Virtual Hauntology in *Resident Evil*: why playing the original *Resident Evil* feels like coming home

Nicholas Norman Adams

This article introduces and explores the concept of *Virtual Hauntology*. I have planned to write this article for long time. Originally, I conceptualised this work as purely an academic piece—written for an academic journal. However, having previously published in *Phlexible Philosophy*, I felt—upon careful reflection—that the medium of an online platform—and the stylistic freedoms that this allows—represented the most fitting space from which to share the ideas and 'story' of this article. The structure of this article can be best located as a socio-philosophical investigation of two linked questions: Why do so many people feel nostalgia for the virtual worlds of video games? And—connected to this: How does this nostalgia become such a powerful driving force encouraging individuals to reengage with games and virtual spaces over time? To explore these questions, I draw upon my own relationship and experiences with Capcom's 1996 PlayStation game *Resident Evil*.

A lifelong fascination: *pausing* real-life

I've always had a special relationship with computer technology since an early age. Examples of this from my life are numerous: begging my mother to set-up her old softkey ZX 48k Spectrum (which she recently and very kindly gifted to me) when I was around the age of five years old in 1989; my parents acquiring a pair of obsolete Amstrad PCW 8512 green-screen computers for me and my brother to experiment with circa 1990; my father allowing me to play around on MSDOS using his borrowed 486 work laptop when I was aged around ten in 1994, and myself and my brother programming early BASIC and later AmigaBASIC using our Amiga A500+ after finding a coding manual in our local library around ages eleven and twelve. As time evolved—and I reached my early teens, I developed a fascination with the Amiga demo scene, as well as the burgeoning PC and early-internet culture of the 90s, cultivating a technological fascination that has continued to intensify over time.

Regarding gaming specifically, I've detailed my past fascinations with the Oliver Twins' Codemasters classic *Magicland Dizzy* and the lasting and recurrent emotional significance of *Magicland* upon my childhood and adult life in a previous *GameTripper* [article](). Beyond this, I recently published an [academic article]() discussing the role of video gaming as an escapist aid for individuals experiencing Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), drawing on my own experiences of MDD and my time playing the 2000 Ion Storm game *Deus Ex* in my teenage years as a form of self-therapy.

The truth is—I've come to realise at the age of now forty—that my infatuation with video gaming is much less linked with attraction to specific graphics, gameplay or storylines. Instead my interests are networked specifically to notions of escapism via the medium of virtual spaces, and an acute obsession with the accelerating role of technology in shaping how humans understand and make sense of the 'real world' within which we exist. This is reflected in the choice of games I play—preferring sprawling puzzle-oriented games with specific objectives, that also allow me the freedom to *linger* within the virtual world if I wish; exploring at will to develop a sense of complete immersion and delocalisation—*escapism*—from the real world. To example some of my favourite immersive games that realise these effects: *Zork*, *Ecco the Dolphin*, *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*, *Metal Gear Solid*, *Sam and Max Hit the Road*,

Discworld II: Missing presumed…!?, *Tomb Raider*, *Silent Hill 1 and 2*, *Fallout 3*, and *The Last of Us: Part II*.

While the concept of 'pausing' is used colloquially within the world of video gaming to refer to the suspension of a game to take a break from playing, I argue here for a reversing of this term. For me, I conceptualise video gaming itself as *pausing*: the *pausing of real-life*. This interpretation of *pausing* represents an accurate description for humans taking a *break from reality* to exist within a structured and escapist virtual space. Following on from this, I contend that to address the above questions of nostalgia and nostalgia's role in manufacturing reengagement, we must first explore how nostalgia is manufactured through the occurrences that play-out within these virtual environments while real-life is 'paused'. I do this in the following sections, utilising a first-person narrative account of my own experiences of playing *Resident Evil* as the primary source of information for which to then hypothesise a theory.

Resident Evil: first contact

I first encountered *Resident Evil* shortly after it was released in the UK. At this time—in 1996, I was thirteen years old, still in high school and living at home. I recall first seeing early images—low-resolution screenshots—from the Japanese PlayStation version of the game (a version which I later purchased—in a small store deep in the neon district of Akihabara—many years later, on a work-related trip to Tokyo) published in one of the UK 1990s computer magazines (perhaps the official PlayStation magazine) that myself and my brother routinely begged our parents to buy for us. Our pleas were despite neither of us yet being owners of the consoles that the magazine's content was focused on. I had already played the Psygnosis masterpiece *WipeOut* on my family's communal PC when it was released the year before, being enthralled by the techno soundtrack and level of graphical detail—having acquired the game for Christmas after viewing the early demo showcased in the 1995 movie *Hackers*, a film which also made a lasting impression upon me. However, the graphics that appeared in the printed screen-captures depicting *Resident Evil* departed from artwork exampled in *WipeOut*, seemingly taking established 3D polygon renderings in a new, more advanced visual direction.

Instead of creating a frenetic and fast-paced racing or combat simulation, the graphical design concentrated on developing an immersive world of *survival horror*, which I was excited to see appeared to blend two of my favourite genres: gothic horror and adventure, realising this into a 3D, virtual interactive world. Despite there being only three pictures shown, each of these elicited tingles of excitement and anticipation when I considered what I was looking at. The pictures were as follows: the 'haunted house' styled presentation of *The Spencer Mansion*—the setting of the first *Resident Evil* game; a close-up shot of a zombie lying on a carpeted mansion floor, appearing as if slowly coming to life; and finally, a still excerpt from an introductory black and white Full Motion Video (FMV) scene-setting sequence, which depicted a helicopter that appeared to be carrying an investigatory team over woodland. The caption below this last image provided context: the team were conducting a reconnaissance mission in search of a past team who has vanished. As I viewed the images, letting my eyes rove from one to the other—taking in the graphical presentations, the details of the artwork and noting the exquisite use of colour and depth situated within the pre-rendered backgrounds of the game in the first two pictures, I knew that I was witnessing the birth of a new era of gaming. I felt that I *must* play *Resident Evil* at the earliest opportunity possible.

It wasn't until late in late 1997 that I first played *Resident Evil*. Discussion of the upcoming release of the game had been the dominant subject of dialogue between me and my high school

friends in the corridors and recreational areas of our school, our discursive focus shifting—upon the UK release of the game—to centre on speculations for whom would acquire the game first and be the original member of our clique to experience playing this. I had no hope of being the vanguard player, for I still did not yet own a PlayStation console and neither did anyone in my family. There was no jealousy or competition linked with our speculation for whom would be the first to experience *Resident Evil*, simply we wished to share in each other's excitement. To this point, the question was often asked: "Have you got *it* yet?"—the "*it*" representing an implicit but always understood reference to the coveted PlayStation version of *Resident Evil*.

One day, a Tuesday in late September 1997, I alighted at my local secondary from the rickety school bus to be met by the excited faces of two of my friends—one of them notably more animated and excited than the other:

"I've got *it*" he breathlessly mouthed to me, unable to contain his excitement.

Little schoolwork was completed that day. In each class, we sat hunched together, towards the back of each classroom, talking in conspiratorial—hushed—tones, as my friend laid out—in a style with all of the reverence of a devout believer delivering a sermon recounting a treasured biblical fable—the premise, introduction, overarching plot and initial gameplay experience of his first time with *Resident Evil*. This gaming experience—he told me—had been snatched from him the evening before, after his father had returned from a trip with the game as a gift for him late in the evening. Eventually—as my friend told it—his mother had threatened to take the game away from him, if he continued to refuse to turn it off and go to bed, so concerned was she that he would not be sufficiently rested for a day of school in the morning. However, and being somewhat of a revolutionary figure within our crowd, our friend had—of course—feigned sleep and quietly played for several further hours, with tinny headphones plugged into the headphone jack of the TV and his duvet draped around the screen to obfuscate the glow of the small CRT television. As he recounted this 'first-play' experience, it made for compelling listening. When I returned home that evening, I informed my parents that I would be spending the upcoming weekend at my friend's house.

By the time Friday came around, our small collective of gaming enthusiasts had built our excitement up to new heights. Each day we met outside the bus terminal of our high school, eagerly awaiting the next instalment of our lucky friend's gaming narrative that told of the previous night's survival horror adventures. Often, the introduction to each adventure was repeated, being retold when different friends came over to say good morning, our friend telling each story slightly differently each time, sometimes adding small details previously missed out (*there were different keys that unlocked different parts of the mansion*), other times including entire concepts we heard for the first time only upon this retelling (*you encountered different characters from a previous rescue mission within the mansion*). Of course, living in a remote region of Northeast Scotland, this all occurred well before any of us had access to dial-up or ADSL internet, which could have been used to uncover the complete plot and provide context to his narratives. Accessible mainstream Broadband would not exist in the region until well into the 2000s. Thus, we had no frame of reference for what *Resident Evil* looked like in actuality, only our friend's word and descriptions to go on: as such, we were reliant on an oral history—*a fable*—of our friend's escapades and adventures within the game to create an expectation of what the game looked like.

While this may be interpreted by some as a serious limitation, it was anything but. This absence of *knowing* created a vastly fictional, imaginary space that it could be argued is harder to visit and is now exponentially less-experienced in our present reality, where the ever-present nature of internet access and pinpoint-accurate search engines render the concept of *not knowing*

largely obsolete. However, this was the culture of the time, and without concrete knowledge, we relied upon our imaginations to bring the world of *Resident Evil*—as articulated by our friend—to life. As we stood listening to our friend speak, we were enthralled with tales of the FMV introduction sequence and the videos of the characters and their appearances; their clothing, style and mannerisms and their combat load-out. We were captivated by discussions over the vast expanse of the mansion, its different rooms and puzzles and the mechanics of the save rooms and inventory boxes. It all sounded too good to be real and by the end of that Friday, my imagination was buzzing with hypothetically constructed scenarios and ideas of visual and gameplay possibilities regarding what the evening's virtual adventure could hold.

Eventually, I left school that Friday, boarding a different bus that afternoon—this time joining my friend on one bound for his house, a small, isolated cottage in the Northeast of Scotland, set-back from a main through-road that bordered a small town. From the upstairs window, the ruins of a small castle were visible, and beyond that, endless rows of undisturbed forestry, the fir trees growing thick and impenetrable. Upon arrival, we wasted no time in playing *Resident Evil*. As we loaded-up the coveted, much looked forward to, and now already legendary game for the first time, my friends mother—aware that we were playing 'something scary' dropped by the door of my friend's room, first asking if we were happy with pizza and chips for dinner which she would take up to us (we were delighted!), before telling us several stories of how the house they lived in was haunted, owing to its proximity to the ruined castle. Being no stranger to ghost stories (hearing these is simply ubiquitous with growing up in Scotland—everything is haunted!) I paid little attention, focussing instead on the deep synthetic chiming that the PlayStation system made when the large circular grey power button was pressed, and turning my focus to the smooth, intersecting slide of the primary-coloured Sony PlayStation logo overlapping effortlessly across the screen as the accompanying music reduced into a low lingering hush flushed with spine-chilling echo and spatial delay effects.

We played all weekend, getting little (if any) sleep on the Friday night, and both falling asleep while gaming at various points during the night of the Saturday.

Playing *Resident Evil* was a truly mesmerising experience for me. I had previously experienced *Doom*, *Descent*, *Quake* and *Castlevania*, all of which located the player into different and immersive worlds that blended various depths of horror and technology, but nothing—up until then—had prepared me for the depth of immersion and focus that I faced when playing *Resident Evil*.

Recalling that first experience, I remember my friend explaining carefully the mechanics of the controls; the pressing of a button on the rightmost part of the controller in tandem with one of the buttons of the leftmost D-pad in order to make the character run. It was all new to me. I recall also being overwhelmed by the mechanic of having to press and depress one of the trigger buttons (R1) alongside the 'Cross' button to make the character shoot—a virtual safety-catch to prevent the negligent discharge of a digital firearm that could trigger the wastage of precious ammunition. Such mechanics—until then—were completely alien to me, but are now considered standard within modern game environments.

Beyond the controls, gameplay and graphics, it was the environment and ambiance of the game that had the most impactful—and lasting—effect upon me.

After we had chosen our character—opting for Jill Valentine instead of Chris Redfield, owing to Jill starting the game with larger inventory space and beginning with her trusty Beretta pistol

already equipped—we were soon traversing the various rooms, floors and hidden areas of *The Spencer Mansion*, encountering manifold plagues of zombies, a giant snake, mutated gorilla-type 'hunters' and dramatically oversized spiders, as well as solving a myriad of puzzles deciphering clues, and piecing together the overarching conspiracy storyline from the numerous documents and diary entries that expounded upon the world of *Resident Evil*. These in-game notes provided key plot-point and background information on the insidious and evil biotechnology corporation *Umbrella* and the histories and context of the various characters that the player encounters within the game. All of this built emotional investment in the wellbeing, in-game choices, overall outcomes and survival of the characters that the player controls.

As we continued playing, I found myself beginning to mentally map the sprawling environment of the game, comparing my mental notes against the virtual map of the mansion, which was available to access from a gaming menu.

Regarding the immersive nature of the environments, the pre-rendered backgrounds of the game were simply magnificent, providing a level of detail and realism which would have been impossible if these backgrounds were rendered using in-game graphics. To explain, the backgrounds of *Resident Evil* existed as computer designed static artwork. This is in contrast to the polygon-rendered characters that the player controlled. For context, **Figure 1** shows a screenshot from the original PlayStation *Resident Evil* release. Within this is visible the background—a large hallway, which is pre-rendered artwork. Imposed on top of this are gaming assets visible which are rendered in-game. These are: Jill Valentine: the player-controlled character (centre-left), a slain zombie on the floor to the left of Jill, and a statue which the player can interact with (foreground: right-most structure).

Figure 1: Screenshot from the original PlayStation version of *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996).

While it could be conceived that using both pre-rendered backgrounds alongside in-game rendered character sprites may cause a visual clash of juxtaposed styles that a player may find jarring, the end graphical result was opposite to this. Instead, the backgrounds provided the most masterful and beautifully immersive environments. These environmental settings immediately drew my attention, locating my presence from simply sitting in front of a screen, to instead leaving me feeling like I was situated *within* the game: as close to the action as possible. This was largely down to the depth and detail of the backgrounds made possible by using pre-rendered artwork. As myself and my friend navigated the mansion—each loading sequence of a door slowly opening brought with it a double-edged tension: part of me was afraid and anxious for what might be lurking behind the door, another part of me was flushed with excitement and anticipation, what new environment was I entering and what might this look like?

This anticipation was always delivered upon. I delighted at entering new areas; searching these almost obsessively for hidden items and explanations, drawing the frustration of my friend as I often repeatedly revisited areas, clicking the controller with compulsive abandon as I walked Jill painstakingly slowly against walls, commanding her to examine paintings, objects, furniture, and almost anything that seemed like it could provide a point of possible interest; a glimmer of lore from which to gleam more details about the world of *Resident Evil*. To my delight, my meticulous searching was rarely in vain. For many of these objects and components within backgrounds, text would appear on the screen upon examination, providing details and—at times—specific commentary regarding the character's perception of what they were seeing. This further heightened my engagement with the virtual world, fostering within me a deeper sense of connection, ability and perspective to the world of the game. It was as if I was seeing the interior of the mansion through the lens of the character that my friend and I were controlling.

Turning to audio ambiance, the music and sound design of *Resident Evil* was like nothing I had experienced before, and operated in tandem with the visual environments to realise a perfect paring that conjured the world of *The Spencer Mansion* to life. Rooms with specific music, for example 'save rooms' began to become immediately recognisable upon entry, the tempo of the music slowing—representing a soft piano-led piece synonymous with relaxation and comfort; the distinctive deeper notes of the piano underscored with lilting and delicate blends of synthetic strings. The piece (and most of the soundtrack) was composed by Masami Ueda. These 'safe havens' were contrasted with the deeper minor note heavy soundtracks that scored abandoned and dimly lit hallways; the soundscape stripping back to sparse and clashing notes of low piano tones interspersed with high, shrill peaks of strings and synthetic digital samples looping into discordant and fragmented anxiety-provoking scores. Other areas, such as doors leading into courtyard or balcony settings were marked by a change in audio dynamics and sound-effects, which were spotlighted by the absence of music building tension and intrigue, as well as worry and anxiety for what such a lull within the established soundscape could be signalling. In some of the larger outside environments, the sounds of creaking trees, chittering insects and ambient weather effects underpinned a sense of such environments being vast expanses, even though—in reality—these programmed virtual spaces were relatively small and constrained in terms of gameplay and exploration in comparison to the vastness of the overall mansion setting.

As that first night of gaming wore on, with us both playing through the night—I recall my friend and I achieving much in the way of story progression, solving puzzles and exploring the mansion. Playing *Resident Evil* felt like a journey—a *quest*, and one that we had been preparing

for, for a long time. Thus, our gaming stamina was heightened by many months of anticipation. Despite us beginning the game only several hours previous, we had soon—by working together—progressed well beyond the save point my friend had stored on his memory card when playing solo. We had successfully solved the shotgun puzzle, used the blue gem on the tiger statue, completed the piano puzzle and the linked emblem riddle, and had fought the giant snake and competed the subsequent serum quest. As the precious freedom days of the weekend seemed to converge into one amalgamated gaming marathon—and Friday night became Sunday afternoon, we had left the confides of the mansion by collecting the sequence of crests required to unlock the garden passage. We had continued on to battle the giant 'Plant 42' in the workers' accommodation area in the outskirts of the mansion proper, and had fought the giant shark guarding the underground aquarium. Upon returning to the mansion—which triggered a spine-chilling FMV sequence that introduced a new enemy into the equation, I realised the time, and that my father would be coming to collect me to bring me back home within the next half hour. We continued gaming—stuck within the mansion, searching in vain for a final quest item to allow us to progress beyond areas we had already explored, until finally I heard the familiar noise of my father's Rover 620i shift gear into neutral and the engine reduce to idle in the small driveway just below my friend's bedroom window.

It has been a good weekend of progress, but I recall the sinking feeling of inevitable anti-climax that I felt rise-up within me, at not knowing how the story of *Resident Evil* would conclude. Alongside this, I felt a mixed frustration that I didn't yet own a PlayStation console, and my own copy of *Resident Evil* so that I could continue the adventure.

Upon arrival home, I sat with my parents in the kitchen of our cottage, drinking tea, while my mother made pancakes. My parents asked me what we done: how me and my friend had spent our time over the weekend. I began to speak about the world of *Resident Evil*, but my mother interrupted me, asking: "You didn't spend the whole weekend sitting in front of a *screen* did you?". "Well…*yes*", was my planned reply, but instead, I stayed silent and thoughtful.

My silence was primarily because the insinuation was that this time spent *sitting in front of a screen* was somehow *time wasted*. I felt the exact opposite to this. I felt like I had *travelled* places, *seen things*, and experienced new realities and possibilities that set my mind alive with new thoughts, ideas, focus; stoking the embers of intrigue and excitement about what the imminent technological future of post-1990s society may hold and what my part in this could possibly be. Certainly, I had visited more interesting places by engaging and immersing myself within the virtual world of *Resident Evil* than I would have been able to traversing the empty abandoned woodlands that sat behind my friend's house, or pounding the cracked pavements of the small, primarily elderly-populated and sleepy town near where he lived, which contained only a small corner shop, a hairdresser, a chip-shop, and a local pub that we were (then) far too young to gain access to. Besides, these were all locales I was all too familiar with, and offered nothing in the way of novel experience for me. Thus, by playing *Resident Evil* I had experienced something *entirely new* that I would have not been able to experience in the real world. Even at the young age of thirteen, I had felt like that was a beautiful and rare gift: I had been *transported*.

Virtual Hauntology

Since that first experience at my childhood friend's house, I have played the original *Resident Evil* on every PlayStation console that I have owned. My own independent gameplay adventures began with a borrowed copy (from a different friend than the one I first played with)

which led to my first completion of the game while playing on my brother's PlayStation, which he received only a few months after I first played *Resident Evil* at my friend's house. Later, I purchased the *Director's Cut* version to play on my own PlayStation console—acquiring my console second-hand, after making the decision to divert my original PlayStation savings to purchase a launch version of the much more expensive Sega Dreamcast. I bought a PlayStation after my Dreamcast purchase, upon realising that—while I loved the Dreamcast—Sega did not plan to support the console after the initial wave of UK sales.

Years later, I was delighted to find out, upon purchasing a PS2 at launch, that my PS1 copy of *Resident Evil: Director's Cut* could be played on the new console. I experienced the same gratitude when I (again, years later) bought a PS3 console at launch, and slid my old copy of the game into the slick, self-loading CD slot-drive and watched the familiar PlayStation introduction start-up sequence—and then the Capcom logo—materialise on the screen. Eventually (and in more recent years), playing on PS4 and PS5 has required a digital download of the same *Director's Cut* version of the game that I first bought twenty-five years ago as a physical copy, when the desire to replay *Resident Evil* once again strikes me, which it regularly does, all these years later.

Returning to the title of this article, it may seem strange to refer to playing *Resident Evil* as feeling like *coming home*. After all, *Resident Evil* is a horror game, set in an abandoned mansion situated deep in a remote forest, within which mutated zombies and grotesque monsters roam around abundant, actively trying to kill the player. So—how can such a game foster a sense of belonging, comfortable nostalgia and relaxation? This can be best explored by applying the concept of hauntology.

Hauntology is a term that broadly refers to the notion of specific elements from the past returning—like spectres, to influence and 'haunt' ideas and concepts in the present moment. The concept originated with Jacques Derrida's publication *Spectres of Marx* (1993), which delineates the argument that Marx's political concepts of collective responsibility and radical social critique are arguable more relevant in a post-communist society informed by capitalism and liberal democracy than such ideas were under communism. Thus, the 'spectre' of Marx is haunting present late-modernity through its sustained relevance. Most salient for this work, the late cultural theorist Mark Fisher developed a masterful adaption and reinterpretation of Derrida's use of the term to explore the hauntological influence of specific cultural aspects of past modernity upon contemporary music, particularly regarding practices of sampling and utilisation of 'retro' production techniques—for example 'lo-fi'—as stylistic choices.

Central to Fisher's interpretation of hauntology is melancholy; a nostalgic yearning for specific elements of a past place, temporality and culture, but the desire to locate the 'best parts' of this past memory into the comforts of the present. This interpretation can be evidenced across numerous practices in contemporary reality. For example, many digital tools allow for social media users to add 'retro' filters to uploaded videos mimicking the low-quality resolutions and frame-rates of early VHS analogue cameras. Also: many contemporary music production styles mimic the natural limitations of past recordings, adding auditory touches such as manufactured crackle, vocal pops, reduced quality, and stereo-hiss as stylistic integrations to make recordings sound 'authentic', where these additions were previously an inescapable—and undesirable— side effects anchored to the limitations of available recording technologies. More recently a spate of 'pixel art' retro-styled video games have been released that imitate the style of successful 1990s first-person-shooter (FPS) games such as *Doom* and *Quake*. These new imaginings capitalise on the nostalgia linked with the style and mechanics of the past offerings

that when first released were novel and innovative, incorporating 'janky' control mechanics and frame-rate limitations that current technologies have moved beyond, but which are now included for their *hauntological* aesthetic value. As Fisher argues, the prevalence and desire for such hauntological integrations of past concepts raises interesting questions for reality, namely: is the return to an obsession with past 'retro' aesthetics resplendent of a lack of ability to produce novel and meaningful new concepts, technologies and possibilities in the current cultural world?

This theorising also begs another question: as society moves forward to a new apex of technological evolution, is this an evolution focussed on capital, as opposed to culture?—with culture now seemingly looking backwords for ideas and influence while capital processes appear to be accelerating. This perspective can be easily evidenced, for example, in the frequency of blockbuster films, series and video games that simply represent remakes of past—historical—releases, in an effort to re-capture and re-invigorate the interest, magic, and excitement created by these original media and (re)monetise these concepts. Whatever the success of these remakes, however, these concepts will never be *novel,* only *hauntological.*

Following this tread of thinking, I now return to answering the two questions posed at the beginning of this work:

The first of these—*Why do so many people feel nostalgia for the virtual worlds of video games?*—is easy to answer. Humans feel nostalgia for the virtual worlds of video games because they facilitate novel, emotive and engaging experiences that can represent powerful touchstones of experience. Nostalgia is conjured when humans reminisce about these times—just like 'real life' experiences. Such memories remind people, irrevocably and inseparably of the emotions that they experienced when they first played—emotions which may be more difficult to conjure later in life, in the present social world, and in the current temporality and culture where much cultural experience is *recycled.*

This position lays the foundation for answering the second question posited: *How does this nostalgia become such a powerful driving force encouraging individuals to reengage with games and virtual spaces over time?* In answer to this, I posit that reengagements with video games often represent humans trying to recapture—as with hauntology—spectres and shadows of these past novel and positive emotions. Some researchers have called this active engagement with memory recall—enacted as efforts to 'scratch' the itch of nostalgia—as *mental time travel.* I contend such reengagement efforts present a rational reaction to the absence of the novel in present modernity, so—returning to engage with a medium (the virtual world of a video game) which first operated as the originator for novel feelings is a natural—and logical—interaction, even if such feelings are muted when compared to the memories of the original excitement, these relived experiences can represent powerful triggers that serve to re-elicit and 'bring to life' the original memory. Thus, this practice represents a second-hand experience of novelty; relying on a strengthening and recall of the original memory and attached emotions of novelty, but this can be nonetheless a powerful experience. As such, I term this revisiting as a *coming home* as it represents less a desire for a new, novel experience and instead a recapturing of—*a coming home to*—a 'saved' historical experience and its attached encoded positive emotions. This, I propose, represents the case of *virtual hauntology* as it is enacted by many humans today.

Relating this theorising to my own relationship with *Resident Evil*—for me, revisiting *Resident Evil's* virtual world never fails to generate a recalling of my emotions that first weekend, when

myself and my friend sat down in his childhood bedroom, carefully loading the *Resident Evil* CD into his original grey PlayStation console, and spending two (mostly) sleepless nights and days obsessing over the novelty of the story, the beautifully rendered backgrounds and scenes that depicted the setting of the game and the complex mechanism of character movement and combat. Reflecting now, the build-up in excitement over what *Resident Evil* could have been—thoughts and imaginary scenarios constructed around only three blurred screenshots, that percolated over the course of months prior to having seen any working version of the game, let along played *Resident Evil*—exist as a memory for a time that is now absent and obsolete in current modernity. Such natural levels of intrigue and anticipation have largely been negated by detailed online reporting of plot, appearance and content of modern upcoming games, removing any opportunity for myth-building and cancelling-out the motif of mystique almost entirely.

Examining these thoughts and feelings: the dominant notion of nostalgia I feel when replaying *Resident Evil* now is underpinned by the deep—resonating—sense of excitement, purpose, possibility, passion and desire—the same emotions that I felt back in late 1997 regarding what the future may hold, driven largely by realisation that virtual environments were on the cusp of a new era, where developments towards facilitating emotive immersion into gaming worlds was rapidly accelerating forward—breaking previously impossible boundaries. Such emotions, memories and context that I experienced back in 1997 have been *actively encoded* into my memory alongside the gaming experience, and these memories are brought to life in more detail and luminosity when reengaging with the game. Indeed, this was how many of the above details presented in this paper were remembered and articulated.

For me, replaying *Resident Evil* recalls a simpler time in my life; a world where less knowledge was immediately available, but for which my imagination was immeasurably richer. It was a time where innocence and freedom were abundant, constructed by the seemingly now-impossible naivety of not having constant global news access 24/7. Technological wonderment seemed everywhere; commonplace, and with this the air seemed to crackle with a collective excitement of possibility and purpose; we were *moving towards something*. It felt like there was so much left to discover, so much *unknown and untapped*—not simply within the vast confides of the *Resident Evil* mansion, but in life itself, the wider world and the people that I would encounter as my life progressed. Replaying *Resident Evil* reminds me of these notions and allows me to relive these, representing a temporal, but comforting regression back in to a mental 'safe space'—a cocooned environment of memories that forms a welcome escape from the frenetic 'always on' digital reality that—at times—can seem saturated with accessibility and content, yet within which there often is little meaning, method, excitement or novelty to be found.

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Nicholas Norman Adams is a researcher and Chartered Psychologist, an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, and a Science Council Registered Scientist. His academic interests are interdisciplinary and draw from psychology, sociology and poststructural feminist theory. His research examines men and masculinities, risky behaviours, mental health, and factors influencing men's positive growth trajectories. He has a special interest in the role of video gaming as an escapist aid for persons experiencing mental distress, and regarding the concept of *hauntology* as applied to understand nostalgia. He received his PhD from The University of Aberdeen in 2019. He currently works as a Research Fellow at Robert Gordon University, in Aberdeen, Scotland.

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