

Discussion Note

Response to David Myers

Brock Rough

This discussion note is a response to David Myers's "A Reply to Rough" (Myers, 2018).
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5617/jpg.5945>

Many thanks to David Myers for providing this opportunity to clarify my view in response to an interesting challenge.

First, a set of brief corrections. Myers spends a good portion considering possible alternative accounts of art that stem from a misrepresentation about my claims about artworks. I claim that artworks are meant to be appreciated; that is a claim about artworks themselves. It is not about what an artwork communicates, or expresses, as appreciation is a broader notion and as a prescription requires no uptake.

Further, Myers believes he can refute my argument by simply rejecting a communicative theory of art. First, to "simply reject" a position without further reason is not an argument, and thus not a philosophical refutation. Second, as my position does not endorse nor depend on a communicative theory of art, so any move the Myers makes against the communicative theory leaves my position untouched, thus the author's point is not merely dulled or deflected, but disappeared.

I take the main point, however, to be the supposed counterexample that proposes a new goal for my proposed "Artwork-Game X". Myers believes this shows an inescapable paradox resulting in a case of compatibility between an artwork and a game.

Artwork-Game X is a hypothetical object that proposes the best case scenario for demonstrating compatibility between artworks and games, which is then shown to be impossible. *Ex hypothesi* it has all the features of both an artwork and a game. I proposed that appreciation is the most reasonable prelusory goal of 'playing' an artwork. This goal, to be a prelusory goal, must be achievable independently of the arbitrarily inefficient means prescribed of those who play it. It is this, I argue, that is impossible, for were any such rules imposed by the artist, they would also be part of the object of appreciation, and thus the prelusory goal of appreciation could not be met independent of their consideration.

In response, Myers proposes that Artwork-Game X could be rendered coherently a game and an artwork by substituting the prelusory goal “trying to experience it”. The author continues, arguing, “The goal of art...is necessarily accomplished efficiently, while the goal of games, [Rough] believes, buttressed with reference to Suits, is necessarily not. But it is, of course, the *goal* of the game that Suits insists requires inefficient means to accomplish, not the *experience* of game play itself.”

This is incorrect as a more careful reading of Suits shows, and seems to arise from Myers’ confusion between (lusory) goals and prelusory goals. Suits does not require that lusory goals be achieved inefficiently, but only prelusory goals.

What we must consider, then, is if “trying to experience gameplay itself” can properly be a prelusory goal and still result in a game. It would have to be possible to achieve it independently of the means of achieving. I believe the author’s example of an alternative prelusory goal fares even worse than the original goal suggestion of appreciation. As “gameplay itself” just *is* the process of trying to achieve the prelusory goal of the game, it is unclear how this could be done independently of playing the game. The aim of the gameplay would be to experience the gameplay; this is on its face incoherently circular, regardless of any independence concerns. How can the experience of gameplay be both the subject and the object of the action of the player? No explanation is forthcoming, though perhaps we find something of a clue in a passage the author offers elsewhere in their response, which we will return to momentarily.

Before that, however, Myers claims that games create the context “that most efficiently evokes and sustains the lusory attitude necessary to play a game.” This is true, but trivially so. The lusory attitude, according to Suits, is a component that necessarily refers to game playing, and thus game play is the most efficient way of evoking this attitude because it is the only way to evoke it. But the author ignores the point that Suits is always careful to make: of course one can act efficiently within the confines of the game, and it is only there that a certain experience can be had; the inefficiency of games lives elsewhere, in the relationship between the constitutive rules and the prelusory goal.

Myers is right that both games and artworks “may be considered equally efficient in accomplishing experiential goals”. What he gets wrong is that substituting “experiencing game play itself” as a supposed prelusory goal results in a game.

Finally, the author concludes with some claimed paradoxes about game play. “Game play is efficient if and only if it is inefficient” and it is “competitive if and only if it is cooperative”;¹ Suits shows why both of these considerations are incorrect in his *Grass-*

¹ It is arguable if this second claim is in fact a paradox. It may be the case that something can be both competitive and cooperative, though nothing in my argument depends on this.

hopper, particularly Ch. 7. It is “serious if and only if it is not serious”; I cannot discern why the author makes this claim, especially as Suits believes the racecar driver can be deathly serious while still playing a game; perhaps it is some unreferenced reference (what a paradox!) to Huizinga’s or Caillois’ notion of the magic circle, which Suits does not truck with. The author continues with the thought that “game play may be art if and only if it may not be art.” I am never sure exactly how to respond to a rejection of the law of non-contradiction. The most charitable response may be that the author is making an equivocation for rhetorical reasons. It is not really the case that thing are X if and only if they are not-X, rather they are X if and only if they are in some false but illuminating way taken to be not-X. Or, perhaps, the author really is on to something and their argument is sound if and only if it is unsound.

References

Suits, B. (2014). *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. Broadview Press.