Consuming History

Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture

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tunnels or caves ... or reading the scrawlings on a wall in a cell of a derelict mental asylum.[27]

Such explorers often reject contemporary life, enjoying the isolation of the empty space. This 'extreme history' is importantly self-defining and eschews any kind of authority and ordering system; it is an attempt at reclaiming the space of history and engaging with the environment of the past first-hand:

> I suppose my motive to do this is simply that I like to explore new places and to explore the past. Not just to look in it from behind the dull glass of a museum, but to experience these places first-hand and to try to understand their stories.[28]

These adventurers are the first wave of tourists exploring contemporary British industrial/post-industrial heritage. The explorers are not particularly concerned with the age or significance of the building (although asylums, former hospitals, factories and tunnels are popular). Their motivation is to find 'anything derelict and abandoned or disused. Urban Exploration is about visiting and experiencing these often forgotten places and photographing them before they disappear forever.'[29] The attraction of abandoned building exploration is the unknown and the never seen, the idea of being a pioneer, but also, as Nicholas Royle says, 'I'm less interested in what might have taken place in a disused building, than I am in what I can imagine taking place in it in my alternative version of reality. The one in my head.'[30] It is a violent enfranchisement, a taking back of 'official' history and a grasping of the past. Urban exploration is an opening up of a space of possibility in the very ruins of the past. It is a way of eschewing heritage – of avoiding history as something packaged and commodified, and re-asserting a communal ownership of sorts over it.

9   History games

The previous chapter's discussion of the activity of re-enactment suggests that a large number of diverse groups are keen to embody 'history' for a variety of purposes. Analysis of history-as-experience illustrates that it is a set of narratives divorced from an institutionalised framework, used in different and dissident ways by a variety of social bodies. This chapter develops the motif of re-enactment with a consideration of another model of historical 'experience' – that enacted in contemporary computer games.[1] Initially, such games seem to offer an empowerment similar to that of reality history but this seems ambivalent at best and illusory at worst. The chapter then moves to look at the 'experience' of history in a range of other games, and considers the ludic historiographic possibilities that the past creates. These games are sometimes occasional leisure pursuits – undertaken irregularly – although for others they are hobbies and immensely important. They are played by a demographic which is global, across all age groups, and relatively often male. They represent, then, a complex set of cultural-historio phenomena which often entail a certain embodiment – either first-person, or deploying an avatar – and encourage a sense of experiencing history. The manifestation of history in such a range of gaming models and genres suggest a complexity of interaction on the part of the user. Millions of gamers worldwide engage with the past through their immersion in these virtual and ludic worlds, attaining some kind of – albeit skewed – historical awareness through an active engagement with a representation of the past.

First person shoot 'em up history

First person shooters (FPS), or point-of-view (POV) games, present a particular type of visualised historical experience. Such games have graduated from the first commercial types of the genre, *Battlezone* (Atari, 1980) and *Tail Gunner* (Vectorbeam, 1979) through to early successful franchises such as *GoldenEye* (Rareware, 1997) and *Doom* (id Software, 1993), but the principles are largely the same. Point of view games are rarely peaceful, and generally come under the category of 'shoot 'em ups', in which the only piece of the player's virtual body visible is their weapon. Such games dispense with an explicitly othered avatar body and instead use the screen as the viewpoint. The player is put in the position of performing a

character while simultaneously seduced by point of view to identify bodily and wholly with this character. This can be disorientating in its scope – modern versions of these games enable the player to have both a direction of movement control and a direction of vision. The implications of point of view games can tell us much about historical experientiality.

The games of particular interest here are World War II first person shooters, in particular, EA Games' *Medal of Honor*. This suite of game was relatively unique when it was launched in the late 1990s as it was a successful first person shooter (FPS) which eschewed the fantasy element associated with the games, and instead relied on building an extremely believable background to the game.[2] The organisation and construction of the game invited the player to experience it as narrative. There have been several generations of *Medal of Honor*, ranging from secret resistance missions in France to the war in the Pacific. Based on missions undertaken during the Second World War, *Medal of Honor* puts the player in the position of the combat marine, and invites them to be part of a greater military framework: 'You don't play, you volunteer' goes the advertising hook. *Medal of Honor: Frontline* (EA Games, 2002), a recreation of the D-day landings, emphasises that this is 'your finest hour'. Claims for experience range from 'Storm the beaches of Normandy' to 'Defeat the Nazi War Machine' (a second version invites the player to 'Defeat the Japanese Empire'). As Barry Atkins has commented of *Close Combat* (although a strategy game, not a FPS): 'The grand sweep of historical narrative becomes comprehensible in miniature, and the individual is presented as being able to "make a difference" in circumstances where the outcome was so uncertain and not already decided by sheer weight of numbers.'[3] *Medal of Honor* builds a sense of linearity and historical direction through its landscape and gameplay. Further, the game is interested in selling a heroic individuality within the broader sweep of history, an existential neoliberal view of the soldier as freer than perhaps we might say they are: 'Can one man truly make a difference?' was the tag line for the first instalment, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* (EA Games, 2002), with the assumption, of course, that they could.

The game's visuals rely heavily on the *verité* documentary style of *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers* (Figure 9.1). Similarly, the game deploys tropes from a number of war films, interacting virtually in the perpetuation of certain historical simulacra along the way. For the beach landings the game particularly deploys the 'shock' aspect of the handset – which will rumble and vibrate as the player comes under bombardment – to create an experience of the landings which is disturbingly messy, loud and disorientating. Players are required to crouch, jump, run; ragged breathing is constantly heard, there is constant bombardment and shouted instructions, and players are under fire for most of the game. The game is heavily organised, however, and involves the player achieving targets either military or geographical (by moving through levels and killing enemies) in a strictly ordered fashion. The player is not allowed to skip levels or decide not to fight. This plays heavily on the 'target' version of games – as a series of increasingly difficult tests which are eventually overcome. There is some cumulative progression, and the levels become more difficult.
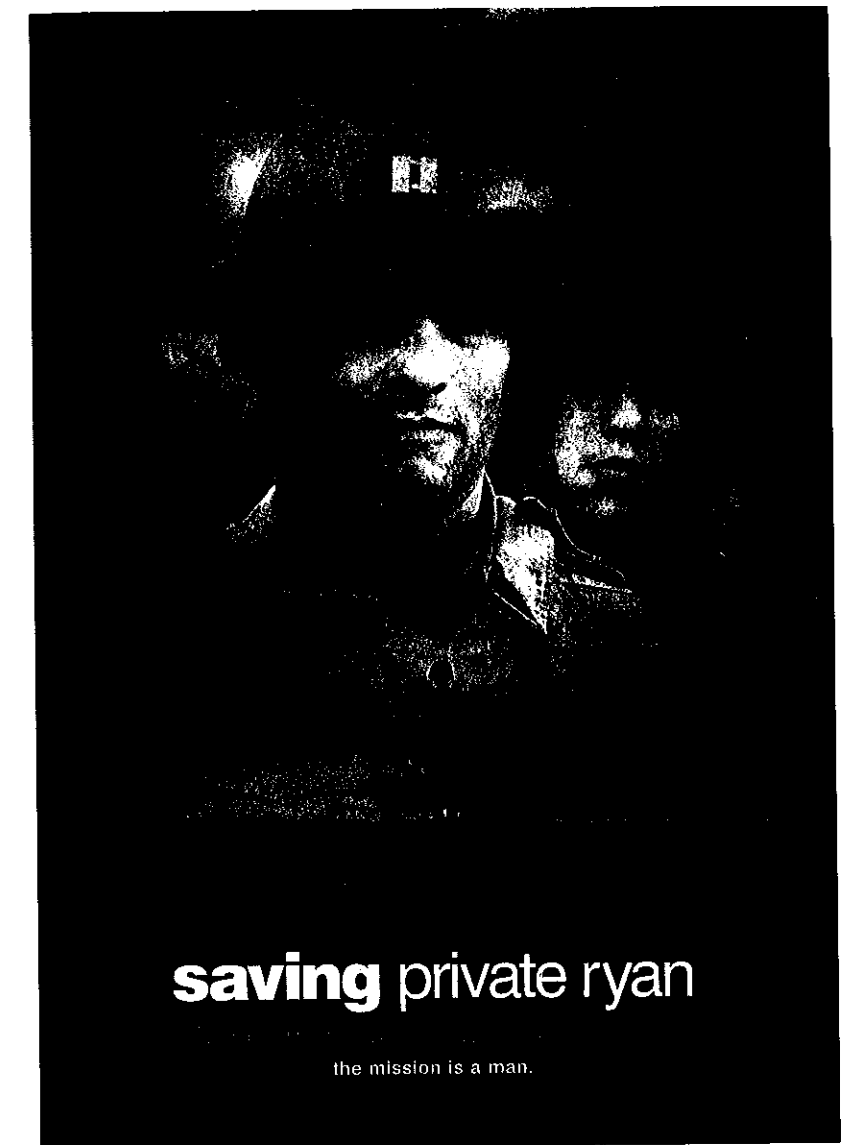
saving private ryan

the mission is a man.

Figure 9.1 Promotional poster for *Saving Private Ryan*, 1998, directed by Steven Spielberg.

The player is required to enact and progress the story or it won't happen; this history won't move onwards without the player satisfying certain criteria, eliminating the correct enemies and staying alive. The player is therefore granted agency of some description within what is not narrative history but simulation – although simulation that mimics narrative history such as film and documentary. The game is not interactive or ergodic, being more a set of levels with increasingly

complicated imaginative landscape.[4] The game is a simulation that invites an experience of interactivity and control, but which manages somehow to create a balanced dynamic between a passive experiential model and an illusion of control. It embodies the conflict within gaming studies between game as narrative and game as simulation – this is, in many ways, both. Key to the experience of the game is the balance between enfranchisement and narrative; the illusion of control is key to playing – the player is at once a powerful figure but at the same time an avatar that can easily be destroyed; at once a small cog in the military machine and at the same time crucially important to the war. The experience of history is at once othered and simultaneously enfranchising – the war takes place around and above the player, but their experience of history is fragmented, ontological and particularised.

Behind the jock rhetoric of *Medal of Honor* is something very sophisticated, the creation of a virtual landscape that becomes increasingly complicated in an updated incarnation of the game, *Rising Sun* (2003). This game's view of history is unreconstructed: players fight relatively faceless Japanese soldiers, and the bombing of Pearl Harbor is called the 'Day of Infamy'. This version emphasises the notion of the individual to the conflict 'you must claw and scratch to turn the tide of the War in the Pacific ... you begin an odyssey through the critical battles of the early parts of the Pacific Campaign'.[5] The game allows the player to unlock video clips, win medals, see news footage and receive letters from home. A dossier tells the player the background story of those they meet (one of whom is their brother), and of themselves. Online play allows the player to engage in increasingly complex situations. They can fight others online in 'deathmatches', too. However, the free levels are not part of the wider game – and again, if the player chooses to play with others they must work as a team to reach the various targets. Unlike, for instance, strategy games in which a player might plausibly play well enough to change the course of history, this kind of (much more popular) 'shoot 'em up' is relatively unsophisticated in its version of events. The player may pursue what seems to be their own mission, to mould or construct their own history – but crucially the element of interaction or recreation is lost. Their point of view is never their own, even if it looks that way. However, the games still encourage a notion of the importance of the individual to the conflict, and a recognition of the importance of the foot soldier.

Call of Duty (Activision, 2003), a FPS that built on the market for *Medal of Honor*, emphasises further this recognition of the common soldier. The game's rhetoric is more inclusive, and less individualistic than *Medal of Honor*. The tag line for the game is 'no one fights alone'. The emphasis is on teamwork and a developing sense of alliance: 'In the war that changed the world, no man won it alone. Through the chaos of battle, ordinary soldiers fought – and died – alongside one another'.[6] The game is more interested in filmic experience than *Medal of Honor*, but treads a fine balance between celebrating the ordinary soldier and making that soldier's version of the war a set of cinematic clichés. The war is consciously turned into film, at once othering history and simultaneously making it recognisable, part of a recognisable pattern or language of cinematic tropes:

Experience the cinematic intensity of WWII's epic battles including D-Day, the Russian Charge at Stalingrad and the Battle for Berlin – through the eyes of citizen soldiers and unsung heroes from an alliance of countries who together helped shape the course of modern history.[7]

The ordinary soldier can make a difference in this game, but their ability to do so is somehow compromised by that 'cinematic intensity' – the game becomes film, becomes a controllable genre. Indeed, the game went well beyond its forbears in linking with Hollywood – the screenwriting talents of Michael Schiffer, writer of *Crimson Tide* and *The Peacemaker*, were brought in 'to further immerse players into the game and capture the cinematic intensity of WWII ... bringing a closer personal identification with the game's characters'.[8] Yet this emotional intensity is blended with claims to authenticity – the second instalment, *United Offensive*, brought in military advisors to help create 'authentic portrayal of squad tactics, formations and battle situations'.[9]

This combination of historical and military 'authenticity' allied to a Hollywood rhetoric of emotional attachment is immediately clear in *Battlefield 1942* (EA Games, 2002). The WWII version is reliant on film, but it is in the *Battlefield Vietnam* (EA Games, 2004) chapter that the game takes things beyond pastiche into downright quotation – the opening sequence of helicopters is played out to the *Ride of the Valkyries*, for instance, echoing the helicopter scene in the film *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979). This game, while strategic, returns to a sense of individual input: 'the outcome of the battle depends on the choices you make'.[10] The player is enfranchised but at the same time put into a recognisable chain of signifiers – performing a role (a similar cultural echo is found in the quoting of Jimi Hendrix in the title of *Vietcong: Purple Haze* (Illusion Softworks, 2004)). The 'freedom' allowed the player is compromised by the generic rules put into place before the game has even started.

Brothers in Arms (Ubisoft, 2005), promises 'unprecedented authenticity' and is based on a true story (not for the gaming community the delicacy of re-enactors in wondering whether replaying actual wartime experience is something to be ethically comfortable with). The attention to detail is lavish: the game includes 'historically accurate and detailed battlefields, events and equipment recreated from Army Signal Corps photos, Aerial Reconnaissance Imagery and eyewitness accounts'.[11] This combination of authenticity and film suggests that the games are actively investing in a notion of 'narrative' and historical actuality, but the blending of 'factual' history and cinematic trope creates an interestingly blurred space of identity. The game sees itself as an upgrade, an evolution – it is a 'tactical shooter' rather than a simple destructive FPS, a new kind of engagement in which strategy and teamwork are as important as marksmanship. The consumption of history is both academic and fictional. The experience of the game is narrative and simulation, part of a fixed set of signifiers and simultaneously part of the sweep of history. The player attains objectives and completes missions, but with a new emotional connection and intensity (*Brothers in Arms* portrays the squad leader as thinking of his men as his 'family', and the title consciously

evokes *Band of Brothers*). The player is engaging in re-enactment, simulation, a game and history all at the same time. The games expect a complexity of understanding and response from their players, and the ability to inhabit multiple identities and experiences when engaging within the gaming platform is taken for granted.

The online community is incredibly important to these games. At any one time around 2,000 players are engaging with *Battlefield 1942* (compare that to *c.*6,000 Sealed Knot re-enactors in the whole of the UK and the size of this community is demonstrated). Gamers arrange themselves into regiments and communities with the same fervour and attention to detail of the re-enactment community. Regiments practise weekly, talk tactics; there is a sense of involvement and ownership. Names include 'New World Order', 'The Honor Squad', 'Doom Soldiers', 'RuffNecks', 'Screaming Eagles'. These organisations are taken extremely seriously, and deploy tropes learned from the games and from the rhetoric of war films, again folding back into postmodern historical experience. These communities also sustain the scholarly and mainstream academic element of the games – the *Brothers in Arms* website includes a 'historical forum' with links to museums, new books, maps, and information about weapons. Online skirmishing and fighting is itself evolving, with the user no longer tied to being in one place – PSP consoles and mobile phone game technology allied with wireless networks mean that players can carry on their missions and their involvement increasingly on the move. This mobility again changes the dynamic of engagement with the game. Networking through mobile historicised interfaces means that the user is no longer static and overlays a new level of embodiment to their engagement with the game. Another innovation is the HMD (Head Mounted Display) which makes the game a much more immersive bodily (or gives the illusion of bodily) experience.

History in these games has become a masculine backdrop to a leisure activity (there are no female characters and the demographic of players is resolutely male). The games are in and of themselves, relating to little else. The skills the player learns are not transferable; they cannot even use them in other games, often. There is nothing to be learned from this kind of history, no information to be gleaned; yet there is still an ontological kick to be got out of it, an involvement in historical discourse. The games are keen to stress the legitimacy of their view of the past, emphasising the 'authenticity' of their weaponry and uniform while suggesting that the player uses the games to 'experience the powerful realities of war'. These games are not that far away from re-enactment in their regimented enfranchisement of the individual within their historical nexus.

Games can also provide a space for contested historical narratives to flourish. American Vietnam games are in many ways enacting this historical amnesia, effacing the complexities of the situation in order to present a heroic sweeping narrative teleology. Other American games, for instance, mimic the actions of Special Forces in Iraq (*Conflict: Desert Storm* I (SCi Games, 2002) and II (SCi Games, 2003), although they are not FPS).[12] *Desert Storm II* casts the player 'Against the Might of a Tyrant' in combat to deal with some 'Unfinished

business' from the 1991 war.[13] These games both shore up a sense of national identity (freedom fighting) and immediate resolution, while engaging in an Orientalist creation of the Middle East as an exotic, barbaric place. There are Hizbullah FPS games online, and Islamic Jihad games allowing the player to act as a Palestinian freedom fighter.[14]

In FPS games, the projected self is virtual, an unseen avatar allowing the player to engage with and in some ways understand history. Indeed, the experience is as 'realistic' as possible. The player is invited to be part of history, a wittingly small part of a teleological move towards the present. Taking their lead, in some way, from the edutainment first-person history experience as presented in re-enactment and living history, history in gaming presents at once a complexity of historical experience and a tightly organised, inflexible model of history. This type of experience suggests an investment in dynamic models of history, an economy of historical desire drawn inexorably toward the tension between 'experience' and 'authenticity'. 'Play' and variously controlled models of interaction frame contemporary consumption of history-as-experience as cultural product and economic experience.

Role playing and history as identity

This is further illustrated, but complicated, by online role-playing games, in which an othered virtual historical avatar becomes the embodied projection of the user. The blurring of the generic and factual boundaries, hastened by the integration of media systems and modes of representation, is demonstrably – and extremely suggestively – the case in historical online role-playing games. Massive multiplayer online games (MMOGs) and massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) combine game play with virtual and social software in unique and massively popular fashion.[15] Players design an avatar to enter the virtual 3D online world and to engage with the avatars of other players.[16] They can rent space, travel around, and undertake complex tasks as well as building and designing objects and products. The concept is a combination of gaming, role-playing and Virtual Reality simulation. Around 10,000 people are 'in' *Second Life* (Linden, 2003) at one time, and around 9 million users are registered. The scenarios are imagined and created in the main by the users, with certain framing principles (and increasingly 'real world' law is infringing); MMORPGs are more rule-based and akin to traditional 'games' insofar as they are quest- or task-based, less interested in mimicking the real world than in creating an imaginative forum for interactive play. Most MMOGs have their own internal economies which in turn have a manifestation in the 'real world'.[17] Their uses range from education through festivals to the US army designing a game to train soldiers in urban warfare. As Sherry Turkle argues, they also provide 'a new environment for the construction and reconstruction of self'.[18]

Popular MMOGs are generally based in the contemporary world (*Second Life*) where MMORPGs tend towards a quasi-historical romance fantasy combat scenarios (*World of Warcraft* (Blizzard, 2004) or *Age of Conan* (FunCom, 2008)).

Increasingly games are based on films (such as *Lord of the Rings* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*).[19] There are also hybrid MMOG-FPS crossovers, such as *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* (Activision, 2004). Pseudo-medieval games such as *Regnum Online* (NGD, 2007), *Rakion* (Softnyx, 2005) and *RuneScape* (Jagex 2001), in which players capture castles and are costumed in medieval style, are popular; *RuneScape* has 9 million registered users. There is furthermore a subgenre of games that incorporate Celtic, Norse, Greek, Korean or Chinese mythologies. This suggests that the vagueness of the audience's historical knowledge – and the attraction of various general historical archetypes rather than specific location and events – impact on and shape this game-playing community. Players have hacked games like *World of Warcraft* and used their graphics packages to recreate sequences from animated historical films; such splicings are then served on video sites such as YouTube, and these entities are pastiche texts implying a kind of tribute, imitation and willingness to replay cultural product in virtual contexts.

However, there is a strand of authentically historical MMORPGs and these are increasing in number as designers attempt to differentiate themselves from the host of games and experiment with possible outlines. Historical MMORPGs allow participants to act in history but the more sophisticated elements of MMORPGs – the interaction of human avatars with each other and their building and developing the world – mean that the games (and therefore their historical situation and development) will transform as their members change. These historical games are popular – *Roma Victor* (RedBedlam, 2006) has 5000 members, for instance. The developers 'invested years of painstaking research into bringing unprecedented levels of detail to the historical authenticity of this world', and again, like FPSs, the authenticity of the experience is key.[20] They develop economies in the case of *Silk Road* (Joymax, 2005), a trading game based in China, or pioneer in *Frontier 1859* (Cosmic, in development), or explore *Uncharted Waters Online* (KOEI 2004). *Voyage Century* encourages the player to take on a profession (such as a trader or merchant), as does *Roma Victor*, in which the avatar can craft nearly anything that is replicated in the real (historical) world as well as farm, fish, cook, smelt and brew. While most of these games are task- or quest-based, they encourage in the player a sense of economic identity and as a consequence a kind of skill-based autonomy (and potential development). MMORPGs are international (often made and served by Chinese, American or Korean companies yet played throughout the world), and illustrate a global gaming interface within an economic nexus.

Being part of history is necessary to accrue 'experience' or 'skills' which lead to points and rankings. The games – similarly to the FPSs that have online play – encourage community, solidarity and teamwork as well as a type of virtual interaction within their historical scenarios.[21] Replayability is not necessarily an issue as these games are continuous – players may die during combat, for instance, but all they lose is experience and possibly financial worth; the game itself continues (so the time-line is not affected). These games are also suggestive in terms of presenting history as a set of 'roles' that might be learnt and perfected. Identities can be effaced, put on and impersonated throughout the experience.[22]

The player both enacts their own role and – as part of the wider game – re-enacts an historical period. The chosen avatar projects the player into the game scenario while simultaneously effacing the actual self. The interaction with the game scenario is complex – the player is empathically and materially involved in the environment, playing and learning skills that have a value within the game individually and generally, while they are simultaneously performing historicity.

Research suggests that increasingly women are playing MMORPGs, and clearly the demographic of games is dynamic and evolving.[23] Taylor illustrates the 'multiple contexts' experienced in such games and argues that this complexity is key to the gaming experience and attraction; gamers in MMORPGs undertake a variety of tasks, engage with multiple scenarios and interact 'socially' with a wide selection of other players. These games allow ludic self-presentation, and as a way of physically engaging with and understanding the past they suggest a flexibility of approach and an acknowledgement of the gap between then and now – the avatar is the liminal figure who allows the player to connect with the world of the game, the consciousness which is not centrally self that leads the gamer through the other world of the past.

Civilization and disc contents: strategy games[24]

More cerebral and less embodied in their presentation of history-as-experience, but no less interesting in terms of their postmodern complexity and interrogative historiography, are strategy games. Sid Meier's successful *Civilization* (MicroProse, 1991–) suite of games is the most successful of what are known as reality strategy games. They use real historical, geographical or factual backgrounds to structure the game. The most venerable of these games is *Risk*, originally digitised in 1988 and a version of the 1957 board game. The aim of this game is straightforward conquest, whereas the turn-based *Civilization* and real-time games such as *Age of Empires* (Ensemble, 1997–) emphasise expansion through trade, scholarship and technological innovation.[25] There are also mafia games, arms-dealer games and railroad tycoon computer games, demonstrating the broad range of the long-term strategy model. Strategy games emphasise a teleology of development whereby the player wins or loses depending on the outcome of various decisions relating to technology, economy and military strength (this teleology is reflected in the structures of development, where new advances are dependent on already having invented or discovered something else in a strictly structured order).[26] These games 'visually and aurally immerse players in history' and as a consequence are more profound in their impact upon gamers' sense of the past than previous generations of historically based games; and, as Kevin Schut argues, the narrative of the gamescape tends to be patriarchal and systematic, presenting history 'as a matter of aggressive power'.[27]

Civilization enables the player to build 'wonders' of the world to supplement financial power and make society happier and more advanced. Culture is important, as is nationalism – and both can be augmented by diverting money and resources to them.[28] *Civilization* is a straightforward game that presents

history as a series of progresses – there is nothing random other than the gameplay of your opponents (AI or human), and the average player can move towards success (i.e. 'civilisation') relatively easily. Realtime games are less predictable although similarly present a model of history which is predicated upon development, progress and the building of imperial dominion. Such games present (particularly pre-modern) history as the preserve of a set of contending empires. *Age of Empires* allows the player to progress their tribe through the Stone, Tool, Bronze and Iron Age. The past in these games is a framework, a system, that has various contingencies but very clear boundaries and edges: a 'crude caricature of the historical process', in Niall Ferguson's critical words.[29]

The gamer in these scenarios is ruler and has an overview of the historical process, navigating towards a successful outcome predicated upon economic and military decision-making in the main. Ted Friedman has argued that the player of such games does not associate themselves with an individual but sees the entire gaming field, and that the pleasure and purpose of the game is to think like a computer.[30] Certainly the simultaneity of engagement – a player sees the entire game and holds numerous roles some of which are specific (ruler/god), some metonymic (the player *is* whichever tribe or nation they decide to play) – argues a complexity of interaction and an interface with multiple roles. The combination of binary encoded ways of thinking (acting like a computer, or Friedman's 'Cyborg Consciousness') and historical framework suggests a virtual history that changes the way that users think about the past and engage with that past, encouraging them to see history as a set of tasks, problems, issues to resolve through the correct decision-making. Furthermore, the cyborgness associated with this game play illustrates that simulations are different from, for instance, re-enactment due to their overlaying of gameplay with an electronic framework. The experience of gaming is not embodied in the same way and so therefore is directed in other intellectual and cerebral directions.

In these games the process of history is driven by technological development and the skilful deployment of scarce resources. However, while this seems deterministic the scenarios boast such a wealth of randomness that history is replayable nearly endlessly with different outcomes. Replayability is one of the purposes and attractions of these games, and gamers would be expected to play repeatedly. Different decisions have different consequences, and the historical process is seen as a complex, multiple process. The games also emphasise co-operation, particularly in their online manifestations. The historiography of the games is therefore made complex by their very format, as they have an inbuilt reconfiguration with infinite outcomes. The games suggest the chaos of history while inviting the player to inscribe order onto a world envisaged in a 3D map (in itself ideologically problematic). They also ask the gamer to conceptualise historical development as something which is predicated upon the possible outcomes of various decisions – the player has to think of the consequences of what they are doing – and that there are various paths not taken; they have therefore been theorised as counterfactual, or at least presenting the possibility of different historical timelines (within the overarching move towards progress). Niall Ferguson

argues that wargames are necessary for the historian precisely because of their counterfactual element.

He also praises them because they have the wider social effect of educating a 'strategically savvy generation'.[31] This point – that games are educationally and socially useful, particularly in terms of ordering and arranging unstructured information – is taken up by Steven Johnson:

> to non-players, games bear a superficial resemblance to music videos: flashy graphics; the layered mix of image, music, and text; the occasional burst of speed, particularly during the pre-rendered opening sequences. But what you actually *do* in playing a game – the way your mind has to work – is radically different. It's not about tolerating or aestheticizing chaos; it's about finding order and meaning in the world, and making decisions that help create that order.[32]

Games, for Johnson and Ferguson, allow a way of considering multiplicity while also imposing structure and order. They teach discipline and intellectual dexterity, and in the case of historical games a certain historiographical ambivalence.

Age of Empires was specifically developed as an historical one in order to differentiate it from other fantasy-based realtime games, as designer Bruce Shelley argues:

> Players already have some pre-conceived notions of what should be going on and thus have some ideas about how to play. They do not have to learn a pseudo-scientific rationale for what is going on. History gave us a framework upon which we could hang our game. We could pick and choose which interesting parts of history to include or discard.[33]

The idea that the player would have a rough idea of what 'should' happen in history argues a sense that these games allow one to replay and reorder reality. History is a 'framework', a model on which to project the game (and something which is easily plunderable). Authenticity is not an issue in these games particularly:

> Extensive, detailed research is not necessary or even a good idea for most entertainment products. The best reference materials are often found in the children's section because this is the level of historic interest for most of the gaming public. If you build in too much historic detail you run the risk of making the game obtuse. The players should have the fun, not the designers or researchers. We are trying to entertain people, not impress them with our scholarship.[34]

Shelley here effectively claims that most users' understanding of – or, maybe more specifically, 'interest' in – the past is at school level or below. Detail leads to an 'obtuse' experience. Shelley's honesty about the sketchiness of the history used in such games differs greatly from the way that FPSs such as *Medal of Honor*

are presented. The player in those games is much less independent – their decisions may be wrong – than the strategy games, and they are – particularly due to the POV screen use – involved in the historical process the game enacts at a much more basic and visceral level.

The games have been used in secondary education, demonstrating their flexibility and attractiveness.[35] However, this in itself raises problematic questions about the historiography that is being demonstrated (and thence taught) through the game, particularly in the light of Shelley's comments (although other games pride themselves on authenticity). Similarly, the game engine for *Rome: Total War* (Creative Assembly, 2004), a hybrid turn-based strategy game with some real-time elements, was used in BBC's *Time Commanders* (2004–5) and the History Channel's *Decisive Battles* (2004), both of which used the technology to recreate famous ancient battles. *Decisive Battles* simply used the virtual model in tandem with location work to demonstrate what had happened – in itself interesting for the encroaching virtualness of television history and the viewer's need for visual representation (and their presumed familiarity with game *mise-en-scènes* for the presentation of historical scenarios). In *Time Commanders* two teams compete over a combat scenario and experts give their opinions and tell the audience what 'actually' happened and why particular decisions were costly, lucky, or strategically good. The virtual model allows the past to be presented as something malleable, highlighting the cost of particular decisions and demonstrating the contingency of (teleological, imperial, combat-based) history. This use of CGI and game technology in history programming illustrates the creeping virtualness of television documentary on the one hand and the ability to import history into the format of a television game-show on the other, and suggests that the relationship between video game, 'fact', and genre is fast being blurred.

Wargames and scale models

Of course, computerised strategy and role-playing games are merely more sophisticated updates of older modes of staging and personating combat. Static model and tabletop wargaming has a venerable history – stretching at least from H.G. Wells' *Little Wars* in 1913, a set of laws for playing with toy soldiers for boys and 'that more intelligent sort of girl' – and similarly demonstrates an interest in strategy, re-enactment, pattern and organisation, while also seeing an educational value in the pursuit: 'You have only to play at Little Wars three or four times to realise just what a blundering thing Great War must be.'[36] Recreational wargames were widespread in the 1960s and 1970s, driven by the company Avalon Hill, although have largely been superseded by online manifestations. Nonetheless they demonstrate a desire to approach the past – in general, what might be termed Whiggish turning points of history – in an informed and procedural fashion and to render that history subject to a set of clear rules and relatively predictable (although not necessarily resistable) outcomes.

Model-, card- and board-based wargames still flourish and with them multiple ways of envisaging, performing, and mentally conceptualising historical combat.[37]

We the People (Avalon Hill, 1993), a card-driven wargame (CDG), replays the American War of Independence and allows 'American' and 'British' players to 'simulate this first of the world's great revolutions in a fun and historically accurate game'; they can win, lose, or tie the war.[38] Board-based games such as *Diplomacy* or *Battle Cry* generally deploy dice to ensure that chance is a factor in the scenario, adding a random element.[39] Other wargames such as those played with miniature figurines are not tied to the tabletop but introduce multiple terrains and complicated rules (of course, many board-based games also use model figures).

Making scale model soldiers, tanks, airplanes, and boats as part of wargaming scenario building is an analogous hobby. Visual artists Jacob and Dinos Chapman used 5,000 Airfix model soldiers and associated hardware for their diorama works *Hell* (1999–2000) and *Disasters of War* (1993). The latter used fibreglass figures to imitate images from Goya's *Disasters of War* series (1810–20). *Hell* has atrocities committed by masses of figures that are recognisably German soldiers although they have been mutilated and melted into horrible figures. Using what are effectively gaming implements (or, for many, toys) to make such traumatic and unpleasant images – what has been termed 'abject art' – comments on the underlying prevalence of war in contemporary leisure culture.[40] The works suggest further that our understanding of war is at once distanced by such representation – soldiers are mere figurines in contemporary culture where in Goya's Spain they are rendered human and anatomically correct – and made manifest by recourse to historical caricature (the figures are generic, mass-produced and metonymic instead of individual) rather than actual understanding. The images use leisure models (toy soldiers) to present the simulacrum of contemporary violence – something unexperienced, a pastiche seemingly predicated upon an original (Goya) but cut loose from 'reality'. The Chapmans comment on the way that history can unthinkingly pervade society and render concepts like trauma, war and hell as part of a gaming continuum – a mere set of tokens to be won and lost as part of an allegedly ordered process. All of these types of ludic engagement with history – from the embodiment of the FPS to the cerebral teleologies of strategy games – demonstrate a complexity of modern understanding of the past and an imaginative intervention on the part of the player. This in turn might suggest that the historical imaginary is more diverse and complex than hitherto thought, and that audiences are extremely sophisticated in their engagements with historical products.