place, rather than merely assuming their incompatibility. Ridge leans on the claimed ubiquity of multi-functional objects outside the categories of games and artworks to make this point. Fair enough, but that is why my argument is targeted narrowly at just these two things.

Finally, to Ridge's most interesting challenge, that objects that operate with prescriptions are not themselves constituted by those prescriptions, obviously I grant that not all of them are, nor ever claim they are. But complicated objects like games and artworks are, despite their possibly simple seeming nature. They are not the only things constituted in this way, nor are they the ones most dependent on prescriptions. Laws, for example, are partly, if not wholly, constituted by prescriptions, and contra Ridge's earlier point about abstract things not being creatable, are most definitely made, unmade, and altered. So also are games and artworks.

## Games

*Monopoly*, Elizabeth Magie and Charles Darrow, Parker Brothers, 1935

## References

Jerrold Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is" in *Music, Art, & Metaphysics*, Oxford University Press, 2011 (original 1980), 63-88

Michael Ridge, "The Compatibility of Games and Artworks".

Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, Broadview Press, 2014

Amie Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics* Cambridge University Press, 1999.

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<sup>6</sup> Ridge, "The Compatibility of Games and Artworks".