

Perspectives on Video Games as Art

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"Perspectives on Video Games as Art"
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Abstract: In their article "Perspectives on Video Games as Art" Jeroen Bourgonjon, Geert Vandermeersche, and Kris Rutten engage in discussing whether or not video games can be considered a form of art. Although this question has already been discussed elaborately, the debate is guided by many different and often conflicting positions. The aim of this article is to revisit this debate by mapping out a range of perspectives on video games as art. The authors explore the relation between games and different definitions and functions of art, different motives of artists, and the potential impact of the arts. The authors postulate that the discussion about the art status of video games is neither singular nor straightforward, and that the artistic possibilities of video games should instead be assessed by confronting a number of interrelated perspectives.

Jeroen BOURGONJON, Geert VANDERMEERSCHE, and Kris RUTTEN

Perspectives on Video Games as Art

In previous research (Soetaert, Bourgonjon and Rutten <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1794>>), we have explored the claim from James Paul Gee that video games can be considered a new form of art that functions as a new type of "equipment for living" (Gee, "Why games studies now?"). More specifically, we analyzed his assertion that the debate about the art status of video games is one of the main reasons why the study of games should be developed as a distinctive field of research within (comparative) cultural studies and literacy studies. Our main approach was to focus on video gaming as a new way to create worlds and construct meaning and sense. In this paper, we re-engage in the discussion of whether video games can be considered an art form, on the one hand by exploring which insights from the arts are applicable to video games, and on the other hand by focusing on new possibilities created by video games in the context of creative processes and the appreciation of art.

From the perspective of literacy studies, it is tempting to treat video games as another type of narrative and to apply existing frameworks for analyzing (visual) language and stories in video games (<Bourgonjon <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2510>>). Game and media scholars have increasingly warned against such a straightforward translation of existing frameworks. Indeed, Gee argues that "as a new art form, one largely immune to traditional tools developed for the analysis of literature and film, video games will challenge us to develop new analytical tools" (58). According to Henry Jenkins, "if games are going to become an art, right now, rather than in some distant future, when all of our technical challenges have been resolved, it may come from game designers who are struggling with the mechanics of motion and emotion, rather than those of story and character" ("Games" 27). However, the question of whether video games are art raises a number of important issues (see e.g. Theresa Devine and Grant Tavinor), and has proven to be controversial in the public debate, both in institutional settings and in academic discourse. In what follows, we will therefore (1) address the main concerns raised in each of these contexts. Next, we will (2) explore video games from the perspective of the arts, positioning video games against a number of approaches that have been used to define art. We will argue for a functional approach, focusing on how video games could help artists realize their creative intentions and artistic motivations. Finally, we will (3) postulate that the discussion about the art status of video games should also address the social impact of video games compared to the social impact of the arts.

Approaching games as a form of art has proven to be very controversial. In this regard, the remarks of Roger Ebert ("Games can never be art" <<http://www.rogerebert.com/roger-s-journal/video-games-can-never-be-art>>) and Jack Kroll ("Games can be fun and rewarding in many ways, but they can't transmit the emotional complexity that is the root of art" <<http://europe.newsweek.com/emotion-engine-i-dont-think-so-156675>>) are exemplary of a broader public debate. These two critics contended that games are primarily a form of play, with a focus on goals, points and results – and they argue that as cultural artifacts, games can therefore never be compared to the work of great painters, film directors and writers. These concerns have instigated debates about interactivity and procedural rhetoric (e.g. Bogost), and about the ability of the audience (i.e. players) to care as much about pixels on the computer screen as characters in films (Jenkins <<http://web.mit.edu/21fms/People/henry3/GamesNewLively.html>>).

Because of this controversy, it is not surprising that Paola Antonelli from the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) created turmoil in 2012 when she decided to incorporate games in the permanent design collection. The debate that followed oscillated between those who did not understand that such a renowned institution would incorporate games (e.g. Jonathan Jones from *The Guardian* responded to this: "Sorry, MoMA, video games are not art" <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/>>), and those who pondered why this has not happened sooner (e.g. Dutton). Of course, whether or not museums and art institutions recognize games is an important element in the discussion about games as an art form (Pederdini <<http://www.molleindustria.org/blog/the-great-art-upgrade/>>). Therefore, it is interesting to explore games from an institutional perspective, focusing on how art institutes approach games and whether or not games are incorporated into the collections of museums (on this, see Tavinor, *The Art; Devine, "Integrating Games"; and Sharp, Works of Game*). Indeed, as Brock Rough argues: "if we look more carefully at the way videogames have actually been exhibited, their inclusion is not as unequivocal as it may first appear" (*Are Videogames Art?* 44). In what follows, we provide a brief overview.

At the start of the twenty first century, institutional initiatives about games were mostly restricted to symposia or small exhibitions (Smuts <<http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/>>). In 2001,

for example, a symposium was hosted in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art titled: *ArtCade: Exploring the Relationship between Video Games and Art*. The symposium presented recent video game-inspired artworks alongside a selection of video games from the 1970s to the present. Another example is the exhibit *BitStreams*, which was hosted in the Whitney Museum of American Art and featured video game-influenced works. However, the statement that has likely influenced the debate the most was when MoMA decided to add games to its design collection in 2012. The collection offers a broad spectrum of games spanning the early days of videogaming (e.g. Pac-Man from 1980) until now, including contemporary games such as *Canabalt* (<<http://www.canabalt.com/>>) and *Minecraft* (<<https://minecraft.net/>>). Curator Paola Antonelli's decision was extensively discussed in the media, claiming that games have finally been recognized as art as a result of this institutional recognition. However, it needs to be emphasized that Antonelli approached games first and foremost as a form of design.

In the same period, the Smithsonian American Art Museum also played a role in the institutionalization of games as art. The Smithsonian incorporated video art in the collection that thematizes gaming based on the work of artists such as Nam June Paik and David Hockney. This decision was highly contested in the public debate as well. One of the main issues was that games were chosen based on a public poll instead of the careful deliberation process of a curator. Critics argued that the exhibition lacked coherence and did not have much depth (Salter). As a result, the Smithsonian's attention for games was considered to be a publicity stunt rather than an effort to take games seriously as an art form.

Scholarly discourse has proven to be similar, as opinions remain divided in the academic context as well. Those who are in favor argue that games such as *Braid* (<<http://braid-game.com/>>), *Flower* (<<http://thatgamecompany.com/games/flower/>>) and *One Chance* (<<http://www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/555181>>) can indeed be compared to great art (e.g. Gee) and some even go so far as to argue that games therefore belong in the museum (e.g. Beale). However, not all scholars are unanimously positive (Adams). These discussions raise the question of why there is such an apparently strong need to label games as art. According to Paulo Pedercini, one of the reasons seems to be to legitimize games as a serious cultural practice and not as "merely" fun and play, or what he refers to as the "great art upgrade." In this regard, Rough aptly argues that the search for satisfying answers to the art question should focus on the good work that has been done, while "allowing for the quick discharging of the large amount of questionable opinion-mongering that has also taken place" (1). An important question that needs to be raised is whether "all" video games should be considered as art. After all, it may be the case that some video games are art while others are not. Rough therefore suggests rephrasing the original question: "Are videogames art?" to "Can videogames be art?" or maybe even more straightforward to "Can videogames be artworks?" (5).

Theresa Claire Devine, for example, (<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1555412015596105>>) provides an overview of the different arguments that are raised to tackle this question. One argument is that games appear to possess all the formal elements that are expected from art (2). This is important, as Ernest Adams (<<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1386/jmpr.7.1.67/1>>) has argued that the legitimization of games as an art form is as much about public expectations as the nature of the games themselves. Furthermore, it is often claimed that video games are art due to the fact that they have also given rise to new art practices. According to Ri Pierce-Grove, looking at art from the perspective of games "sheds a useful light on the expansion of play and digital game techniques into both installation art and educational museum displays" (469).

However, the sometimes apparent similarities between video games and arts at the level of aesthetics, narrative, politics, and philosophy (Díaz and Tungtjitcharoen <<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1555412014557543>>) alone, does not allow for a straightforward categorization of video games as artworks. On the one hand, although video games contain artistic elements such as graphics or music, these qualities alone do not necessarily imply that they are art in themselves. On the other hand, game technologies could be considered an extension of traditional art, enabling a two-way dialogue between the author and a viewer, and as such, allow both to explore new artistic possibilities.

These discussions exemplify the multitude of different positions in the debate about games as art. We believe that in many cases, these positions can be considered blind spots both from the world of art as well as from the field of games studies. Scholars are preoccupied with the dominant approaches and perspectives in the fields they are trained in, which can make them blind to other potentially interesting perspectives. In other words, the different assessments of games as art are not necessarily guided by an understanding of what both can offer to each other. From the perspective of art, there is not much knowledge about the diversity in video games. From the perspective of games, there is often a very traditional understanding of what exactly can be considered as art.

In what follows, we aim to elaborate on some of these issues by bringing together additional perspectives from the arts. As such, our discussion is located in "comparative cultural studies" developed by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, whereby attention is paid, among others, to different perspectives on intermediality, digital humanities, and art. Starting from the perspective of the arts, we will examine what definitions for art may be applicable to the question about the art status of video games. In line with contemporary discussions about art as equipment for living, we will then resort to a more functional perspective, focusing on how video games could satisfy new and alternative creative intentions and artistic motivations. We will examine two approaches in particular: a historical-technological perspective and an artistic perspective. Furthermore, we will also argue for a close examination of the social impact of video games in the third section of this paper. More specifically, we will contextualize video games in a broader discussion about the social impact of the arts.

From the perspective of the arts, video games can be considered an interesting case study to explore different accounts and definitions of art. In his research on games and art, Brock Rough provides an overview of historically important accounts. He starts off with definitions that concentrate on Kant's notion that art should generate beauty. From this perspective, when something is beautiful, it could be considered a work of art (7-16). Next, Rough discusses transmission theories (e.g. Tolstoy), which consider a work of art successful when it is able to communicate and express ideas and generate feelings (16-52). Another important perspective is based on anti-definitional strategies that reject the mere possibility of defining something as fluent and transitional as the arts. These have led to more institutionally oriented definitions, which argue that the place where the work is exhibited decides whether or not it can be considered a work of art, rather than the qualities of the artwork itself. From this perspective, art is that which is presented in a museum or an art institution.

These different perspectives highlight the difficulty of singularly defining the characteristics of art, problematizing the potential art status of games. Therefore, we concur with Rough to take on a more intentional-historical account approach, instead focusing on the functionalities offered by art (72). According to Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, "functional definitions of art are based on the notion that art serves a purpose, so that an object is a work of art only if it achieves the objectives and purposes of art (which can be diverse and change over time). Functional definitions of art focus on the potential art offers to the artist. This potential might be the property of imitating nature or expressing emotions; however we define them, though, these properties are intrinsic to the work of art" (7). We believe that such a functional approach can prove more fruitful in overcoming some of the conflicting positions in the debate. In addition, these functional definitions of art provide the basis for a description of art as "equipment for living" (Soetaert, Bourgonjon and Rutten <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1794>>).

The term art is often considered to have a sort of quality assessment over a specific work, which, as stated above, is also very much present in the debate about games as art. Another more relativistic perspective is that today, "everything is art;" therefore games can be considered as such. To avoid such general claims about games as art, we argue that it is more relevant to develop a number of guiding questions. What is the aim of the artist or game designer with this work? What are the qualities of a specific work? Or in terms of the debate about gaming, what can games bring to the arts? Indeed, the aim should not be to legitimize games as a cultural practice, but rather, open up the discussion about their potential artistic possibilities (or functions).

In what follows, we address this functional approach from two different perspectives. First, we describe the historical-technological perspective. New materials and technologies have often inspired artists. Games are no exception to this. Secondly, we explore the possibilities from an aesthetical perspective. Which aesthetic motives can support digital games? Thirdly, as artists have already been experimenting with games and rules for quite some time, it is interesting to explore the new possibilities offered by the turn from analogue games to digital games.

From a historical-technological perspective, it is clear that technical evolutions have proven to be an important trigger for artistic innovations. A striking example is the emergence of photography (Benjamin). When cameras became widely available, artists started exploring the new creative potential of photography. By selecting specific subjects and experimenting with the many possibilities, artists turned the camera into an artistic medium, and photography into a distinct art form. However, although many artists are often among the first to embrace new technologies and media, their resulting art works are often confronted with resistance in the broader art world. Photography, for example, was initially not recognized as a form of art (Benjamin). On the one hand, people need to get acquainted with new technologies; on the other hand, they need to acknowledge that art is continuously in transition and that technology also influences how we look at and experience art. In this respect, Ellen Sandor and Janine Fron have argued that, "For future generations, video games may become the

most dynamic extension of cultural memory since photography was embraced as an art form" (1). Video games do not just offer new possibilities to established artists; they contribute to the democratization of art by enabling people who would not have been able to express themselves creatively with other media (Jenkins). Indeed, video games allow people to create different types of works, ranging from game art, over art games, to artists' games (for an overview, see Sharpe; Pedercini). Noticeable examples are Cory Arcangel's artistically hacked version of the popular digital game *Super Mario Bros* (*Super Mario Clouds* <<http://www.coryarcangel.com/things-i-made/2002-001-super-mario-clouds>>) and Ryan Green's autobiographical game *That Dragon, Cancer* (<<http://www.thadragoncancer.com/>>), which deals with the loss of their child to cancer. As a game developer, Ryan Green found that a video game was the best way to translate his family's experience of the low and high moments during this period of their lives.

According to Montse Arbelo and Joseba Franco (<<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2501>>), the digitization is changing how art is created. "It changes the solitary artist into a collaborative nomad belonging to multidisciplinary, transnational groups, it changes the materials used, the concept of the unique work and its inherent rights, its exhibition, and the function of the general public" (2). Precisely because artists have always been keen to explore the potential of new technologies, Derrick De Kerckhove urges us to focus on artistic developments to understand what is happening in our digitized culture. Or in his words, to explore "what is happening at the edge of technology through the study of the arts" (xxvii). In emphasizing the relationship between art and technology, De Kerckhove builds on the earlier work of Marshall McLuhan. "If men were able to be convinced that art is precise advance knowledge of how to cope with the psychic and social consequences of the next technology, would they all become artists? Or would they begin a careful translation of new art forms into social navigation charts? I am curious to know what would happen if art were suddenly seen for what it is, namely, exact information of how to rearrange one's psyche in order to anticipate the new blow from our own extended faculties" (McLuhan 71). Indeed, "the mind of the artist is always the point of maximal sensitivity and resourcefulness in exposing altered realities in the common culture" (McLuhan qtd. in De Kerckhove xxvii; on this see also Rutten and Soetaert). In his research, Chris Cheser provides an overview of examples that show that both games and art experiment with the implications of technological and cultural change. Precisely because some of these works are generally accessible, they can function as a contribution to the public debate about the ethics and aesthetics of new media.

From an artistic perspective, artists can also turn to game technology to create art. But which new possibilities does game technology offer to artists? How can games help artists move forward? To answer these questions, we first need to know what exactly an artist aims to achieve. However, it is impossible to enlist all possible motives of artists. Therefore, we will limit our discussion to three traditional motives of artists as described in Willem Elias's *Modern Art*, and relate them to the possible motives of games.

A first motive that artists can have is to mimic reality. Especially in traditional approaches to art, "good" art is often seen as "realistic" art. Even though it would be a misnomer to attribute similar motives to game developers, a similar trend can be observed in video game culture: many commercial studios and artists have developed a strong focus and even an urge to develop as realistic images as possible. This movement was specifically important in the 1990s when the calculating power of computers made it possible to develop spectacular three-dimensional games.

Since then, the urge to create "realistic games" has only increased. At this moment, several companies are exploring games and virtual reality to enhance the "real-life" experience.

Although these are technologically very complex and expensive endeavors, these technologies have increasingly become available to artists, as software packages were released that make it more feasible to develop professional looking video games. However, not all game scholars view favorably the increasingly photorealistic images in games. Much like art critics in the past, game critics refer to the fact that "beauty" and "realism" are not necessarily the most important elements to achieve a "quality" experience.

According to Henry Jenkins, game designers often strive for aesthetic recognition by giving themselves over to "cinema envy." Game critics now argue that the excessive attention to graphical advancement is blocking creativity within game studies. Instead of developing innovative games, more photorealistic versions of earlier games are being made. This has caused a number of counter reactions, an important one being a seemingly back-to-basics aesthetics movement in game culture. Independent games designers (e.g. Zimmerman) now argue for a "return to a garage aesthetic, stripping aside fancy graphics and elaborate cinematics, to reclaim the core elements that make games distinctive from other expressive media" (Jenkins 9 <<http://web.mit.edu/21fms/People/henry3/GamesNewLively.html>>). Indeed, many independent game developers are now making their own games, regard-

less of commercial motives, thereby embracing the newly acquired artistic freedom. Instead of focusing on spectacular 3D effects, these developers are focusing on new gaming experiences. A known example is the work of the American game designer Phil Fish, who developed the game *Fez* (<<http://fezgame.com/>>). At first instance, *Fez* appears to be 2D, but it was actually a very sophisticated 3D environment. Although the game had some important technical issues, it has been applauded because of its innovative character. Other examples of games in which the developer has embraced the potential of video games to create new experiences for the players include *Journey* (<<http://thatgamecompany.com/games/journey/>>), *Luxuria Superbia* (<<http://luxuria-superbia.com/>>), *Donut County*, (<<http://www.donutcounty.com/>>) and *Proteus* (<<http://twistedtreegames.com/p/roteus/>>).

A second traditional artistic motivation is the expression of emotions and beliefs. In this regard, games are not always considered successful in having the same emotional effect as other art forms, such as novels and films. From this perspective, games are being accused of evoking little more than instinctive reactions and cerebral impulses, such as the feeling of disappointment when receiving a counter-goal in *Fifa 2017* (<<https://www.easports.com/fifa>>) or frustration when dying in *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* (<<http://www.counter-strike.net/>>). There are a number of explanations for this assessment, however all of these reasons can easily be countered.

First of all, technologically, it appears to be easier to animate objects than human interaction, which has led some programmers to focus on storytelling through objects and architecture rather than human beings. Secondly, digital games are only a beginning of a tradition, so game developers are still exploring how they can use game mechanics to arouse more complex emotions. Thirdly, it was only recently that game development – including the art of evoking complex emotions through a combination of game rules, images and stories (see Bogost's description of procedural rhetoric) – has become part of the curriculum in art schools.

But perhaps it is unproductive to compare games and other art forms such as novels and films. We need to remember that games are, first and foremost, played, which urges the audience to take on a much more active role. Obviously, games will effectuate different emotions depending on the role of the players. In addition to feelings of triumph and pride when achieving important goals in the virtual world, games could potentially also evoke new and more complex feelings such as melancholy, guilt and despair (e.g. Murray). A trend can be witnessed in game culture towards the development in which gamers are confronted with ethical challenges, aiming to evoke precisely these types of emotions such as *This War of Mine* (<<http://www.thiswarofmine.com/>>) and *Papers, Please* (<<http://papersplea.se/>>). In *This War of Mine*, players assume the role of a group of civilians, who try to survive during war time. As players struggle with lack of food and medicine, and having to deal *Papers, Please*, players experience the difficulties of being an immigration officer at a border crossing in a fictional communist country. Players have to review immigrants' and returning citizens' paperwork, making the final decision on whether or not to allow people into the country. Carlos Mauricio Castaño Díaz and Worawach Tungtsjitcharoen have conducted an analytical and semi-experimental study with the purpose of testing if video games can serve as a form of transmission of social representations and feelings. Their results showed that games can pass on social feelings: "in other words, these games transmit socially shared emotions in the same way a person in an art exhibition shares feelings with others watching the same work of art" (4).

A third motive that can be ascribed to functions of art is the destruction, continuation, and transformation of art (Maet <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2243>>). The aim of artists has often been to thematize and problematize images that have seemingly become normal in popular culture at large. By making new versions of an image, an artist can render it less familiar and enable reflection about iconic images in popular culture.

In game culture, we notice a similar trend. Increasingly, developers are starting to become self-aware and critical about digital gaming and the many tropes it relies on. According to artists and game designers Auriea Harvey & Michaël Samyn (<<http://tale-of-tales.com/tales/OverGames.html>>) from the gaming studio Tale of Tales, digital games are not evolving enough because of a restricting focus on shooting, building, flying and racing. While these developers (who dislike being referred to as artists) do not want to judge gamers, they do want to offer something new and different. One way they do this is by turning away from traditional game elements such as rules, goals and scores. They made "The Graveyard," (<<http://tale-of-tales.com/TheGraveyard/>>) in which players can become an old woman who visits a graveyard. Players can walk around, sit on a bench, and listen to a song. The designers describe the game as an interactive painting rather than a game. It is an experiment in which poetry is shaped during playing, in which a story is being told without words. Another noticeable example is the game "Braid" (<<http://braid-game.com/>>). At first sight, "Braid" looks like a typical, al-

beit somewhat original, puzzle game. However, the game can also be read as a brilliant social commentary on the video game trope depicting the protagonist male as the hero who has to rescue the damsel in distress.

Of course, we acknowledge that the creative intentions of artists are more diverse than the three artistic motivations listed above. However, we believe that this elaboration gives a number of examples of what video games have to offer to artists, whatever their motives might be.

Games potentially offer amongst others new ways to imitate reality, express emotions, question assumptions about life in general (and games in particular), and push against rationality and logic. Again, this does not yet imply that video games should be considered a part of the arts scene. Notwithstanding, the motives to develop games can be similar to the motives used to develop art—but the opposite can also be true. The sociologist Johan Huizinga had already noted in 1938 that "All art derives from play" (65). He meant that the ludological or gaming aspects often influence art, which is also an important aspect of digital games.

One of the arguments that critics often use to state that games aren't art is that they are trivial, too playful, and of no use. Building on this remark of Huizinga, in her book *Critical Play*, Mary Flanagan has tried to inspire game designers to think differently about the functions of play and games by providing a historical account of various forms of critical play and games. According to Flanagan, playfulness is an important part of art history—a point she proves convincingly by offering many examples of games in artistic waves such as Dadaism, Surrealism, and Fluxus. A game that could have been part of Flanagan's work, is "Wonderer," an audio artwork "based within a game engine and presented as a series of audio speakers within a gallery space. The artwork aims to approach the game engine as a sculptural object rather than an interactive, playable space" (Sutherland 30 <<http://www.artslashgames.com/>>). However, Flanagan's main goal is not just to underline the creative, but also the critical potential of play.

When we focus on Flanagan's message about the potential of games to include critical thinking and subversion, it is important that we also acknowledge the impact of games on the audience. In the previous section of this article, we focused exclusively on the range of possibilities that are opened up for artists as a result of video games. In this section, we will focus briefly on the ways in which video games – as a form of art - can potentially create a social impact.

In their seminal work *The Social Impact of the Arts. An Intellectual History*, Belfiore and Bennett offer an overview of all the arguments that have been made about the impact of the arts in Western history. Besides the claims that reject instrumentality (cf. "l'art pour l'art") or classify the impact of arts as being negative (e.g. Plato's condemnation of theatre), Belfiore and Bennett identified six additional categories of arguments focusing on the positive impact of art. To summarize, art has the potential for catharsis, increased personal well-being, education and self-development, moral improvement and civilization, use as a political instrument, social stratification, and identity construction.

It is apparent that each of these claims also represents specific research strands in contemporary game studies. Increasingly, scholars are focusing on the potential of video games to regulate emotions and clarify ideas, (e.g. Granic, Lobel and Engels <<https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0034857>>), reduce anxiety and stress (e.g. Ferguson and Olson <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11031-012-9284-7>>), increase empathy (e.g. Harrington and O'Connell <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.062>>), moral decision making (e.g. Gollwitzer and Melzer <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.07.001>>), and teach about politics (e.g. Neys and Jansz <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0267323110373456>>). In previous research (Bourgonjon, Vandermeersche, De Wever, Soetaert and Valcke <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1461444815569723>>), we have contributed to this body of literature, by comparing the historical and academic discourse on these claims (e.g. "games foster personal well-being") with players' discourse found on popular internet forums where players get together to discuss games, learn tactics, and share experiences. A recurrent topic on these game forums is the question of whether or not video games have the potential to change someone's life. We performed a content analysis on these forum messages to examine the alleged similarity between the arguments used by players and the claims discussed in Belfiore and Bennett's work. The results clearly showed that players' talk about the impact of video games reflects the grand claims made about the impact of the arts in general.

While we agree that players' claims about the impact of games on their lives does not always reflect what players really think or believe, we also acknowledge that every positive story can likely be matched with a negative one. Therefore, it is important not to confuse these claims with actual effects. Nevertheless, from a rhetorical perspective, these claims can be analyzed "not as evidence of what people really know or believe, but as a form of social action which serves particular social purposes" (Buckingham 175 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/030549899104198>>).

In this paper, we have mapped out the different arguments in the debate about the art status of video games. First, we have elaborated on the controversy as it has taken shape in the public debate, in institutional settings, and in academia. Secondly, we have explored video games from the perspective of the arts relating video games to the many definitions that have been provided for art throughout the centuries. We have argued for a more functional approach, focusing instead on how video games offer new opportunities for fulfilling the creative intentions of established and new artists, as well as the ability to impact its audience. Rather than looking for a straightforward answer to whether or not videogames are art, we aimed to give an overview of a number of different perspectives and (op)positions in the debate. Of course, we acknowledge that many interesting questions remain.

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