

ARCHAEOLOGY *VERSUS* ANTHROPOLOGY

WHAT CAN TRULY BE PRESERVED?

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PRESERVATION OF COMPLEX OBJECTS, CARDIFF

PROF. RICHARD A. **BARTLE**

UNIVERSITY OF **ESSEX**

INTRODUCTION

- THIS TALK CONCERNS WHAT IT MEANS TO **"PRESERVE"** A VIRTUAL WORLD
 - MAINLY **GAME** WORLDS (MMORPGS) BUT ALSO SOCIAL WORLDS (*SECOND LIFE* – REMEMBER THAT?)
- **MMOS** ARE GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE A GENRE OF **COMPUTER GAME**
 - THEY'RE **SOLD** AS COMPUTER GAMES
 - THEY APPEAR IN COMPUTER GAMES **CHARTS**
- SO ... CAN'T WE **PRESERVE** THEM JUST AS WE WOULD ANY **OTHER** COMPUTER GAME?

NOT GAMES

- HERE IS AN INHABITANT OF **LEICESTER:**



BACKING UP

- WHY DO WE **WANT** TO PRESERVE **ANYTHING** FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS?
- STANDARD RESPONSE: SO THEY CAN **LEARN** FROM IT
- LEARN **WHAT**, THOUGH?
 - WHO **WE** WERE?
 - WHO **THEY** ARE?
 - WHY ARE IMPORTANT THINGS **IMPORTANT**?
- PUT **ANOTHER** WAY: HISTORY, LITERATURE AND **ART**

HISTORIANS

- HISTORIANS AIM TO UNDERSTAND **OLD** MEANING FROM **OLD** ARTEFACTS
 - THE PAST MEANS THE **PEOPLE** OF THE PAST
- PRESERVATION IS IMPORTANT TO HISTORIANS BECAUSE IT GIVES THEM A **SOURCE**
- THEY USE IT TO **RECONSTRUCT** THE PAST
- THEY CAN THEN **EXPLAIN** THE PAST IN WAYS **RELEVANT** TO THEIR PRESENT
 - WHICH **ALSO** ACT AS HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS FOR **TOMORROW'S** HISTORIANS

GAMES

- A GAME HISTORIAN PLAYING *GALAXIAN* TODAY CAN ONLY **IMAGINE** WHAT IT MUST HAVE BEEN LIKE PLAYING IT WHEN IT FIRST CAME OUT
 - WELL, IT WAS LIKE *SPACE INVADERS* EXCEPT I COULD GET TO THE **SECOND SCREEN**
- TO **UNDERSTAND** GAMES OF THE PAST YOU NEED TO PUT **ASIDE** YOUR PRESENT-DAY SELF AND TRY TO PLAY AS YOUR **PERIOD** SELF
- THIS CAN HELP YOU GET A SENSE OF WHAT GAMES **MEANT** TO PEOPLE BACK THEN

TEXTS

- TO PRESERVE A **NON-MMO** IS TO TREAT IT MUCH AS A LIBRARY WOULD AN ANCIENT **TEXT**
- YOU **KEEP** THE ORIGINAL IN ITS ORIGINAL FORM WHEREVER **POSSIBLE** BUT REPRODUCE ITS **CONTENT** IN AN **ACCESSIBLE** FORM
- THE **PROBLEMS** ARE MAINLY **PRACTICAL** TO DO WITH H/W AND S/W **SIMULATION**
 - RETAIN ORIGINAL SOFTWARE THAT RUNS ON ORIGINAL, WORKING HARDWARE IF YOU CAN
 - USE **SIMULATORS** TO DEMONSTRATE IT

LITERATURE

- STUDENTS OF **LITERATURE** REVEL IN THE FACT THAT THE SAME TEXT **TODAY** DOESN'T MEAN WHAT IT DID IN THE **PAST**
- **LANGUAGE** AND **SYMBOLS** GRADUALLY **CHANGE** IN MEANING OVER TIME
- BOOKS ARE **SITUATED** IN THEIR HISTORICAL **CONTEXT** BUT ARE OPEN TO INTERPRETATION
- MOST IMPORTANTLY, TODAY'S **READERS** ARE **NOT** THE READERS OF THE PAST
- JANE AUSTEN 2012 IS **NOT** JANE AUSTEN 1816

GAMES

- A **GAMES STUDIES** EXPERT LOOKING AT AN OLD GAME **ISN'T** TRYING TO EXTRACT **OLD** MEANING FROM **OLD** SYMBOLS
- THEY'RE TRYING TO EXTRACT **NEW** SYMBOLS
- THE DESIGNER **CEDED** AUTHORIAL CONTROL WHEN THE GAME WAS **PUBLISHED**
- IT'S **NOW** AN ARTEFACT FOR PEOPLE IN GENERAL TO **INTERPRET** HOW THEY WILL
- IF YOU PLAY A 1985 GAME FOR FUN, DOES IT **MATTER** WHETHER IT'S 1985-PLAYER FUN?

ART

- YOU CAN LOOK AT THE *MONA LISA* AS A **DOCUMENT** OF 16TH CENTURY TUSCANY
- YOU CAN LOOK ON IT AS SOMETHING YOU CONSIDER **BEAUTIFUL** OR **ADMIRABLE**
- YOU CAN **ALSO** LOOK ON IT AS AN EXPRESSION OF **ARTISTIC INTENT**
- IN THIS VIEW, THE ARTIST IS ATTEMPTING TO CONVEY A **MESSAGE** THROUGH THEIR WORK
- BY **EXPERIENCING** THE WORK, AN EXPERT CAN **DIVINE** THE ARTIST'S MEANING

GAMES

- A GAMES EXPERT PLAYING OLD GAMES GAINS **INSIGHT** INTO THE GAMES' CREATORS MINDS
- THEY **SEE** HOW IDEAS **DEVELOP** AND **CHANGE** OVER TIME
- THEY CAN TELL A **MOLYNEUX** GAME FROM A **MEIERS** GAME AS EASILY AS THEY CAN TELL **MOZART** FROM **LADY GAGA**
- IN **GAINING** THIS UNDERSTANDING, THEY ARE BETTER ABLE TO CREATE THEIR **OWN** GAMES

VESUVIUS

- THIS IS MOUNT VESUVIUS ERUPTING IN 1944
 - I COULDN'T FIND PHOTOS FROM 79



MMOS

- ALL THIS WOULD ALL BE **FINE** IF MMOS WERE GAMES, BUT THEY'RE **NOT**
- THEY'RE **PLACES**
- JUST LIKE PLACES, THE PEOPLE WHO **LIVE** THERE ARE **PART OF THE PLACE**
- YOU CAN'T TALK ABOUT **LEICESTER** WITHOUT CONSIDERING THE **INHABITANTS** OF LEICESTER

NOT GAMES

- WHAT MMOS **ARE** IS **BOUND UP** WITH WHO **INHABITS** THEM
- YOU CAN'T **SEPARATE** THE TWO
 - WELL, YOU **CAN**, BUT THEN YOU MISS HALF THE PICTURE
- MMO **PLAYERS** ARE AN INTRINSIC PART OF:
 - THE HISTORICAL **CONTEXT**
 - THE **ARTEFACT** CREATED
 - THE **MEDIUM** THROUGH WHICH ANY AUTHORIAL **MESSAGE** IS BEING DELIVERED

ARCHAEOLOGY

- PRESERVING ONLY THE **SOFTWARE** OF AN MMO IS LIKE PRESERVING ONLY THE **BUILDINGS** OF A CITY
- THAT'S BETTER THAN **NOTHING**, BUT ITS STUDY BASICALLY AMOUNTS TO **ARCHAEOLOGY**
- IT'S PRESERVING ONLY **EMPTY SPACES**
- IF WE'RE PRESERVING FOR A **PURPOSE**, WE NEED TO HELP PEOPLE **USE** WHAT WE PRESERVE
- FOR MMOS, THAT MEANS PRESERVING THE **PLAYERS** AS WELL AS THE **WORLD**

ANTHROPOLOGY

- CRYOGENICALLY PRESERVING RANDOM PLAYERS COMES WITH SOME TIRESOME **MORAL** ISSUES
- IF WE CAN'T PRESERVE **THEM**, THE NEXT BEST THING IS TO PRESERVE **STUDIES** OF THEM
- THERE IS A **DISCIPLINE** FOR STUDYING COMMUNITIES: **ANTHROPOLOGY**
 - AN ETHNOLOGY FILLS THE PRESERVATIONAL **HOLE**
- **UNFORTUNATELY**, YOU CAN ONLY UNDERTAKE AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY **BEFORE** YOUR CITY IS BURIED IN ASH

PROBLEMS

- **EXPENSE** ASIDE, THERE ARE **PRACTICAL** PROBLEMS WITH CREATING ON-GOING STUDIES OF VIRTUAL WORLDS
- THE WORLDS **THEMSELVES** CHANGE
 - WOW 2004 IS NOT WOW 2012
- THE **PLAYERS** CHANGE OVER TIME
- THERE CAN BE CULTURAL **DIFFERENCES** BETWEEN SERVERS
 - **MINOR** BUT STILL PRESENT
- STUDIES LAST **MONTHS**, NOT A **DECADE**

POSSIBILITIES

- DESPITE ALL THAT, WE **COULD** STILL HELP THE PEOPLE FOR WHOM WE'RE PRESERVING MMOS
 - **VIDEOS** OF PEOPLE PLAYING AT VARIOUS POINTS IN THEIR PLAYING CAREER
 - (ACTUAL PLAYERS, NOT ACADEMICS)
 - **INTERVIEWS** WITH THE DESIGNERS AND DEVELOPERS
 - DESIGN **DOCS**
- ARCHIVE WHAT WE **THINK** THE PEOPLE 200 YEARS FROM NOW WILL **NEED** TO KNOW TO MAKE SENSE OF WHAT WE'RE **PRESERVING**

CONCLUSION

- IF SOMETHING IS **WORTH** SAVING, IT'S WORTH SAVING FOR A **REASON**
- WE SHOULD **ANTICIPATE** THAT REASON AND PROVIDE AS MUCH SUPPORTING MATTER AS WE **CAN** TO **AID** RESEARCHERS OF THE FUTURE
- FOR **MMOS**, THIS WOULD IDEALLY INCLUDE AN **ETHNOLOGY**
- FOR **ALL** COMPUTER GAMES, IT MEANS **MORE** THAN JUST THE SOFTWARE AND HARDWARE
- THAT **IS** THE PLACE TO START, THOUGH!