Making *Minecraft* Magic: Art as the Medium
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Currently it seems controversial for one to call video games works of art *as* video games and not as something else, such as a work of interactive film or literature, and it might still be controversial to call them works of art as one of those mediums. But I would like to presuppose that video games can be works of art as games, and what I want to suggest here may even be more controversial: while games can be works of art, certain games can *also* be a medium for artistic creation while still being a work of art itself. Games that I have in mind primarily are what are call creative or sandbox games, i.e., games that have little to no narrative and are primarily played for the sake of the game and not to finish some goal or objective. My paradigm example is the block-based *Minecraft*.

Minecraft gained somewhat of a cult following that's still alive to this day. The visuals of the game are completely block or cube shaped, and players can hit certain blocks with tools (or their hands) to gain resources and to build things with those same blocks they mined. But there is one thing in particular interests me. The game has two modes: "survival" and "creative." In survival mode the player has to deal with things like hunger, monsters in the world, taking damage from falling; but in creative mode, there little to no restrictions to what a player can do. They can fly, they take no damage, there are no monsters (unless players place them), and, most importantly, they have unlimited resources to build whatever they want. It is what players do in this creative mode that interests me the most here.

First, I would like to look at Dominic Lopes's *A Philosophy of Computer Art*, where he gives some insight on how interactive art such as video games involve the user or player. His paradigm examples of computer art aren't video games, but rather works such as *Telegarden* where users can visit a website to control a robot to tend to a garden, or *Project X* by Damian Lopez, which is another website that features verse detailing the story of Vasco da Gama's voyage around Africa. However, every word of the text is a link to a different screen that "elaborates, opposes, or recontextualizes the previous screen."[1] *Project X* is interesting because this allows many different displays of the same work to be experienced, where perhaps each display is unique. But Lopes notices this leads to an interesting problem: if a work like *Project X* can be used to create many different readings, does it become less of a work or more of a device for creating new works?

Lopes brings up the example of magnetic letters that people use on refrigerators, and that these can be used to write poetry for example. But the thing about the magnetic letters is that we do not appreciate the letters themselves, rather we appreciate the works we can create with them. Lopes says that the magnetic letters can either be merely a device for generating poems or it can be a single work that has many varying displays—just like *Project X*.[2] The big difference for Lopes seems to be that, in the case of *Project* X, we appreciate both the single display and the work itself, similar to how one might enjoy a certain version of a composition and still appreciate the original score.

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[1]   Dominic McIver Lopes, *A Philosophy of Computer Art* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 22.
[2]   Lopes, *A Philosophy of Computer Art*, 54.

This is where *Minecraft* can come back in. As I said before, *Minecraft* features a creative mode that allows players to do things in the world of *Minecraft* that are similar to what people do with LEGOs. We wouldn't say that *Minecraft* isn't a single work, since we do appreciate the original work/game itself, but *Minecraft* can also be used as a device to create amazing works of computer art. Players can create massive castles and other infrastructure, create models of things from the real world, recreate works of art such as the *Mona Lisa,* or even create their own original visual works similar to paintings. It turns out that making these types of art in *Minecraft* can be extremely popular, too. And this is why it is such a great example of a work of art that itself can be used to generate a new form of art even if it might be niche. Another example of a (non-video) game that could be seen this way is the tabletop classic *Dungeons and Dragons*. Players are given the rules and resources, but they themselves create amazing stories and situations with the tools they are given. Both *Minecraft* and *Dungeons and Dragons* are different from the magnetic letters, since they do seem to be more like a single work, but they *can also* be devices.

For this reason, I think it's fair to ask questions such as: can a work be both a work with multiple displays *and* a device for creating new works? Or is it possible for a work of art to be turned into a medium of art? Examples like *Minecraft,* where the creations that players build are almost as popular as the game itself, might show that they can be appreciated apart from the game itself, while still somehow being *a part* of the game. In my view, it's fair to say that something like *Minecraft* or *Dungeons and Dragons* can be seen as both something like *Project X*, where it is one work with many varying displays *and* as something like the magnetic fridge letters, as a tool to *create* those varying displays as works of art.

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References

Lopes, Dominic McIver. *A Philosophy of Computer Art*. New York: Routledge, 2010.