

Reply to Fuller

Tylor Cunningham

“Making *Minecraft* Magic: Art as the Medium” raises an interesting question about the variety of mediums we can use when pursuing artistic endeavors. The author posits that certain kinds of art, like games, can be used by players to form their own works of art. The two examples that they use are *Minecraft* and *Dungeons & Dragons*. Since these are relatively complicated cases, I think it might be helpful to start from what I think is a clear example of art being used as a medium, supporting the author’s thesis.

Originally, the “Pinkest Pink” was developed by Stuart Semple in response to Anish Kapoor purchasing exclusive artistic rights of Surrey NanoSystem’s newly developed Vantablack pigment in 2016. Semple created it for widespread use and specifically mentioned on his website that it wasn’t for use by Anish Kapoor. On its own, the entire stunt seems to be exactly the kind of thing we would call art. It’s a creation with an intended message behind it. It just so happens to also be a material used in the creation of other people’s art. That is why they’re purchasing it.

So, what about the art of *Minecraft* or *Dungeons & Dragons* is being used in subsequent creations? If what makes *Minecraft* a work of art is the fact that it’s a game, then something about its being a game needs to be involved in the player’s creation of their own art within the sandbox. My first thought is that it’s not enough that players are using tools created within the program. With other digital artistic spaces like Photoshop, there are a variety of tools that someone can use to create their own works of art, from brush and smudge tools to blur effects. I take these to be analogous to the various materials that exist within *Minecraft*. So, while these artists are using Photoshop to create art, Photoshop is not a work of art itself. It’s more a toolbox that allows for the creation of art.

Minecraft, as the author mentioned, is a work of art in virtue of its being a game. I think that the analysis is correct as long as the fact that it’s a game can be preserved in the sandbox mode where these creations are happening. At least one interpretation of games challenges that possibility, however. Bernard Suits, for example, says, “Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.”¹ On Thi Nguyen’s analysis this means that the medium for games is player agency: “The game designer crafts for players a very particular form of struggle and does so by crafting both a temporary practical agency for us to inhabit and a practical environment for us to struggle against.”² If it’s true that what makes games art is their ability to manipulate agency through artificial struggles, then sandbox modes where the limitations of the game are removed for the sake of creativity seem to be removed from the category of games *as art*.

It’s possible that there is something else in non-Suitsian games, games like make-believe games or sandbox games, that makes them art. I’m not sure what this would be. So, work would need to be

¹ Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*, 3rd ed. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2014), 43.

² Thi Nguyen, *Games: Agency as Art* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2020), 17. It’s important to note that Nguyen himself thinks that Suits’ account of games is incomplete as he mentions in 6n4. There are other types of games, though I wonder if a lack of agential modification makes them art.

done to establish these kinds of games as works of art, as opposed to mere tools like Photoshop, to motivate a claim that art can be used as a medium for the creation of further art. I suspect a helpful place to start would be the distinction between physical and artistic medium raised by Joseph Margolis.³ Nguyen summarizes the distinction, “For example, in paintings, the physical medium consists of pigments applied to a surface, while the artistic medium includes various techniques, including brushstrokes.”⁴ Where Semple’s art would be used as physical medium in the creation of further art, I wonder if it’s possible that what makes creations in games like *Minecraft* art is the technique of the specific engagement of the system developers have laid out.

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³ Joseph Margolis, *Art and Philosophy: Conceptual Issues in Aesthetics* (Atlantic Heights, NJ: Humanities Press, 1980), 1-42.

⁴ Nguyen, *Games*, 14-15.