Games as Representations of History

The past has always been a rich playground for games to explore. From Sid Meier’s’ eponymous *Civilization* (Meier, 1991)series, through Lara Croft boldly Tomb Raiding, (Core Design, 1996) and culminating in *Assassins Creed’s* (Ubisoft, 2009) parkour across the rooftops of many historical landmarks. It is a landscape that is both familiar and new simultaneously. The familiarity from our societal exposure to the monuments of the past, and new because in general, climbing all over a cultural landmark in real-life is considered (understandably) taboo.  
Interaction with historical monuments and artifacts is not only actively encouraged: it is integrated into the goal and reward system inherent to the game. Some of the goal conditions can be complex and highly varied (Zagal, 2020), but almost inevitably, the player sends their character scrambling to the top of an internationally recognised structure to be greeted by the cheerful ping of an achievement.  
*In Philosophy of Sports*, Keating (1964) argued that the:

“…primary purpose of sports is not to win the match, to catch the fish or kill the animal, but to derive pleasure from the attempt to do so and to afford pleasure to one’s fellow participants in the process” (1964, p. 29)

Keating is interested with the purpose of the activity, not the activity itself. He explains *why* a person might engage in an activity irrespective of what the person may have to do.  
This relates directly to games. Why *do* people play games?   
The factors are manifold. Perhaps for enjoyment and pleasure (Yee, 2016) Gamers may also be motivated to play a game with an educational slant, such as the discovery mode found in the Assassins Creed games, in order to learn. The objectives are not limited or restricted by the game, and emergent gameplay can bring unexpected benefits to the engagement of the playerbase. In fact, there is a significant portion of the players who deliberately push against the in-built mechanics of the game and attempt to create an alternative way of playing the game, or, in extreme cases, create a new way of interacting with the game entirely.  
As mentioned above, Ubisoft, the French/Canadian developer of the Assassins Creed games have included a ‘Discovery mode’ into their most recent titles: utilising the research and historical context in order to encourage the player to not only interact with the environment, but to learn from it too.   
The developers are justly proud of the work and veracity that they strive to include in their titles and have been keen to emphasise that fact in their promotional material.  
By doing this, the game becomes transformed from a tool of entertainment into one of education, whilst still doing the trick of keeping the player entertained and engaged. In 2020, the University of Montreal, (Karsenti, 2020) in response to the Quebec government mandate, started teaching historical context to their students using *Assassin’s Creed II* (Ubisoft, 2009) *Assassin’s Creed: Brotherhood* (Ubisoft, 2010), and *Assassin’s Creed: Revelations* (Ubisoft, 2011)  
The summary of the data and feedback from the students found that: “series sparked student interest and allowed them to escape from the boredom of their history textbooks to “experience” history as a dynamic process.” (Karsenti, 2020) and that “…we can confirm that Assassin’s Creed has clear educational potential: students enjoy it and affirm that it is indeed a valuable source of historical knowledge” (Ibid)

# Bibliography

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