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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

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Memory, Autofiction, and Identity in Video Games: The Case of *Looking Back*. An Interview with Kristopher Poulin-Thibault

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Abstract

Indie developer Kristopher Poulin-Thibault speaks with Samuel Poirier-Poulin (no relation) about the creation of the video game *Looking Back*. The interview starts with a brief discussion about the RPG genre and quickly moves toward a broader discussion about autofiction, trauma, time, memory, retro games, and language. Poulin-Thibault reflects on the interconnectedness of these topics and their influence on identity construction.

Author Keywords

Video games; memory; autofiction; identity; trauma; mental health; language; indie games; indie developers; *Looking Back*.

Résumé

Le concepteur indépendant Kristopher Poulin-Thibault parle avec Samuel Poirier-Poulin (aucun lien de parenté) de la création du jeu vidéo *Looking Back*. L'entrevue débute avec une brève discussion sur le genre RPG et se transforme rapidement en une discussion plus large sur l'autofiction, le trauma, le temps, la mémoire, les jeux vidéo rétro et les langues. Poulin-Thibault réfléchit sur le lien qui unit ces sujets et sur leur influence sur la construction identitaire.

Mots-clés de l'auteur

Jeux vidéo ; mémoire ; autofiction ; identité ; trauma ; santé mentale ; langues ; jeux vidéo indépendants ; concepteurs indépendants ; *Looking Back*.

The Premise

It was in mid-July 2019. I was sitting in my room, reading papers about game design. I took a break, went online, and ended up on the Facebook page of *Looking Back* (2019), a video game designed by Kristopher Poulin-Thibault (no relation). I had been following the development of the game for several months, and it was now close to being released. I had met Kristopher before, during a reading circle on video games that I was organizing. Kristopher is an independent game developer, a French as a Second Language teacher, and a PhD candidate in comparative literature at the University of Toronto. His research focuses on the reconstruction and representation of identity after trauma in autobiographical texts, and on text-image relationships. The game looked promising. I asked Kristopher about the possibility of an interview. I plunged into his game, and one month later, we were having a great discussion about memory, autofiction, and identity in video games, and in *Looking Back* more specifically.

The Meeting¹

Samuel Poirier-Poulin: Hi Kristopher, thanks for accepting to talk about *Looking Back* today. It really is an amazing game that stays with you as a player afterward and that keeps you thinking and “feeling.” I was thinking that we could talk more about the creation of the game first (the creative process), and then more about its content and its main themes.

Kristopher Poulin-Thibault: Sure.

Creating Looking Back: Autofiction, Trauma, and Video Games

S: To begin with, could you describe briefly what *Looking Back* is about?

K: *Looking Back* is halfway between a visual novel and an exploration/RPG game. The purpose of the game is to defeat your thesis. For me, it was very much an appropriation of the RPG format. The game looks like an RPG but is really not that much of one: there are not many fights, there is no such thing as the fantasy theme, wizards and knights. It is very modern and realistic in a graduate student sort of state of mind (see Figure 1). It was also about including the theme of memory, which is something I work on for my thesis and that plays well with the video game medium. I found the idea of putting triggers around the city interesting, and I wanted to play with this idea; then the world just came about by itself.



Figure 1: Kris is about to take a break after having written four pages of their PhD thesis.

S: You just mentioned that your game is inspired by the RPG genre, and you really used the word “appropriation”—you do not try to hide it, you do not talk about re-appropriation. What pushed you to use the RPG genre, and why do you use the word “appropriation” uh... so... [Laugh.]

K: Shamelessly? [Laugh.]

S: Yes. [Laugh.]

K: I used that genre because for me it is very nostalgic. I grew up playing those games—games that had this graphic style and this levelling up system. These things are really close to my heart. For me, it was once again a way to play with the idea of memory and giving it a more modern twist because that genre, in my opinion, has not evolved that much in the last twenty years or so. Of course, the graphics have become better, but it is still very much the same basics, with the idea of grinding on monsters to gain experience, leveling up your attack, your magic, finding weapons, etc. I just wanted to make it my own and adapt it to real life, or at least, to my real life.

S: When did you start working on this game and what pushed you to create this game? Was it a way to make it through your PhD?

K: In a way yes! But what initially triggered this idea was a conference about three years ago. I presented a paper, and it was my first time really talking about video games and analyzing video games in a more serious manner—I work on literature usually. I wanted to make this presentation a bit more fun. I knew the person who was organizing the conference. The topic was Alzheimer’s disease and memory loss in fiction, and I discussed a game called *To the Moon* (Freebird Games, 2011)...

S: That is the conference we see in your game, right?

K: Yes, actually! Yes, yes! Exactly! I included this one moment in *Looking Back*. As I was giving the talk, I realized that not many games explore the theme of memory in a deeper manner. There are tons of books and movies that really talk about memory and memory loss, but games, not so much. Then I started toying with the idea of creating my own game. At first, I did it just for fun, to see if concepts would translate well into video games. I started toying around with different game-making programs, and maybe after one year or so, I realized that this was getting bigger and bigger—I had not even realized how big it was actually getting. I decided to make it a bit more serious, thinking about maybe distributing the game.

S: Your game deals with a lot of heavy topics (anxiety, depression, death, mourning, suicide, abusive relationship) that are mostly related to past traumatic experiences. At the same time, a big part of the game is a negotiation between looking back and looking forward. During a conference (the conference you mentioned), Kris, the protagonist, says: “video games represent memory loss not as a time bomb, a destructive force in other mediums, but rather as a blank canvas, a space of agency for one to recreate and re-create oneself.” Was *Looking Back* a way for you to recreate/re-create your past to look forward?

K: Oh yes, it was, definitely. You put it in a really nice way, that is pretty much exactly what it was for me. I talk about the theme of identity a lot in that game in conjunction with memory, so basically, how memories shape your identity, but also how memories are dynamic. Whenever you explore and re-explore memories, whether it is in the game or in real life, it is never the same memory. As soon as you explore it in your mind once again, the memory is different in hindsight because of the knowledge and everything you have acquired. For me, identity is dynamic because memories are dynamic, and memories are the foundation of identity. I talk about this in my game. Just the game-making process itself made me re-explore these memories in a lot of depth, and doing that recreated how I am as a person for sure.

S: I would like to talk a bit more about the relationship between your game and autofiction, a genre mostly associated with literature. Why did you use autofiction to tell this story/your story (rather than having another protagonist who would have lived similar experiences)?

K: [Laugh.] At first, I did not mean to share this game to anyone, except maybe a few friends at some point, so I just made myself as a character, my dog, a few friends. I thought it would be a good way to talk about myself without thinking about the audience or marketing aspects. I was just making that for fun and for the experience. As I was making the game, it just became this really big thing, and it was a little too late to go back and change everything. My character was just there by default, but I did not really plan to be there in the first place, but then I just started owning it.

In my thesis, I work on autobiography, so I thought it would be an interesting bridge between autofiction and video games. I use “autofiction,” but there are a lot of critical discussions about the term: “autobiographical stories,” “autofictional stories,” “life writings,” “memoirs,” etc. The term “autofiction” emphasizes more the idea of fiction than the other terms, and that was important for me. I often argue at conferences that video game is the artistic medium that offers

the most agency to its audience, the players, rather than the creators themselves. Mixing autofiction and video games was a way for me to emphasize the idea that, although this is initially my story, now that the story is out there and that you are the one playing it, it is your story, it is not mine anymore, especially because it is a choices-matter game. The player influences the story and makes the story go in different ways that I did not actually go through because of their input. It was a way to accentuate that as well, to shift the weight from me to the player.

S: As a player, I felt that Kris was more “accessible” and that I could empathize with them more than when I read autofiction. Do you think autofiction in video games works differently than in literature?

K: Oh yes, most definitely. Literature, no matter how you look at it, does not offer the same level of agency to the reader than the game does to the player, and this is very clear to me at least (even though there are some books in which you are the hero, the “choose your own adventure” kind of book). I am glad to hear that Kris was more accessible; that is something I was aiming for. I made all my characters “genderless” for different reasons, but one of those reasons was to make it possible for the player to really immerse themselves into the protagonist and into the other characters without the gender boundary. The only exceptions are because they were inevitable: the mom, the grandma, and the dad; that was too hard to avoid, but everyone else is “genderless.”

S: Autofiction is often criticized by its detractors for being narcissistic, “the writing of the self” (“l’écriture du moi”). In *L’espèce fabulatrice* (*The Tale-tellers*, 2008), Nancy Huston emphasizes that she is a novelist, a “raconteuse,” that she “tells” stories and writes about other people. She argues that fictive characters are necessary to allow the reader to empathize with these characters. For her, this is not possible with autofiction. Do you agree with this statement? What do you think of this “écriture du moi” kind of critique?

K: Autofiction is something that I do not only work on in my thesis, but something that I have always enjoyed, and this is why I decided to work on that in the first place. I completely respect Huston, I think she is a wonderful writer, but I respectfully disagree with her. Personally, I empathize more when I know that the story comes from a real place, when a writer is opening up to the reader directly and without the veil of fiction. It might have been fictionalized, as all stories are, in my opinion. Even when you try to be as faithful to the reality and as objective as possible, I think there is always a part of fiction, that is unavoidable. Just knowing as a reader that parts of the story are based on a personal experience makes me empathize more, so I would actually argue the opposite, though of course that is my own subjective experience with autobiography. I do not consider narcissistic to share your life experience, unless you try to depict yourself as a hero or to show off your accomplishments. On the contrary, I talk mostly about my weaknesses, my struggles, and my shortcomings in *Looking Back*, and that I think is what players empathize with, a lot more than they would in a fictional game with a valiant knight or a pretty princess.

S: I followed the development of your game on Facebook, and I was surprised to see that you were progressively introducing some characters of the game and tagging the name of the people who inspired these characters. Why did you decide to do so?

K: I asked each person for permission to tag them, to make sure no one would be uncomfortable. The first reason why I did that was to build a hype around the release of the game, but I did it also because the people in the game are not only important in my own life but also in the process of building your identity. I feel that each of these people represents a part of me, and this is why I picked these people: not necessarily because they are my best friends or because I love them more, but more so because I feel that each of them connects to my own identity in a certain way. For instance, I chose to put Irin, the dancer, because I did ballet for six years and JML, the politician, because I have done some activist work. Each of these characters represents a part of me.

In a previous paper I presented, I argued that the way writers build their identity in autobiographical works is often through the creation of characters, and these characters come to form a mosaic of the writer's identity in the autobiographical space. I really wanted to put the emphasis on the characters around Kris and leave more empty space into Kris for the player to insert themselves. Kris is more malleable and changes depending on your decisions. As you were saying, there is a danger of having a more narcissistic approach when you write your own life story, and I think that putting more emphasis and underlining the role of others around you is a way to shift from that a little bit at least, as well as having the player embody the protagonist. It becomes more of a dialogue between the player and me rather than just my own monologue.

Plunging Deeper into Looking Back: Time, Memory, and Identity

S: *Looking Back* talks about time and memory. Every time the player explores past memories (good memories, bad memories, and even traumatic events), they get a Memory Shard that can be later used to dream. Exploring the past always costs Mental Health and can be rewarding or very costly. Can you talk a bit more about these game mechanics and what pushed you to use memory and dreams as central elements to your game?

K: I titled the game "Looking Back" because memory is really an essential part of the game; the idea of inserting my own life as a grad student came after actually. As a player, you can avoid exploring the memories, and you can succeed in the game without exploring them. That was important to me: to let the player opt out. During the memories, the game often asks the player if they want to explore this memory further. The player can choose to say "no," and that is totally fine because I am aware that some of these memories can be triggering in a bad way for some players.

I wanted there to be a cost as well because when you get lost in this sort of stream of thoughts, of memories, when you start thinking, sometimes it can be very damaging to yourself (you sort of spiral down). This is the whole idea of post-traumatic syndrome I guess, where you just keep getting constantly reminded of past events. But I also wanted there to be a reward to exploring memories, even if it is costly. Sometimes, you are not going to get any stats or bonuses from the memory, but at least you will get the Memory Shard, and with the Memory Shard, maybe you will get other valuable stuff. It is always a possibility, just like memories are unpredictable; you

never really know where they are going to take you when you start exploring them or thinking about them and other paths your life could have taken if you had chosen to say or do something different.

S: I agree with you, but then why when we are dreaming in the game, we have the choice to make one dream more than another based on their titles?

K: Yes, but then again, the titles can be misleading; I did that on purpose. The title “A Dream About the Future,” for instance, could be very positive or very negative, or in-between, but it is actually positive. A lot of dreams are quite depressing to be honest, but I tried to include a strange, very out-of-this-world aura to them that really tried to shift away from the darker themes. In contrast with the memories (which I tried to make as faithful to reality as possible), when you know that it is a dream and when it is not realistic at all, I feel that the difficult or sad elements are not as heavy. But I did try to represent a spectrum of emotions within the dreams; a couple of dreams are very, very dark, but a couple of them are also very positive.

S: *Looking Back* is also a critique of academia. I feel that there are two main elements that you address in your game: the first one is related to education and capitalism, high tuition fees; and the second one is related to the power dynamic between young researchers/PhD students and professors. Can you talk a bit more about that in relation with the symbol of the casino and the final bosses of the game?

K: Yes. [Laugh.] At first, I did not want to spoil that the final boss is not actually the thesis because the way I framed the game (or advertised the game) was that the thesis is the ultimate boss monster. But once you have defeated the thesis, you realize that you still have to accomplish a few things to finish the game. This comes a bit as a surprise to the player. After the thesis, there is the defence, and you have to go through each individual committee member once (three people), and then all the committee members together at the end (see Figure 2). Before fighting them all at once, there is this sort of recap of different important decisions you made throughout the game, including your most important relationships with allies, who come to defend you in a similar way that you have to defend your thesis. I thought that this was a nice way to make everything come together, but also, as you mentioned, a way to criticize the power dynamic within academia.



Figure 2: Helped by their friends, Kris must defend their thesis against their PhD committee.

While the thesis is very daunting, very scary, it is imposed by these people, and they are the ones who attack the thesis that you produce. Even the term itself; it is striking that you really have to “defend” your work, it is a warlike vocabulary. My game is definitely a critique of that. The fights represent how harmful academia is to grad students’ mental health. Every time the thesis and the committee members attack you, every time something happens, you lose more Mental Health, and you have to be the one finding a way to increase it constantly, whether it is with your allies that heal you or other ways.

The casino and the other things... You know, there are many little critiques inserted in different places, and this is definitely a way to critique academia and society in general. I also tried to phrase it in a certain way to give players an option as well. For instance, two characters embody this socio-political critique yet give choices: Trisitu, the leftist, very staunch activist; and Vimorib, the more capitalistic character, not necessarily in a bad way, but more so in a sort of “I’ll pretend that I am happy with those things, get over it, and once I am in a position of power, then I will make changes.” These are two perspectives that are clashing inside me as well. In a way, I just want to fake it, survive, and be done with it, but in another way, there are things that just do not sit well with me, and I have to speak up about them and fight them when I can. These characters were a way to include the two perspectives at the same time while making the player choose one or the other, or in-between (although if you want to end up with one of those characters in a relationship, you have to pick a side).

S: A segment that I found hilarious, but that is also very cynical, is during the conference scene, when after your presentation, this researcher tells you that they have published “many articles on related topics” and that their “long experience shows that you’re wrong.” [Laugh.]

K: [Laugh.] I am glad that you explored it because this memory is actually one of the memories that you might not have access to. There are a couple of memories like that.

S: Despite the presence of bad memories, nightmares, and the pressure of a—let’s say it—very rude PhD committee, I felt that the game had a comforting atmosphere, with characters that tell you things like “hey cutie” or “hey love.” Can you talk a bit about the atmosphere of the game and the presence of familiar buildings?

K: Because the game is autofictional, I felt it was important to have not only characters, but also places that are real, grounded in real life, and that people could recognize. Most players do not know me personally, of course, but they know the places, and they may empathize more with the characters or immerse themselves more because of that. Even if the players are not from Toronto [the city in which the game takes place], by knowing that it is Toronto, they can look up the places, and see that it is actually real, so it has that effect (see Figure 3).

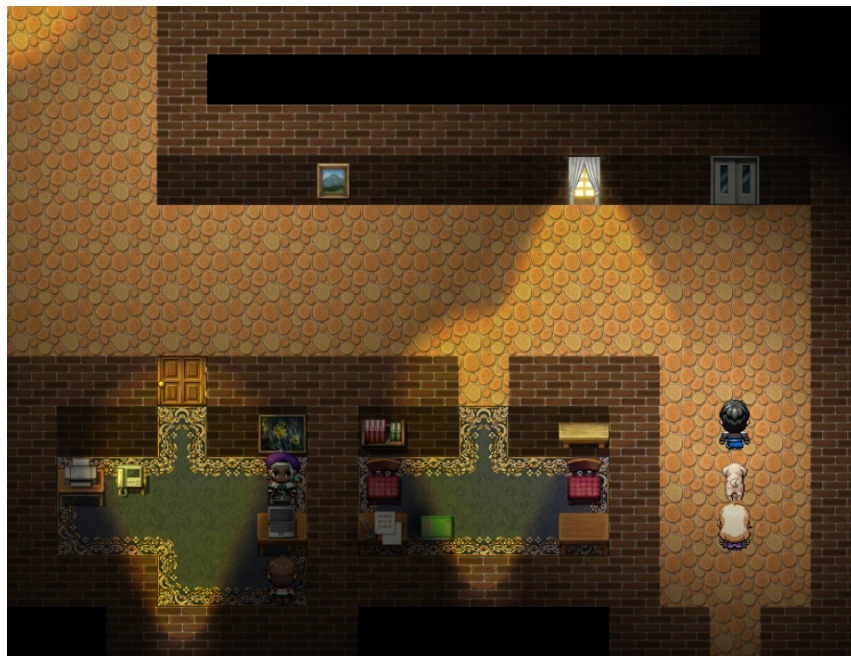


Figure 3: *The Centre for Comparative Literature, University of Toronto.*

Regarding the atmosphere, as I was making the game and exploring my own memories, going through some of the trauma as well, I realized that the game was sometimes a bit dark, so I tried as much as I could to balance it out with comedy and more lighthearted elements. That is what real life is to me, as cliché as it might sound, there is the dark, but there is also the light, and it is always an oscillation between the two. You do not know what is going to come next actually in the game when you explore memories. You find a trigger and you have to take a chance or not, it is up to you. When you start exploring, some memories start lighthearted and get a bit darker, for instance the teaching memory; others start dark, but end up being very empowering or have a good resolution to them. It was a balance that I wanted to emulate as a developer, but also as a person. I try to find comfort in the little things, in the game and in life, whether it is a cute line that a stranger says, a funny pun, having a dog as pet follow you around, a *Dungeons & Dragons* memory... I think it all contributes in creating a pseudo-realistic atmosphere.

S: The general form of the game—the character design, the music, and some cute and naive conversations (about Princess Peach or with the girl drawing a Jigglypuff)—reminded me of the first *Pokémon* games and made me nostalgic. Am I wrong, or there is a *Pokémon* feel to your game?

K: No, you are not wrong at all. There are even *Pokémon* references as you mentioned, and there are also a few little references here and there to many retro video games: references to *Sonic*, *Zelda*, *Mario*, *Mortal Kombat*; all of those games I grew up with and that are really part of me. The *Pokémon* feel is really from the J-RPG style, the sort of top-down 2.5-dimension style, and even the fights. It is reminiscent, of course, of games like *Final Fantasy*, *Chrono Trigger*, and that kind of stuff, but *Pokémon* also had a similar fighting style. It is partially on purpose and partially because *Pokémon* adopted a J-RPG style.

S: You mentioned that your game was inspired by video games you were playing when you were a kid, and at one point in the game, Kris can get tattooed one of their favourite video game characters. Later on, they say to Amel: “I would not be who I am without the games I played.” It was the first time I heard this expression applied to video games, this relationship between video games and identity. Can you elaborate a bit more on that?

K: Actually, it is interesting that you brought up this quote because it is one of the quotes I did not think so much about. Some of the quotes in the game are the results of my research: I took them textually from papers I wrote, so there is a lot of thought behind them. But this quote is not even something I had thought about, it is just something that came out of me naturally because I truly think so. I guess musicians could say the same about the songs they listened to when they were kids, or readers about the books they read as children. For me, it is the same with video games. I grew up with them, they were a part of my daily life. Video game characters were my friends, as we see in one of the childhood memories. If you read one of the letters, it says that as a child, my best friends were Mario and Luigi. You know, they were really close to me. I think you can feel that throughout the whole game as well. I do not hesitate to make direct references to all of those games; it is a way to honour them and thank them in a certain way.

S: Your game contains a lot of inspiring quotes and dialogues. Another quote that I found very powerful is the one about Jean Grey, when Kris talks with a little girl and she says: “My favourite is Jean Grey. She’s so strong and intelligent! I wanna be her! Except I don’t wanna die all the time.” And she continues:

You constantly remember Phoenix, Scott. And Madelyne Pryor. There are all these negative images of women who you thought were me at various times, and all their memories are marching around your mind wearing this outfit. But I’m here with you, I’m standing right in front of you, and I’m tired of their ghosts. I claimed the name “Phoenix” as part of a plan to claim this identity. To empower myself. I’m tired of suppressing my abilities just because I’m afraid that exploring them might upset you.

Where is this quote from and why was it important for you to incorporate it in your game?

K: This is one of my very favourite quotes as well. That is why it is long, and I still wanted to include it. It was important for me, and I think it speaks to broader themes that I explore in the game. It is from one of the *X-Men* comics [see Seagle, 1998]. Jean has always been one of my favourite X-Men, I have always felt a connection to her and found the symbol of the Phoenix very powerful, especially in relation to identity, memories, constructing yourself. Ultimately, *Looking Back* is about constructing an identity for the protagonist by making choices, exploring memories, and I feel that the Phoenix embodies that as well and so does the character of Jean Grey. She constantly dies but comes back, and there are expectations to be a certain way by everyone else because of how she used to be, but ultimately, she is just trying to be herself, whoever that is at that moment. And who she is keeps changing, who we all are keeps changing, and we all feel constrained by our previous selves.

S: I feel you have talked a lot about identity during this interview and this is something definitely important in your game, so I would like to conclude this interview by talking a bit more about the role of language in your game related to identity. There is a banner in Kris's apartment, and when Kris looks at it, they say: "I keep forgetting why I put this banner up... I need to remember, somehow..." I know that you are currently learning Mohawk, and a short segment of the game focuses on your Mohawk ancestry. This part is entirely in Mohawk, without any translation (see Figure 4). Why was it important for you to have this part entirely in Mohawk?



Figure 4: Kris is rediscovering their Mohawk ancestry.

K: First of all, it was a way to talk about your own roots, your own background, as something you do not control. You do not choose to be born a certain nationality or speaking a certain language: it just happens. The inclusion of that banner was a way to say that there are things you do not control and do not even see or understand that are part of your identity, part of your intimate space. If you go back to that banner in the apartment after having explored the Mohawk area, something different happens: you finally remember your invisible roots.

As for the choice to leave that segment of the game in Mohawk, it was a way to represent the lack of understanding of my own heritage and perhaps of everyone's heritage in general. There are even choices you have to make in that segment without knowing what you are choosing. They will influence the game without your knowing. You do not really get to choose in the end because I assume that the vast majority of players does not speak Mohawk, and that is fine, that is what I was looking for: you do not get to choose where you are from or what your nationality is. You just have to guess and try to make sense of it after the fact. After choosing, the game tells you in English, "oh, you acquired the banner of the wolf, or the banner of the turtle, or the banner of the bear." Then you realize that it is what you chose, and you have to accept it and live with it, and understand that it is who you are now. It was a way to include this concept in the game through the choices-matter aspect. By leaving it in Mohawk, I also avoid representing this culture with the language of the colonizer. So I did my best to do this language and this culture justice, with my very limited knowledge of the language—I do not speak Mohawk fluently, but I am learning it and improved my knowledge of it through the years of working on the game.

S: Can you talk a bit about your choice of creating your game in English, while still incorporating elements of French?

K: The elements of French are mostly related to whenever I am teaching—I teach French in Toronto. In Toronto, my life happens all in English, except whenever I teach, so it was a way to remain faithful to that, but also because English in the world of video games reaches a lot more people than French.

S: But there is also something interesting when Izil starts reading the poem "Beat My Heart" in French. They do not do that on purpose in the game, but as a game developer, you created that part on purpose, you made Izil read the poem in French, right?

K: (Laugh.) Yeah, yeah, that is a good catch for sure! That is a poem that I actually wrote, it is one of my own poems, and Izil is the poet, and they represent a part of me that I wanted to put forward through that character. It is a poem that I first wrote in French, and then in English, so I decided to include a bit of both in there. There is also the character of Harrinsky, who is a polyglot and makes references to other languages. Learning languages has been part of my life for as long as I can remember. I did my bachelor's in modern languages, I have lived overseas and always had a huge interest in linguistics, so it was important for me to incorporate this passion of mine in my game as well.

S: Thank you Kristopher. It was a pleasure to have this discussion with you. Is there any question you would like me to ask you?

K: Nothing that I can think of. Thank you so much for playing my game and for the interview, it was wonderful!

Conclusion

As I finished my interview with Kristopher, I realized that *Looking Back* could be situated within a larger body of work on autobiographical games, especially among indie game developers and

multimedia artists. The first game that comes to mind is Mattie Brice's *Mainichi* (2012a), a game in which the player plays as a trans woman of colour and goes for coffee with her friend. According to Brice (2012b), one of her goals with this game was to make space for the "hyper-personal" and to break with the tendency to use video games to talk about universal experiences. In that sense, *Looking Back* is reminiscent of *Mainichi*: it gives space to everyday life and to the personal experience of the author. *Looking Back* can also be put into conversation with the emerging scholarship on autobiographical video games and "self-care, self-understanding, and therapy" (Danilovic, 2018, p. ii). As part of her doctoral thesis, Sandra Danilovic (2018) organized the Autopathographical Game Jam, i.e., a jam during which game designers with disability, mental illness, and emotional trauma came to create games with an "autobiographical narrative of illness and disability" (p. ii). Just like the creation of *Looking Back* was for Kristopher a way to work through past traumatic events to look forward, Danilovic shows that autopathographical game design plays a crucial role in the healing process of game jam participants. Lastly, the relationship between identity, memory, and language has recently been explored by Chad Comeau in *Clarevoyance* (2019), a game in which the player gets to know the Acadian community of Clare (Baie Sainte-Marie), in Nova Scotia. While the game is not autobiographical *per se*, a central part of the project was to collaborate with members of the community of Clare, record their voices, and let them participate "in their own language, in the way that they would talk at home" (Comeau, cited in CBC Radio, 2019). As Comeau notes, the game is a way to keep alive the centuries-old myths of the region and legitimize Acadian French (CBC Radio, 2019).

These autobiographical works all show in their respective ways that video games represent "a blank canvas, a space of agency for one to recreate and re-create oneself" (Poulin-Thibault, 2019). In *Looking Back*, Kristopher explores this potential by reflecting on autofiction, trauma, time, memory, retro games, and language. While I was not sure about the interconnectedness of these topics at the beginning of the interview, Kristopher nicely showed that they all contribute to the construction of his identity.

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¹ The interview has been lightly edited for clarity.