Trading Shovels for Controllers: A Brief Exploration of the Portrayal of Archaeology in Video Games

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Archaeology has been a persistent theme for video games, from the long-running Indiana Jones and Lara Croft franchises to more recent uses of archaeology in games like Destiny and World of Warcraft. In these games, archaeology is often portrayed as a search for treasure among lost worlds that leads to looting and the destruction of cultural heritage. In this article, we review the current state of archaeological video games, including mainstream and educational games. While this is not an exhaustive discussion, it provides an introduction and overview to the current landscape. We propose that an understanding of current popular archaeological video games is important to archaeologists for three reasons: (1) it is a source of potentially dangerous misconceptions about the discipline that must be addressed; (2) it can be a source of inspiration for funding and a means to recruit new students to the discipline; and (3) games can be leveraged as teaching moments in classrooms and public discussions. It is important that archaeologists recognize the ways the discipline is being portrayed in such public contexts, in order to maximize the potential benefit for archaeology and to prevent further misconceptions about the subject.

KEYWORDS public archaeology, video games, outreach, popular culture, archaeogaming

Introduction

Archaeology has long been a romanticized discipline, from the adventures of H. Rider Haggard’s swashbuckling Allan Quatermain to the more recent portrayal of Lara Croft, the Tomb Raider. Adventure, foreign countries, the thrill of discovery,
mysterious artefacts and ancient secrets all play an integral role in the public imagination and subsequent popular appeal of archaeology. With the advance of science, the past remains one of the last lost worlds that can be explored, but also exploited, for fiction. It is not surprising, then, that archaeology has been used in video games as a background, inspiration and even as a mechanical action where players actually dig. However, much like their fictional counterparts in books and movies, archaeologically inspired video games often misrepresent the discipline by framing treasure hunting, vandalism and violence within exotic locales, as legitimate forms of acquiring objects or artefacts; in many cases, what is called ‘archaeology’ in these games has no relation to the discipline itself. Therefore, it is important, as archaeologists, that we recognize the ways our discipline is being advertised and portrayed in order to better leverage these efforts for our benefit and prevent further misconceptions.

In this article, we review the current state of archaeological video games, including mainstream and educational games. While this is not an exhaustive discussion, it provides an introduction and overview to the current landscape. We propose that an understanding of current popular archaeological video games is important to archaeologists for three reasons: (1) it is a source of potentially dangerous misconceptions about the discipline that must be addressed; (2) it can be a source of inspiration for funding and recruitment new students to the discipline; and (3) games can be leveraged as teaching moments in classrooms and public discussions.

The rise of video games
Over the last four decades, video games have increasingly moved from alternative forms of entertainment, to capture the attention of an increasingly broad audience. As Prensky (2001) notes, a large percentage of working-age individuals have grown up in a world where computers and video games are highly prevalent. The vast majority of university students have not known a world without video games, which were first created in the 1970s, and their involvement with these kinds of technologies continues to increase. Tapscott (2009) argues that technology is part of the natural landscape for the newest generations. His research has shown that people are ‘learning, playing, communicating, working and creating communities very differently than their parents’ (Tapscott, 2009: 2).

In 2014, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) released a report on current facts and trends within the video game industry. Their report found that 59% of Americans play video games (with the average gamer being 31 years old), there is an almost even divide between male and female gamers, and $21.38 billion is being spent on video games, systems and accessories yearly. ‘People of all ages play video games. There is no longer a “stereotype game player,” but instead a game player could be your grandparent, your boss, or even your professor’ (ESA, 2014: 2). Video games are no longer a form of alternative amusement, but rather a mainstream source of entertainment, information and education.

More importantly for our purposes, archaeologically themed video games have been popular for decades and are often highly ranked in terms of sales and popularity, competitive with games in other genres. Destiny (Bungie, 2014), which is
heavy in lore and includes two archaeologist non-player characters, was #3 in all video game sales in the USA in 2014, behind Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare and Madden NFL 2015 (Forbes, 2014). Franchises such as Indiana Jones (LucasFilm, 2015), Tomb Raider and Uncharted have released dozens of games with sales in the millions. Based on the popularity of games set in the past (Ryse: Son of Rome, the Indiana Jones series, the Assassin’s Creed series) and games set in the future (Eve Online, Destiny, the Mass Effect series), players are eager to play where there is a strong component of lore and history. Gamers want to play in fully realized historical and geographical settings (Assassin’s Creed: Unity) and also want a story that reveals historical elements as the narrative unfolds (Destiny). History drives these stories and adds a layer of complexity, and there is a major appeal to gamers for playing as an archaeologist, or as a character in an archaeology-informed space. With the dramatically increasing popularity of video games, and the continued interest in those with archaeological themes, it is clear that this medium has a significant capacity to shape the public opinion and perception of the discipline.

**Analysing archaeological video games**

Video games use archaeology in a number of ways, from an inspiration for the plotline, to an actual gaming mechanic where players can ‘excavate’ and ‘investigate’ artefacts. Here, we introduce some of the more popular mainstream and educational games featuring archaeology and how they use archaeology as part of gameplay (see Table 1).

| Video game           | Type/use         | Use of archaeology                      |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Indiana Jones Franchise | Mainstream/popular | Plot/background                          |
| Tomb Raider Franchise       | Mainstream/popular | Plot/background                          |
| Uncharted Franchise     | Mainstream/popular | Plot/background                          |
| World of Warcraft      | Mainstream/popular/MMO | Game mechanic                           |
| Destiny                | Mainstream/popular/MMO | Game mechanic                           |
| Hunt the Ancestor       | Educational      | Plot, game mechanic                     |
| Gates of Horus          | Educational      | Plot                                    |
| Dig It Up: Romans       | Educational      | Plot, game mechanic                     |
| Roman Town             | Educational      | Plot                                    |
| DIG! The Maya Project   | Educational      | Plot                                    |
| Minecraft              | Mainstream/popular | Not inherent, game mechanic added       |
| Second Life            | Mainstream/popular/MMO | Not inherent, plot and game mechanic added |
| Civilization V         | Mainstream/popular | Not inherent, archaeological plot added |
| Elder Scrolls Online    | Mainstream/popular/MMO | Plot/background, game mechanic          |
Mainstream games

Mainstream archaeological video games – such as Indiana Jones, Tomb Raider, Uncharted, Destiny, Mass Effect, World of Warcraft and Elder Scrolls Online – have, for the most part, played upon nineteenth-century stereotypes of imperialistic European adventurers drawn from the Victorian ‘Lost World’ literary genre that involves discovery and exploration of both real and mythic cultures (Hall, 2004). Within such games, only the focus on artefacts is common to both the video game portrayal and the discipline of archaeology. Narratives of discovery are quite common to scholarly archaeological work, but, as Breger (2008: 56) argues, archaeology in popular video games has narratives which ‘follow a relatively unquestioned logic of appropriation’ rather than careful excavation. Further, there is a tendency in video games to focus on pseudo-archaeological claims, including the hunt for bibli-cal artefacts, alien-constructed monuments, a wide range of ‘lost cities’, and the use of psychics as a viable source of evidence. In general, what is represented in commercial video games is not archaeology, but a continuation of the ‘Lost Worlds’ genre. There are a number of commercial video game franchises that are wildly successful and feature archaeology as part of their narrative. By reviewing the popular constructions of archaeology in games with such mass appeal, we can better determine the misconceptions and portrayals that are being produced.

Indiana Jones

Indiana Jones is the most widely recognized popular (albeit fictional) archaeologist. Released in 1982, the video game adaptation of Raiders of the Lost Ark was created for Atari 2600 (Atari, 1982). The game was one of the first of the adventure genre, with players primarily working through puzzles and mazes rather than fighting. Players are required to find various items and tools that will lead them to lost arte-facts, which can be ‘dug up’ – a term we use loosely here because the digging does not represent excavation and is more akin to looting. Like the movie series, the video game perpetuates the idea of archaeology as looting rather than careful excavation, which is further exacerbated by the player’s option to gain entryway into tombs by using grenades. Non-movie-inspired Indiana Jones video games follow typical pseudo-archaeological narratives, such as Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis (LucasArts, 1992), where Jones teams up with an archaeologist-turned-psi-chic to find the lost city through less-than-systematic means. While the entire Indiana Jones franchise plays on the trope of archaeologist as the treasure hunter with good intentions, most have been lauded for their engaging narratives, complex gameplay and high entertainment value. Indiana Jones serves as the exemplar of the public perception of the archaeologist.

Tomb Raider

Second in fame to Indiana Jones is the Tomb Raider game franchise (Core Design, 1996). The protagonist, Lara Croft, has served as the benchmark for female archaeologist-adventurers. The games follow a similar narrative structure to the Raiders franchise with the protagonist seeking to recover lost artefacts, while encountering numerous puzzles, challenges and a variety of dangerous animals and unsavoury humans along the way. Unlike Indiana Jones, who at least works
as a professor and carries what appears to be an archaeological toolkit, Lara Croft is equipped with a wide range of guns and explosives. The *Tomb Raider* franchise tends to focus on more unscrupulous means of obtaining artefacts. While Dr Jones’ goal is to put artefacts in museums and use them for research – an objective backed by his academic credentials – Croft’s only goal is personal collection. Nevertheless, the *Tomb Raider* franchise is at the top of the best-selling franchise lists, and was widely influential for its ground-breaking programming and design in 3D adventure games (McWhertor, 2009). Like her male counterparts, a lack of fidelity to archaeology does not cause a lack of engagement or entertainment.

**Uncharted**

*Uncharted* (Sony, 2007) features the self-proclaimed grave-robber and treasure hunter, Nathan Drake – who similar to Jones and Croft seeks mythical treasure by systematically destroying ancient monuments and ruins. Despite this, the series is often listed among top ‘archaeology’ video games and is highly ranked in general with the second instalment of *Uncharted* receiving ‘Overall Game of the Year’ for Playstation 3 from IGN – an entertainment website – in 2009 (IGN, 2009). Throughout his adventures, Drake searches for artefacts among ruined temples, destroying large areas of the sites in the process.

All three of these franchises have similar narratives based on the search for lost treasure using historic documents, artefacts, temple inscriptions and other sources of evidence employed by archaeologists. However, their methods usually result in the destruction of many monuments and sites in the process, and the final achievement is the procurement of a single mythical or religious artefact (for example, Lara Croft’s search for the Golden Mask of Tornarsuk in Tomb Raider III, or Indiana Jones’ collection of golden idols in Lego Indiana Jones), which given their designation as ‘first-person shooters’ is not surprising. Archaeology acts as the guiding purpose behind the narrative and provides the clues to move the characters forward. However, despite the fact that these three are often lauded as the top archaeology video games, only Indiana Jones ever truly admits to being an archaeologist in an academic sense.

**World of Warcraft**

While the aforementioned video games use archaeology as a narrative background, *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004), *Destiny* (Bungie, 2014) and *Elder Scrolls Online* (Zenimax, 2015) use ‘archaeology’ as a game mechanic as well as a method of learning more about the gaming environment. *World of Warcraft* is a massive multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG), which allows players to choose from a number of fantasy races and professions to populate in the mythical realm of Azeroth. Archaeology was introduced into the game as a secondary profession in the expansion *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2010). Players use the archaeology profession to piece together artefacts, in the form of pets, toys, mounts and rare armours, which can either be used or sold. Players are given the locations of four dig sites per continent, which they can excavate. The skill survey allows them to determine how close they are to the artefacts. Players have three attempts using the Survey skill to find the item; once they
have done so they can ‘loot’ it. Once a fragment is found a research project is started, allowing players to collect all the pieces to construct artefacts. In addition to usable items, players also learn about the ancient races of Azeroth and historical facts about the area and artefacts. The profession is not considered to be one of high value, but rather serves as a side-game for downtime between quests and as a way to immerse oneself into the virtual world.

*Destiny* is an adventure and role-playing game (RPG) where players must navigate a post-apocalyptic future where alien races threaten the end of humanity. In this game, players can increase their abilities as ‘crypto-archaeologists’, a skill which allows them to ‘decode the past and our enemies, seeking new discoveries in matter engrams and artefacts returned by Guardians’ (*Bungie, 2014*). These artefacts or engrams are found throughout the world, bought and sold between players and non-player entities, and can be procured from fallen enemies. Players then take what they find to the cryptarch, Master Rahool, in the Tower (the last city on Earth). Here, ‘archaeology’ is a term used loosely to describe a process by which artefacts or engrams are decoded in order to gain new weapons and items in the game. The cryptarch never says more than the equivalent of ‘wow’. He will even buy things from players. Unlike *World of Warcraft*, players do not learn anything new about the fictional past of this world through the decoding of recovered material culture. Of mainstream video games, *World of Warcraft* and *Destiny* are the only ones to use archaeology as part of its game mechanics rather than a source of inspiration for the narrative, but only in the former is the discipline used more accurately whereby players can gain knowledge about past cultures through the items.

*Elder Scrolls Online* (ESO) is also an MMO adventure and RPG set in the fantasy world of Tamriel. Unlike its five predecessors, ESO predates them by 1000 years in order to reverse engineer the world’s lore so solidly established in the earlier games. Players routinely embark upon quests to rescue lost archaeology teams, to recover important artefacts for professional archaeologists, and to separate myth from fact. Sometimes players are encouraged to loot, and at other times are asked to prevent looters, often combining ripped-from-the-headlines coverage of ISIS/ISIL cultural heritage atrocities with fantasy gameplay pitting good against evil by way of Cultural Resource Management (CRM). ESO separates itself from the lore and archaeology featured in both *World of Warcraft* and *Destiny* by creating morally complex situations where the player must choose how to act, often with differing outcomes depending on the choices made.

**Educational games**

While mainstream games with archaeological themes have been immensely popular in a commercial sense, educational or ‘serious’ games featuring archaeology are not as sophisticated or popular. Although a number of newer games being produced have found a balance between education and entertainment, most tend to fall to one side or the other. Serious games in archaeology have a number of varying objectives, which range from teaching historical content from an archaeological perspective, or allowing the player to learn through the process of discovery, excavation and interpretation. Unlike commercial games where archaeology serves primarily as a
narrative device, the more successful educational games have sought to use archaeology to inform both narrative and the game mechanics.

Created by the BBC, *Hunt the Ancestor* casts the player in the role of a CRM archaeologist as they manage an actual dig site: ‘Time and money are running out and the developer’s diggers are wanting to move onto the site of a dig’ (BBC, 2014a). The player makes all of the archaeological and budgetary decisions on where and how to dig a barrow in England. The game includes archival research, aerial photography, geophysics and more. Lest some think that this sounds less exciting than playing as an adventuring archaeologist, one could draw parallels between games such as those in the FIFA series (EA Sports, 2015), in which gamers play soccer matches, and *Football Manager* (Sega, 2015), which focuses on more administrative concerns such as trading players and managing the salary cap.

One of the most common ways of educating students is the ‘content-and-quiz’ format, where they are given a series of lessons to learn and then asked to recall them in the form of an exam. The game *Gates of Horus* (Public VR, 2008) uses this same method of education, but places fairly impressive graphics over it. PublicVR, a non-profit organization that develops games for educational purposes, designed the game. In *Gates of Horus*, players are able to explore the rooms of an Egyptian temple. In order to progress to the next room they must answer a number of questions posed by a temple priest. While the graphics and interactions with the temple itself are impressive, it would be more effective as a simulation; the actual quiz game portion of the programme is not engaging. Further, while claiming to be an archaeological game, there is a lack of information on the archaeological process.

While the majority of archaeological educational games do not fully use archaeology as an appropriate game mechanic or provide an engaging experience for the player there are a few successes, most notably *Dig It Up: Romans* (BBC, 2014b). This game was designed by the BBC as part of an educational website on the Romans in the United Kingdom. The site was built for primary school students and teachers, and contains information about the history of the Romans as well as archaeological data. Not only does the game allow players to see the different stages of archaeological excavation, but it is all done in a CRM context with the threat of construction setting time limits. Limited by time and money, players make choices on which sections of units they can excavate, using geophysical survey and other methods to aid in the decision-making process. After they excavate a certain number of artefacts they are able to see recreations. The threat of construction, limited resources and random chance creates a challenge for players that is both educational about the practice of archaeology and fun.

Similarly, Dig It! Games, founded in 2005 by archaeologist Suzi Wilczynski, created eight titles for PC and iOS that combine archaeology with education, and include themes such as ‘beat the looters’, repatriation, learning about the Maya, and learning about a Roman village. These are largely point-and-click, first-person puzzle games. A great example of their use of archaeology is *Roman Town* (Dig It! Games, 2010), which invites players to excavate a Roman village while learning about archaeological tools and techniques as well as history and insight into daily life outside of Rome. It provides an educational but also engaging story, allowing players to explore archaeological sites and interpret evidence from it as
archaeologists do. The 2015 edition of the game allows players to learn about Pompeii as well as playing authentic Roman mini-games.

Archaeology is a discipline that is fairly well suited to video games, given the narratives of exploration and discovery, as well as the physical actions of the excavation itself. However, the educational concepts are often laid over game mechanics, causing them to lose their immersive and engaging aspects. In games like Gates of Horus, the game portions are not innovative and follow standard educational methods. In DIG! The Maya Project (DMA, 2013), the game is completely separate from the lessons and the process of archaeology is reduced to picking items off the ground. However, games like Dig it Up: Romans show that archaeology can be the primary focus of an educational game that is both effective for learning and engaging.

**Importance of addressing video games**

Despite the availability of educational games, archaeology seems to be inescapably appealing to mainstream games and players regardless of the many inaccuracies in the portrayal of the discipline. The question is whether there is any educational or disciplinary value in the use of archaeology in mainstream games, or whether it is actually detrimental to the discipline: is it possible that games like Indiana Jones or Uncharted may be a motivation for looting or incorrect interpretations of other cultures, or inspire violence and destruction of the past? We propose that instead of inspiring violence and looting, these games can often stimulate a genuine interest in the past and the use of archaeological methods to interpret it. To deny the power of Croft and Jones in encouraging young archaeologists would be futile – these games allow players the opportunity to experience archaeology without the educational commitment, and may inspire real-world support or pursuit of the discipline. Here, we argue that archaeologists should not uniformly criticize video games, but rather use them as a way to address misconceptions, inspire future archaeologists, and leverage them to improve teaching and research.

**Open discussion and addressing misconceptions**

Archaeological video games provide an opening to talk to the public more seriously about the discipline and compare it against its fictional counterparts. Blogs such as Play the Past (www.playthepast.org) feature posts about history, archaeology and video games, offering insights from dozens of authors who write in an accessible way, connecting real-world history and archaeology to game environments. Recent posts include ‘History as it can be Played: a New Public History?’ (Taylor, 2015), ‘Apotheon: The Action Hero at the Heart of Greek Myth’ (Roy, 2015), and ‘Hullcraft: Using Minecraft and Archives for Learning about the Past’ (Rice, 2015). Meyers Emery used popular archaeological games to discuss how we could use them to create better educational games for students (Meyers, 2011a; 2011b). The Archaeogaming blog features posts by Reinhard and guest authors on the intersection of archaeology and video games written for general audiences. The blog includes posts on the 2014 excavation of the ‘Atari Burial Ground’ as well as video game archiving and preservation, archaeological methods, and an inventory of video games featuring archaeology and archaeologists (Reinhard, 2014a).
Going beyond the blogosphere, archaeology and video games are now being discussed in academic conferences such as the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) by Reinhard and Shawn Graham in 2015, and by Meghan Dennis at the European Archaeological Association, also in 2015. Reinhard has also given public lectures on archaeogaming, most recently at the Henry Ford Museum in Detroit as part of Maker Faire on 25 July 2015. This kind of outreach by scholar-gamers goes a long way to creating a discussion within the discipline and beyond about archaeology and history in popular media.

When it comes to the portrayal of archaeology in video games, archaeologists have one of two choices: they can either be outraged (or perhaps mildly amused), or they can leverage the game for a discussion with players and the public as well as with video game developers. Important questions to ask are as follows.

1. How can archaeology be represented authentically in a game without taking away from the game’s entertainment value?
2. How can characters and non-player characters be designed to more accurately reflect archaeological clothing and equipment, getting away from fedoras and bullwhips?
3. How can games be designed to get away from looting and towards understanding context and history?

Archaeologists need to lobby game developers to talk about the use and misuse in games featuring the discipline, and use their knowledge to provide the public with proper archaeological information. This is not a simple or easy proposition, as historically developers have had to look for a balance between story and accuracy (Copplestone, 2015).

**Source of inspiration**

For some players, games such as *Tomb Raider* have actually led to serious study of archaeology. Meyers Emery counts herself among those who were inspired by Lara Croft’s adventures as a child to travel and read more about archaeological work (Meyers, 2011c). Even though the characters played are over the top with the use of weapons and the predisposition to loot, the history, art, architecture and stories presented by these games offered a gateway into understanding the past, or at least a popularized version of it. Megan Kennedy, a graduate student at the University of Utah, said that ‘*Assassin’s Creed* for me, particularly *Brotherhood*, reignited a long love, gave me the guts to get to school’ (pers. comm., 2015). Popular archaeology paired with video games and video game culture also has the potential to generate serious interest. The aim of Kelly McGuire’s (2015) blog *The Archaeology of Tomb Raider* is to use this particular video game series ‘... as a platform for further study and inspire others to learn more about world history and archaeological sites, and establish the importance of protecting cultural heritage for future generations to study and enjoy’.

**Leveraging games for good**

Archaeologists can either complain about the state of archaeology and portrayal of the profession, or they can use the gaming platform as a tool to foster a discussion between themselves, game developers and the public. With video games as arguably
the most popular form of contemporary entertainment, one can begin the conversation with children and adults alike in what they play, and how they perceive archaeologists because of that medium. It may also be possible to convince game developers that games featuring responsible archaeology can be fun, too. Newer games such as *Elder Scrolls Online* allow players to loot artefacts or to repatriate them (Reinhard, 2014b). *Destiny* features Crucible matches where players must fight off hordes of looters. As archaeologists, we should be reaching out to games like *Call of Duty* (Activision, 2015), where players could receive achievement points awarded when historically significant buildings are saved or museums are protected – an important message given the rise in looting and destruction of archaeological sites during warfare.

Instructors can also begin to use video games to inject history and archaeology into the classroom as teaching tools and for class projects. *Minecraft* (Microsoft, 2015), when played in creative mode, and *Second Life* (Linden Research Inc., 2015) have been successfully used to create archaeological excavations as well as historic buildings or entire cities. One can step back even farther to use game-creation engines such as *Unity* to build fully realized worlds while injecting them with story and gameplay (Archaeology Southwest, 2014). Shawn Graham at Carlton University has been successfully using video games to explore representations of history and archaeology in digital media through his academic courses (2013). Stephen Reid partnered with Dig It! 2015 to create an archaeological site in *Minecraft* that children were allowed to excavate using real archaeological techniques (Reid, 2015). *Red Land Black Land*, a project led by Ethan Watrall, is a modification of the game Civilization V that allows students to play through Ancient Egyptian history using archaeological and historical evidence (Watrall, 2014). Perhaps the next generation of students will be inspired to create games more faithful to what archaeologist do while continuing to add mystery, adventure and romance. Just as in the real world, these are not exclusive.

**Digital engagement**

While not a game per se, *Second Life*, an online virtual world, offers players a chance to explore a massive virtual space that enabled registered, paying users to build whatever they wished on their own plots. Okapi Island was created in *Second Life* as a complete reconstruction of the archaeological site of Çatalhöyük, where students can give virtual tours of the ongoing real-life excavations and finds (Ammons, 2009). Some institutions such as Arkansas State University used their public spaces to create 3D reconstructions of real-world monuments, such as the Tholos at Delphi (Ashes2Art, 2015) and the boyhood home of Johnny Cash (Gill, 2014). SPQR Roma was a public space within *Second Life* where residents could build reconstructions of first- and second-century AD buildings including a neighbourhood, an arena, and even the ancient port of Ostia (Reinhard, 2015). Harrison (2009) proposes that ‘an examination of the role of heritage in virtual settlements has the potential to shed light on the role of heritage in both “real” and “imagined” communities more generally’. He argues that studies of cyber-archaeology may provide insights into broader discussions of heritage and the challenges faced today.
Academic writing and serious research into archaeology and video games has only recently begun within the past ten years. The University of York’s Department of Archaeology leads this research with scholars such as Colleen Morgan and Tara Copplestone applying a critical eye towards everything from digital reconstruction in gaming environments to actually conducting archaeological fieldwork within gaming spaces, drawing a line between the archaeology of media and media archaeology as espoused by researchers such as Jussi Parikka (2012), who has called for closer collaboration between media archaeologists and ‘dirt’ archaeologists (Morgan & Copplestone, pers. comm., 2014).

Conclusion
While not all subjects and topics are amenable to video game creation, archaeology is particularly well suited to it given its recurring themes of discovery and puzzle-solving, as well as the ability to recreate the lost worlds of the past through this digital medium. Archaeology is also appropriate to game-creation because its content revolves around much that is unknown and frequently exotic, motifs that are highly popular in mainstream games. The current state of video games in archaeology ranges from commercial games that portray it as synonymous with looting, and serious games that place unsophisticated or inappropriate game mechanics over blatant educational content. Increasingly, archaeologists are using video games to open important discussions about representations of the past, misconceptions of the discipline, and leveraging these games to teach. Video games with archaeological themes are not detrimental to the discipline, but rather can be leveraged to increase public engagement and interest. We cannot afford to ignore this medium; rather, we should be using video games as a way to correct misconceptions, open conversations with the public, and even create more accurate representations of archaeological work.

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