when it is done, the authors will have fun presenting a high-quality article to their colleagues and friends. Lastly, there is yet another dimension to seriousness and fun. Incredibly, there are fun serious tasks, and what they are depends on the individual archaeologist. We know that the authors find it hard to have fun writing grant proposals, but I consider creating a new research project and writing it down to be one of the more fun activities. Summarizing the last two sections, I would urge every archaeologist to give serious tasks (boring, fun, annoying or otherwise) the same care, commitment and attention, and to avoid prioritizing solely to maximize fun, as this is what enables us to have fun in the end and heightens the enjoyment we can get out of it.

Thoughts on moving forward towards a playful archaeology: a commentary

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In their paper, Politopoulos, Mol and Lammes discuss the lack of play, games and fun in archaeology, striking a playful yet serious tone and noting that 'we have mostly neglected to develop an archaeology of play'. In doing so, they define and discuss the role of play as twofold: *archaeology of play*, which focuses on the study of play, games and fun in the past as a discipline, and *archaeology as play*, which seeks the fun of engaging with the past as an inherent action (perhaps a method or even a playscape). The authors attribute the lack of an established archaeology of play primarily to the fact that archaeology is rooted in cultural theories and practices that treat fun and play with scepticism, often viewing them as the opposite of productivity.

I therefore think to myself: We live in a capitalistic world, and at least in the UK, academia is one of the most competitive, yet least rewarding, fields where scholars must constantly prove their ability to funnel money into their departments against a backdrop of funds that fall short of the amount necessary to send students on summertime excavations (which are of course massive playgrounds chock full of archaeological fun in their own right). I wonder: How on earth can one play and get compensated to do the same? It would arguably be an act of resistance to experience the archaeology of play and archaeology as play under these circumstances.

It is indeed – as the paper points out – much easier when we play and have fun for the purpose of public engagement and outreach or to attract more students to the university. This is particularly true since archaeogaming (if tied to digital archaeology or digital humanities – industries currently experiencing a growth in interest and hence funding) is beginning to shine through as a 'catchy' field for undergraduate students (for a review on current discussions in digital archaeology, see Morgan 2022). One can of course argue against this as well; from my own personal experience, undergraduates let out a hearty chuckle whenever I tell them my research is based on archaeogaming. They go on to suggest that the field sounds more like fun and less like actual research (which is quite hurtful and very untrue), as if research should be an excruciating endeavour with little to no room for play-based fun. I am therefore interested in reading more from the

authors about the 'funification' of the curricula and archaeology departments in this *Monopoly*-driven world.

One core argument of the paper is that 'conducting research on the playful past requires play and an openness to fun', with the authors arguing that the field of archaeogaming is representative of the possibilities and strategies for conducting research 'through and as play'. This also raises the question as to who exactly enjoys the opportunity to create and play these games, a point I have considered in my Ph.D. research on the impact of different (analogue and digital) media for communicating archaeological research to the wider public. Is it only the archaeologists? As the authors point out, 'we miss out on potential interdisciplinary collaborations', a notably valid point. It has become apparent that scholars in disciplines other than archaeology and those scattered across the globe intensively study games of their own heritage (and have fun while doing so) but rarely know each other, let alone collaborate in interdisciplinary settings for various projects.

Last year, one of the authors (Dr Politopoulos) along with Dr Colleen Morgan from the Department of Archaeology at the University of York, Saad Maqbool (a Ph.D. student from the Theatre, Film, Television and Interactive Media Department at the University of York), and myself (a Ph.D. student in digital archaeology from the University of York) organized the 2022 Heritage Game Jam with the theme 'Decolonising Heritage Games'. For the purposes of this endeavour, we invited speakers from various disciplines who typically do not assemble in the name of games and fun. These included Professor Lissa Holloway-Attaway (an associate professor in the Division of Game Development at the University of Skövde in Sweden), the European Society of Black and Allied Archaeologists (ESBAA; a collective of anti-racist archaeologists led by women of colour fighting for equality and the decolonization of the field; Brunache et al. 2021), stakeholders from Leiden University's Past-at-Play Lab (including paper authors Dr Politopoulos and Dr Angus Mol) and many more participants we brought together from three different countries, multiple universities, all levels of study and multiple disciplines, practitioners and scholars, for one unified purpose: to create and play interactive heritage games. The Jam was well-received by the students, local heritage practitioners and international scholars who attended, making it clear that interdisciplinarity and broad collaborations are indeed currently missing from study through play. During the Jam the participants had a great time while creating their games and interactive stories regardless of career stages or disciplines, which also strengthens the argument that events where people come together to play and have fun are important in creating communities, promoting interdisciplinarity and leading to public outreach (see The Heritage Jam 2022).

Another interesting point raised by the article is the decontextualization of play, a fact that is rather worrying. As the authors point out, play and playscapes are typically studied with a distinct element of seriousness that reflects on social, religious and political connotations rather than their actual purpose of play and fun. This decontextualization within archaeological research also happens in storytelling, which should be fun and arguably serves a role within the archaeology of play. Consider, for example, the board game *Dixit*. When playing *Dixit*, the players have six cards with different pictures on them and take turns at being the storyteller. The storyteller creates a short story, and then other players select one of their own cards which best matches this story and give the selected card to the storyteller, without showing it to the others. Then, all the cards are shown face up, and every player has to guess which card was the storyteller's. The stories are always exceptional, and the game is usually followed by plenty of laughs thereafter.

However, archaeological storytelling is perennially viewed through the lens of positivism as a not-so-scientific approach, perhaps similar to the role of games, play and having fun in our science. According to Praetzellis and Praetzellis (2015, 129), noteworthy archaeologists – such as the late Lewis Binford – have heavily criticized the use of storytelling as well as all 'post-processual' archaeology, labelling this as 'not archaeology' and 'anti science'. Yet, for more than two decades now, archaeologists have discussed and published works on how and why to tell stories (Hodder 1989; Praetzellis 1998; Pluciennik 1999; Gibb 2000; Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2015; Majewski 2000; Holtorf 2010, to name a few). Conferences grounded in storytelling that welcome

participants to share their stories and even perform were organized as early as 1997 (Gibb 2000, 1), and archaeologists have long told stories while having fun in the process, either when sharing present archaeological data with the public and other scholars or as a tool to help them interpret the past (Grima 2017, 76). On a similar note, the use of play and games in archaeology is perhaps viewed in the same way with duality (if not multiplicity) in mind: as a medium to engage with the public, students and other academics, and as a tool to explore and interpret the past. In this regard, the paper offers a refreshing perspective on play in archaeology and thus almost strips away the guilt of those who enjoy playing and having fun in our field: which is in itself a beautiful playground and often exactly the reason we became archaeologists in the first place, affording us the chance to play with dirt under the sun, discover exciting artefacts from the past and interpret them, creating stories about the people who were here before us.

Fun in ruins: Archaeology's serious rut

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Archaeology could be a lot more fun, and certainly people in the ancient past had a lot more fun than might be evident from archaeological scholarship. I should say from the start that I share the goals of Politopoulos et al., but I think some points are worth exploring in greater detail to fully understand the study of play in the past, and how we can find ways to study it in a better way.

Since we examine the past through its material culture, we have to engage with the materiality of play and how it becomes the archaeological record. Politopoulous et al. touch on some of the most obvious examples of play that have been addressed by archaeologists: toys, sports, theatre and board games. These are all forms of play that have left an easily discernible material trace in the archaeological record: from game boards, dice and toys (Dasen and Vespa 2021; 2022) to architecture such as ballcourts (Blomster and Salazar Chávez 2020), stadia, and amphitheatres (Christiansen and Kyle 2013). To this list of archaeologically visible forms of play, I would add music and dance, though dance perhaps is mostly visible when it appears in art. Indeed, dance is a good illustration of how so many forms of play are immaterial and thus will forever be invisible to us as archaeologists. Word play, jokes, many kinds of athletic competitions, singing and hand games, among many others, are all kinds of play that require nothing more than one's own body to participate. But even where objects are required for play, these items largely were not created specifically for play but taken from the surrounding environment and used in an ad hoc fashion. Stones, shells, seeds and even dried animal droppings are readily available materials that have been shown ethnographically to be commonly gathered small objects that, when employed on a series of holes scooped out of the ground or lines drawn in the soil, become a board game (e.g. Béart 1955, 429–473). We can see shades of this in the ancient world, in structures where pavements are present or on stone outcrops where boards were carved into the surface (e.g. de Voogt et al. 2020). These are discoverable by archaeologists, but we will (probably) never find a game board that was once dug into the sand, or be able to identify seeds or pebbles as belonging to a game. Thus, even