

Xiangxin Zhang

Elizabeth Stevens

CAS WR100-N5

13 February 2018

Games Are Arts

In 2018, video games have already grown to be impossible to be ignored. Electronic Entertainment Expo/Exposition (E3) is one of the most reputable exhibitions of video games, which is open for one week between May and June in LA. Technology and game operation companies, including Microsoft, SONY, and Nintendo are always the main exhibitors, and their products cover most of the platforms, such as game consoles, PCs, and smart devices. Artificial intelligence, the hottest topic of this year, is now also a trend and direction of game developing, and the total size of the market is over billions of dollars. Video games are no longer ignorable. While a group of people advocating games as a form of art, a large group of people represented by Roger Ebert, criticize video games and refuse to acknowledge their artistic values. Ebert's claim can be tested against the available evidence by conducting a classical close reading of the game "Playerunknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG)" is worthy of a closer look. PUBG is a survival game, and it is a third and first perspective shooting game, which challenges people's overall ability for gaming to an unprecedented extent. It requires high proficiency in gaming skill, also it helps people to relieve pressure and socialize with other players. Additionally, it is a game that improves our teamwork, communication skill and leadership. Last but not least, it delivers values to us. This essay will first discuss why PUBG is comparable to art and then respond to Ebert's arguments against video games.

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PUBG perfectly fits the first definition of what I believe is art, which is that they both require high-level skills and tricks, for example, hands and brain synchronization and coordination. In some extremely competitive and skill-intense games, like PUBG, top players and professional players always amaze their audiences with unbelievable game performance. For instance, one of the most popular streamers of PUBG is Shroud, who is the top one player in the North American server, and he now has almost one million subscriptions on YouTube. Why is he so welcome? The reason is simple, as he can make his game comparable to art. When comparing how different his games are from ours, we will reflexively feel surprised by him. As a result, every move he has made and every shot he has taken is considered as a masterpiece by his followers. Let me give some specific explanations to illustrate how artistic his performance is. In a one-hundred-player round, he has a record of thirty-four kills. I spent over five hundred hours on this game, but my highest record is only fifteen kills. Furthermore, it is widely known that AKM is one of the weapons that are the hardest to control especially when used under automatic mode, but Shroud can use a five-bullet burst with a firing rate close to the automatic mode. In my own experience, when my teammates and I have unexpected contact with enemies in a short range, our individual reaction time and that of our enemies will decide who is able to take action one or two milliseconds before the other. People with talent have a significantly short responding time, which gives them an inborn advantage in a game like PUBG. This corresponds with what I mentioned above, which is that art requires and tries out people's talent and skillfulness.

The second element of what I consider as art is that it helps people to become better in certain ways. As we know, Sculptures help people to research physics and architecture, and it is now one of the majors of art. Sculpture study also creates an industry that provides jobs for

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people who are majored in the concentration. Oil paintings expand people's aesthetic vision, improve the aesthetic temperament, and help people to appreciate the aesthetic value by dissecting these aesthetic factors. When coming to video games, I would say that video games play an important role in helping people to release stress and socialize with people from all over the world just sitting in front of PCs. In my personal experience, I have met various kinds of people in PUBG. Most of them are friendly, and they are willing to share almost everything in and out of the game. There is one person called Sam, a financial manager working in New York. We have had a very pleasing conversation about my study, his work, and this game when we first met in the game, and he encouraged me to choose my favorite major even though I do not dare to, as it is hard for me, who is not good at calculus and statistics. We added each other on Steam, and we will chat for a little while as long as we have time. I received his photo of his little daughter the day she began her primary school, and he is always willing to tell me what happened around the financial market. The third characteristic of my definition of art is that it builds up values. As the lead designer and director of PUBG, Brendan Greene says, "I wanted to create a game that you really value your character, you didn't want him to die" (Greene, Brendan. Personal Interview. 28 July 2017.). He tries to spread a value that we should really care about who we are in the game instead of just thinking them as virtual characters. While most of the games now give players chances to try repeatedly until they win, PUBG does not. In this game, every single decision matters. If you miss one shot, you are giving out your position, and the game is over. Greene tries to convey an idea that we should not take our characters only as someone irrelevant to us; instead, we should take them as ourselves and treat them deliberately. Unlike values other games give us, such as selfishness and ruthlessness, this survival game

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actually teaches us a lesson about how important our life is and why we should take our real-life decisions seriously.

I enjoy games and they make me a better person in many ways. Ebert has made several arguments against games under his condition of zero game experience. First, he claims, “One obvious difference between art and games is that you can win a game. It has rules, points, objectives, and an outcome. Santiago might cite a immersive game without points or rules, but I would say then it ceases to be a game and becomes a representation of a story, a novel, a play, dance, a film. Those are things you cannot win; you can only experience them” (Ebert). It is not persuasive to me, and it actually sounds ridiculous. It is not reasonable to argue that games are all about winning instead of experiencing. PUBG is a survival game and the goal of players is to win, but winning is not always the only goal. We can improve skills by hundreds of attempts, learn how to communicate with teammates when we are under fire, learn to wait for launching a sneak attack instead of frontal attack are all interesting and meaningful experiences.

Secondly, Ebert demonstrates that “Do they require validation? In defending their gaming against parents, spouses, children, partners, co-workers or other critics, do they want to be able to look up from the screen and explain, ‘I’m studying a great form of art?’ Then let them say it, if it makes them happy” (Ebert). I would say it is so blind and irresponsible for someone, who has never played any games to deny a fact that gaming is a way to study art. Art is about not only paintings and sculptures, but also interpreting our world and improving ourselves. PUBG is not a good example, but it also teaches us to strengthen our communication skill and exercise our leadership by forcing us to make clear and applicable plans in a game that every second matter. Besides, this survival game tells us a truth that, for a living, we have to be patient and wait for

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the right time, especially when we see our teammates are knocked out, and our teeth start to chatter due to high tension and anger.

Thirdly, Ebert makes a statement that “They are, I regret to say, pathetic. I repeat: ‘No one in or out of the field has ever been able to cite a game worthy of comparison with the great poets, filmmakers, novelists and poets’” (Ebert). Ebert’s judgment on whether or not something is comparable to art depends on if it is worthy for someone to cite it, which sounds ridiculous to game lovers. I believe it is more reasonable to say that it depends on whether or not games have values in a sense. During the games producing process, there is no interaction of physical materials, as games are all composed of codes. We can conclude that the essences of games are billions of codes, and noticeably, the coding work itself is an intellectual property and achievement. Anything constructed by intelligence deserves respect, and it is necessary to acknowledge them as arts. One of the values game represents is the beauty of smartness. Ebert shortens the definition of art and tries to rationalize his own bias towards games, but I want to say thanks to him as he inspires me to dig in this controversial problem. I love games, and I will always see them as arts.

Word counts: 1564

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