



**Lamont, B.R. (2023) 'Introduction', *The International Journal of Creative Media Research*, 10.**

## **ResearchSPAce**

<http://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/>

This is a pre-published version of the text.  
Please cite only the published version using the reference above.

Your access and use of this document is based on your acceptance of the  
ResearchSPAce Metadata and Data Policies, as well as applicable law:-

<https://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/policies.html>

Unless you accept the terms of these Policies in full, you do not have permission  
to download this document.

This cover sheet may not be removed from the document.

Please scroll down to view the document.

# Introduction To Special Issue On Digital Nostalgia and Creative Technology

Bethany Rose Lamont



**Fig. 1:** Still from Charlotte Wells' *Aftersun* (2021)

Despite its insular qualities, nostalgia, in its essence, is an attempt to connect. Firstly, with a time and space, lost or imagined, but also to one another. As Charlotte Wells notes in her own nostalgic, biographically inflected, feature debut, *Aftersun* (2021), “memory is a slippery thing”, each visit to the event “framed by a new feeling.”<sup>1</sup> Its potential for nostalgic expression, and further creative expansion, is rich through visual technology. This can be encountered in Wells’ “language of cinema”, and of course through the videogames, creative practice, and online visual cultures considered within the articles in this special issue.<sup>2</sup> These participatory screen cultures range from the “low-poly horror” games of the Haunted PS1 community, considered by Patrick Dolan and Dr

---

<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Wells, ‘A Note From Charlotte Wells’, October 21<sup>st</sup> 2022, A24. Available at: <https://a24films.com/notes/2022/10/a-note-from-charlotte-wells> [last accessed 22/06/2023]

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Andrew Bailey, to the nostalgic aesthetic communities identified in Lara López Millán's study of Dark Academia on Tumblr.<sup>3</sup> Yet, in each of the wide-ranging incarnations explored in this issue, we find Wells' reminder that nostalgic technology offers "room for you", created with the hope to "take it, fill it, in order to feel it."<sup>4</sup>

For at the heart of the nostalgic communities studied in this special issue is a sense of creative play. Nostalgic references or technologies being the creative materials that may facilitate these community driven creations. Here, as López Millán explains, "nostalgia is a social and collective feeling...effectively constructed in online networks of affective communities."<sup>5</sup> This is evidenced in the "tool fandoms" first identified by game studies and digital media professor, Stefan Werning, and present within this issue in examples such as Dolan and Bailey's discovery of "the intimacy and enthusiasm that the HPS1 community and the HPSXRP tool fandom collectively foster", and Dr. Patryk Wasiak, and Dr. Marcin Cabak's study of 8-bit retro-programming communities.<sup>6</sup> Here, Wasiak and Cabak position such subcultures within Katharina Niemeyer's foundational research into media nostalgia, as "being interwoven with social practices as well as historical and economic (production) conditions."<sup>7</sup> These studies centre on the pleasure of connection via creation, where the very act of "sharing technical knowledge on how to write code for 8-bit computers is embedded in narratives on the nostalgic image of the past."<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Dolan and Andrew Bailey, 'Ghastly Graphics: Tool Fandom, Bad Cinema, and the Haunted PS1 Game Development Community', Nostalgia and Technology Special Issue, *International Journal Of Creative Media Research*, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Lara López Millán, 'The Dark Academia aesthetic: nostalgia for the past in social networks', Nostalgia and Technology Special Issue, *International Journal Of Creative Media Research*, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Stefan Werning, *Making Games: The Politics and Poetics of Game Creation Tools* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2021) 51, quoted in: Dolan, Bailey, 'Ghastly Graphics.'

Dolan, Bailey, 'Ghastly Graphics.'

Dr. Patryk Wasiak, and Dr. Marcin Cabak, 'Retro-programming and the nostalgia for creativity in the 8-bit microcomputer era', Nostalgia and Technology Special Issue, *International Journal Of Creative Media Research*, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Katharina Niemeyer, *Media and nostalgia: Yearning for the past, present and future*

(Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) p.6-7, quoted in: Wasiak, Cabak, 'Retro-programming.'

<sup>8</sup> Wasiak, Cabak, 'Retro-programming.'

The examples studied in this issue, showcase the potential for nostalgic media to push against elitist models of specialism. Dark Academia for instance offers the Oxbridge or Ivy league experience to anyone with a wi-fi connection. Whilst, the nostalgic “queer play” of the Tamagotchi studied by Jon Heggstad offers “virtual playgrounds through which queer folks are able to explore and rehearse not only their own identities, but models of queer community and queer kinship.”<sup>9</sup> In parallel, Dolan and Bailey emphasise that DIY gaming, “resulted in many feminist, queer, experimental, and artistic game scenes to arise that collectively reveal a much wider possibility space than what is offered by the mainstream industry.”<sup>10</sup> Just as Dolan and Bailey’s HPS1 community sit firmly “on the outer fringes of the commercial industry”, Wasiak and Cabak position their study of retro programmers within the tradition of the learn to code movement, which offered “social empowerment, particularly for women and other underrepresented groups by helping them to obtain valuable coding skills.”<sup>11</sup> The retro programming community drawing inspiration from a bygone era “when the computer industry was young, hobbyists and hackers were encouraged to experiment with computers”, and “teenagers were able to become professional computer game developers through self-education.”<sup>12</sup> Both Wasiak and Cabak, and Dolan and Bailey’s nostalgic examples of creative computing offer open entry, where enthusiasts “with little to no programming experience [can] make their own games and to distribute them online”, and microcomputers such as the Commodore 64, exist as “a machine engineered to welcome its users to the world of creative coding.”<sup>13</sup> In recognising that though vintage technology was “slower, they offered much more opportunities for creativity”, personal as well as communal identity is fostered, with Wasiak and Cabak highlighting nostalgic

---

<sup>9</sup> Jon Heggstad, ‘Bring Your Tamagotchis Up Gay: The Original Virtual Pets as Queer Digital Artifacts’, Nostalgia and Technology Special Issue, *International Journal Of Creative Media Research*, 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Dolan, Bailey, ‘Ghastly Graphics.’

<sup>11</sup> Dolan, Bailey, ‘Ghastly Graphics.’

Wasiak, Cabak, ‘Retro-programming.’

<sup>12</sup> Wasiak, Cabak, ‘Retro-programming.’

<sup>13</sup> Dolan, Bailey, ‘Ghastly Graphics.’

Wasiak, Cabak, ‘Retro-programming.’

media capacity for “forging an attractive personal identity based on mastery of creative programming techniques.”<sup>14</sup>

Here, such nostalgic media making is distinguished by the pleasure (and perhaps pain) of its intensive labour time. In Heggstad’s Tamagotchi, we find an all-consuming gaming experience with “round-the clock needs” that “demands work from the user”, where a player “is unable to simply walk away from the device without facing grave consequences—i.e., a character’s death.”<sup>15</sup> Whilst, for Wasiak and Cabak, “the severe technical limitations of hardware...demonstrate how such constraints stimulate creativity in terms of creative programming.”<sup>16</sup> Here, pleasure is gained both from the feat of “doing really difficult things (or rather, impossible things)” in the case of creative retro-programming, and its potential to offer an experience of “being close to the machine”, in order to foster “beneficial human-machine and social relations.”<sup>17</sup> Such labour, as López Millán, citing the film and media theorist Louisa Ella Stein, reminds us in her study of nostalgic social networks, is woven with “an aesthetics of intimate emotion” thus “calling attention to mediation and to the labor of the author.”<sup>18</sup>

Precedents can be found in offline subcultures, such as print zine cultures, or the vintage aesthetics of 20th century subcultures that took pleasure in the second hand.<sup>19</sup> Arguably, in such instances it’s less about the actual content of nostalgic longing (with examples such as Dark Academia skipping from Narnia to Ancient Rome via Tumblr.com) but what is crafted from these materials. Such media making is akin to the image of a child playing dress up in their parents’ wardrobe, it does not matter if they don a wide brimmed hat, or a flouncy party

---

<sup>14</sup> Wasiak, Cabak, ‘Retro-programming.’

<sup>15</sup> Heggstad, ‘Bring Your Tamagotchis Up Gay.’

<sup>16</sup> Wasiak, Cabak, ‘Retro-programming.’

<sup>17</sup> Linus Åkerlund, “An Introduction to Programming C-64 Demos.” Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> June 2023 <http://www.antimon.org/code/Linus/>. Quoted in: Ibid.

Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Louisa Ellen Stein, *Millennial Fandom: Television Audiences in the Transmedia Age*. (Iowa: university of Iowa Press, 2015) 158. Quoted in: López Millán, ‘The Dark Academia aesthetic’

<sup>19</sup> Angela McRobbie, ‘Second-Hand Dresses and the Role of the Ragmarket’, in: Angela McRobbie (ed.) *Zoot Suits and Secondhand Dresses: Anthology of Fashion and Music* (London: Palgrave Macmillan: 1989)

dress, what matters is the character created from the fabric, and the pleasurable experiences evoked from it. This virtual wardrobe offers what López Millán identifies as a “a simulation of the past, allowing users to enter and enrich themselves through aesthetic expressions.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, as both López Millán and Heggstad find, “through these social networks, a younger generation feel the need to foster new identities.”<sup>21</sup> In the case of Dark Academia, this is through “find[ing] a new identity and online community in an imagined past.”<sup>22</sup> Whilst, in Heggstad’s study of queer childhood and Tamagotchi, a sense of creative discovery is found from these virtual pets, which is part of a longer history of “how queer folks have, historically, reconfigured digital resources as tools for their own expression.”<sup>23</sup>

Nostalgic media serves as the raw materials for creative innovation in this issue’s practice-based works. Thus, offering vivid examples of Svetlana Boym’s model of reflective nostalgia which “does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones.”<sup>24</sup> James Gabrillo’s *Unsensing MTV*, a single piece video work comprised of MTV interludes that are “spliced and detached, slowed and sped up” places “an emphasis on transition and hodgepodge”, and “ponders the passage of time in a commercial mainstream ecosystem of networked products.”<sup>25</sup> Comparably, Giulia Carla Rossi’s digital preservation game *The Digital Archivist*, draws upon a “mash-up aesthetics that include mediaeval imagery alongside retrogaming design and pixel art.”<sup>26</sup> Here nostalgic media is not the endpoint, but rather a playful entry to advocate and educate on the role of librarians and archivists in preserving digital heritage, and thus avoid what Terry Kuny defines as a potential

---

<sup>20</sup> López Millán, ‘The Dark Academia aesthetic.’

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Heggstad, ‘Bring Your Tamagotchis Up Gay.’

<sup>24</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future Of Nostalgia*, New York, Basic Books, 2001, xviii

<sup>25</sup> James Gabrillo, ‘Unsensing MTV’, Nostalgia and Technology Special Issue, *International Journal Of Creative Media Research*, 2023.

<sup>26</sup> Giulia Carla Rossi, ‘The Digital Archivist: the Role of Digital Nostalgia Aesthetics in a Digital Preservation Game’, Nostalgia and Technology Special Issue, *International Journal Of Creative Media Research*, 2023.

digital Dark Age. Here, Rossi emphasises that “the role of nostalgia in *The Digital Archivist* is not intended to serve as a longing for the past”, but instead “the game brings attention to the fact that contemporary technology is at risk of the same fate.”<sup>27</sup> Whilst, Heggstad offers “a new kind of narrative for the Tamagotchi”, by offering the creature new journeys and interactions such as Pride events where the pixellated pet was able to “to interact with leather daddies, drag queens, and a diverse crowd of other queer-identifying folks.”<sup>28</sup> Such creative play both inspire “new openings for thinking about the queer affordances that our everyday interactions with digital artifacts allow us”, and emphasise a longer history of “queer digital artifacts.”<sup>29</sup>

Such sentimental journeys offer an escape route from the challenges of the present. Whether as identified by Wasiak, and Cabak, from the “failings of contemporary digital capitalism and particularly the work conditions in the software industry”, or from global traumatic disruptions, such as the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, in the case of López Millán’s study of Dark Academia’s increased significance for its Gen Z audience during this isolating period.<sup>30</sup> The impact of the pandemic on a public hunger for nostalgic media is similarly acknowledged in Heggstad’s study of the Tamagotchi’s Millennial fandom, where a “rekindled interest in these toys and games that coincided with lockdowns around the world.”<sup>31</sup>

Nostalgia and trauma are curiously co-dependent, with nostalgic aesthetics and “ugly ass polygons” adding to the horror in the case of HPS1.<sup>32</sup> Whilst, in Perceville Forester’s study of nostalgic marketing for *Stranger Things*, 1980s American pop cultural nostalgia wilfully obscures sites of historical trauma, and structural oppression of homophobia, ableism and anti-Black racism

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Heggstad, ‘Bring Your Tamagotchis Up Gay.’

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Wasiak, Cabak, ‘Retro-programming.’

<sup>31</sup> Heggstad, ‘Bring Your Tamagotchis Up Gay.’

<sup>32</sup> Dolan, Bailey, ‘Ghastly Graphics.’

in favour of a playful and positively framed nerd identity. Forester's study reminds us that nostalgia is not neutral, and may instead work to "downplay the intensity of racist, heterosexist, and ableist marginalization at the time, arguably in order to make the nostalgia in the show accessible to the largest group of consumers possible."<sup>33</sup>

Such interplay is reflective of the contradictions of digital media itself, with Heggstad's article on the queer technologies, reminding us that "the internet has given rise to new forms of queer visibility, but it has also introduced new modes of regulation and censorship."<sup>34</sup> Whilst, when considering the contested implications of race, class and colonial history of Dark Academia, López Millán considers, "Dark Academia's dual nature as both accessible and empowering, and potentially exclusionary and alienating."<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in my own study of the nostalgic readership of American editor Jane Pratt, from her 1990s teen print magazine *Sassy*, to her willfully contentious 2010s website, *xoJane*, tensions of first person online recollection and digitally mediated childhood nostalgia are actively centered. This is in order to understand both the "limits of American feminist confessional cultures in regard to issues pertaining to race and class" and "the brittle relationship between the receding memory of an idealistic print girlhood, and the noisy reality of digital womanhood."<sup>36</sup>

In recognising the haziness of these pop cultural memories, and the centrality of their audiences ever changing revisions and retellings, I recognise that no single issue could offer a full stop to such nostalgic creative communities. Instead, to return to Wells, I hope the nostalgic media studies and creative

---

<sup>33</sup> Perceville Forester, 'Who're You Calling a Nerd?: How Identity, Marketability, and Nostalgia Impact Depictions of the 1980s in *Stranger Things*', Nostalgia and Technology Special Issue, *International Journal Of Creative Media Research*, 2023.

<sup>34</sup> Heggstad, 'Bring Your Tamagotchis Up Gay.'

<sup>35</sup> López Millán, 'The Dark Academia aesthetic.'

<sup>36</sup> Bethany Rose Lamont, 'Hazy Pop Cultural Memories: An Analysis of the Shifting Reader Reception Towards the Prosumer Publishing of Jane Pratt from *Sassy Magazine* (1988-1996) to *xoJane* (2011-2016)', Nostalgia and Technology Special Issue, *International Journal Of Creative Media Research*, 2023.



journeys presented in this issue, may be a catalyst to your own sentimental journey, in order to “take it, fill it, in order to feel it.”<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Charlotte Wells, ‘A Note From Charlotte Wells.’