The triple interpretive spaces of otome games: Taking Light and Night as an example

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Abstract

In the digital - intelligent era, otome games create a simulated love experience that combines "immersion" and "interaction", forming complex and diverse interpretive spaces. Taking Light and Night as the research object, its interpretive space can be divided into three levels: "Dasein", "Mitsein", and "public". The interpretive spaces of "Dasein" and "Mitsein" interact with each other, and the rationalization principle of the "public" interpretive space ensures the orderly construction of the entire interpretive system. In - depth study of these three - fold interpretive spaces helps to comprehensively understand the value and significance of otome games in contemporary culture.

Keywords : Otome games; Interpretive spaces; Light and Night

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Introduction

The Space of "Dasein": Individual Imagination and Immersive Interactive Experience

In the digital - intelligent era, otome games present multi - modal and multi - media narratives. Taking Light and Night as an example, its narrative is generated in a simulated manner. Players, as "Dasein", have a generative understanding of the narrative. Players pursue love subjectivity and personalization in the game and achieve self - understanding through imagination. This process relies on the dual construction of "immersive poetics" and "interactive poetics", with "immersive poetics" providing an immersive space and "interactive poetics" enhancing interactivity.Together, they promote players' imagination, enabling players to obtain unique emotional experiences in the game and achieve a transformation from a passive to an active role.

The digital - intelligent era is a new economic era characterized by digitalization and intelligence. With the in - depth development of this era, the text narratives of video games exhibit multi - modal and multi - media characteristics. "Modality" refers to the semiotic resources for meaning production. Images, texts, music, etc. in video games are all manifestations of it. "Multi - media" means the use of multiple media for narrative. As a product of the digital - intelligent era, the textual narrative of otome games is an interweaving of multi - media and multi - modality. Otome games represented by Light and Night have the characteristic of simulated narrative generation. The narrative texts in the game are not in a fixed and completed state but need to be generated by players through practice. Even the main - line narrative is presented through the embodied interaction of players' fingers, while side - line narratives and specific card - based narratives construct overlapping narratives like puzzles.If the main - line world is regarded as the real world, then other narrative texts are possible alternative worlds. This stack - type narrative nested structure shows fictional, developing, and generative narrativity, making the understanding of game narratives by "Dasein" present a dynamic, flowing, and constantly - generating characteristic.

Essentially, the interpretation of otome games by "Dasein" is an imaginative creation. Paul Ricoeur elaborated, in his theory, on the important creative function of imagination in the narrative process.. He proposed the concepts of "prefiguration", "configuration", and "refiguration" in narrative. The imagination of "Dasein" is mainly reflected in the "refiguration" stage. In this stage, the player's personal horizon and the game's text horizon collide and converge, and finally, horizon - fusion is achieved. Through this fusion, players can endow the game narrative with new meanings by virtue of their imagination and achieve the "appropriation" of the meaning of the game text. Here, "appropriation" does not mean physical possession but a spiritual understanding and creation. Players integrate their emotions, experiences, and cognitions into the game text through imagination, making it a part of their unique experiences. The game text itself has the characteristic of openness, which provides a broad space for players' imagination. As Paul Ricoeur put it, only by losing oneself as a reader can one discover who one truly is. It is the reader who guides one into the realm of one's imaginative transformation. The transformation of the context that exerts an influence is, in essence, the transformative impact of the self. When players face game texts full of possibilities, fluidity, and awaiting generation, they lose themselves, constantly break through their original cognitive limitations, and then rely on their rich imaginations to explore and construct their own interpretive spaces in the game narrative.

Through imaginative creation, players make the game narrative a carrier of their unique emotional experiences. The emotional understanding of "Dasein" is the core way to reveal the interpretive meaning of otome games. The narrative

environment constructed by otome games is like a unique time - space journey. Players, different from those in the passive viewing mode of traditional linear experiences, can deeply integrate into the game through the interaction between their fingers and the screen. They can personally experience the emotional changes in it, transform from passive viewers to active participants, and gain a unique emotional experience. Contemporary women actively pursue emotional subjectivity in otome games, firmly take control of the emotional development, give full play to their creativity to add unique colors to their love stories, and persistently pursue personalization, writing unique emotional chapters in the virtual world. This is a unique imaginative understanding of otome game narratives by women, vividly demonstrating their strong pursuit of subjectivity, creativity, and personalization in emotions.

The emotional interpretive meaning of "Dasein" in otome games is closely related to individual imagination, which is inseparable from the dual construction of "immersive poetics" and "interactive poetics". On the one hand, there is the construction of "immersive poetics". The narrative texts in otome games must provide a space for players to immerse themselves in. Players need to immerse themselves in the game narrative, believe that everything is true, and then start to imagine. Therefore, immersive poetics is the premise for constructing imagination.On the other hand, there is the construction of interactive poetics. As love - simulation games, otome games require interactivity, and the imagination of "Dasein" must unfold in interactive poetics. Light and Night has set up simulation communication systems such as mobile phone calls, real - time text message chats, and friend circles. On special festivals such as the Mid - Autumn Festival, Spring Festival, Valentine's Day, or the player's birthday, the male characters will talk to the players through the mobile phones in the game. They can even make a real - world call across the dimensional wall through the player's bound mobile phone number. The high degree of interactivity enables the imagination of "Dasein" to unfold better.

In the interpretive space of "Dasein" in otome games, "Dasein" explores itself in the simulated and generated narrative through imagination and generates in - depth emotional experiences through immersive interaction. When "Dasein" moves towards "Mitsein", it ushers in the second - level interpretive space of otome games, that is, the interpretive space of "Mitsein".

The Realm of "Mitsein": Collision of Multiple Discourses and Practical Influences

Heidegger regarded "Mitsein" as the basic structure of "Dasein"'s existence, emphasizing that "Dasein" exists together with others in the world. "The being of Dasein is being - with" and "The solitude of Dasein is also being - with in the world", revealing the interdependent co - existence relationship between the self and others. Gadamer further expanded the connotation of "Mitsein" by understanding it as participation, endowing "Mitsein" with a richer meaning.In the context of otome games, from Dasein to Mitsein, it means that players move from the individual to the group and try to seek self - identification and value confirmation in the public space.

From the dimension of online interaction, the interpretive discourses of "Dasein" in otome games do not exist in isolation but are intertwined and influence each other with the interpretive discourses of other "Dasein".

The Internet provides a broad platform for the "Mitsein" interpretation of otome games, with APPs such as Xiaohongshu, Weibo, and Douyin becoming the main places for players to express their views on games. Players directly share their opinions on game plots, characters, and other aspects, hoping to obtain understanding and recognition from others. For example, players will analyze the plot development of a certain chapter in Light and Night on Weibo or evaluate the character - building of a certain character and start discussions with other players.

At the same time, "fan narrative" presented in an aesthetic way is also an important form of online interactive interpretation. Creations such as fan fiction, fan comics, fan music, and Fan video editing have emerged in large numbers on platforms such as Bilibili, LOFTER, and AO3, and even spawned related occupations such as cosplayer commissions and language - cosplay teachers. These fan narratives express players' unique understandings of the game text through "modifications" or "expansions" of the game text. Moreover, the intertextual relationship between multiple fictional worlds greatly enriches the connotation of "Mitsein" interpretive discourses. However, this kind of creation needs to follow the principle of identity of the game text.For example, the situation of character setting collapse will trigger disputes among the player group. The interpretive discourses of "Mitsein" attempt to influence other "Dasein" through various forms of expression in this process, aiming to reach a consensus on the understanding of the game. This process needs to be carried out within a rational framework; otherwise, it is likely to cause chaos.

From the dimension of offline practice, the interpretation of "Mitsein" gradually extends from online discourse expressions to real - life behavioral practices.

The ideological and utopian concepts, proposed by Paul Ricoeur as social imaginaries, are clearly reflected in the offline practices of otome games. Some elements in the game form specific ideologies that influence players' consumption behaviors. For example,It has become a trend for players to pursue collecting all the cards. Some players, influenced by this, invest a large amount of money in purchasing card packs to collect more cards. This behavior not only drives game consumption but also forms a specific consumption culture within the player group. Co - branded activities related to otome games and the consumption of peripheral products are also important parts of offline practices. The prices of some co - branded products are much higher than their actual use value. However, players still purchase them out of their love for the game and emotional sustenance for virtual characters. Behind this consumption behavior lies the influence of commercial narrative discourses on players. They utilize the emotional resonance formed by players in the "Mitsein" interpretive space to tempt players to carry out consumption.

In addition, the "otome game self - shippers" phenomenon is a relatively extreme example in offline practices. "Otome game self - shipper" create self - designed characters and immerse themselves in emotional relationships with virtual characters. They extend the emotional experiences from the virtual world to a behavior pattern in real life, constructing a utopian fantasy

world of their own in reality. Some otome game dream girls regard the relationship between themselves and game characters as a unique and private emotional bond, showing strong exclusivity.They reject others' affection for the same character, believing that it will interfere with the uniqueness and purity of their emotions. They worry that in comparison with others, the depth of their emotions for the character will be weakened. At the same time, they fear that different interpretations of the character by others will deconstruct the idealized character image they have built in their personal fantasies. This vividly reflects the impact of the "Mitsein" interpretive space on players' practical actions.

The collision of multiple discourses and practices of "Dasein" forms the "realm of Mitsein", that is, the collision of multiple discourses and practices related to love among contemporary women. The "realm of Mitsein" also influences the construction of the "space of Dasein". In the limited - edition card plot "Everlasting Reunion" in Light and Night, the female protagonist spends a warm Spring Festival with Sariel at his home. At the end of the plot, Sariel asks her, "Did you come here to make me happy?" Instead of answering along his line of thought, the female protagonist replies, "I came for myself. Although there are various things, I also want to enjoy the reunion with Sariel." This response is not accidental. It is the result of the game developers fully considering the current players' pursuit of equal love for women. When creating the game text, they deeply integrated the players' expectations for equal love in their personal horizons with the game text horizon. The female protagonist's answer demonstrates women's independent consciousness and autonomous choices in romantic relationships, conforming to the concept of equal love for women advocated at the "Mitsein" level. It reflects that under the influence of the "Mitsein" interpretive discourses, game text creation actively absorbs players' personal horizons, which is a vivid manifestation of the discourse construction in the "realm of Dasein".

The "space of Dasein" and the "realm of Mitsein" form the hermeneutic circle, presenting a dynamic process of meaning generation. However, while the online space provides a broad space for the "Mitsein" interpretation, it also brings the risk of out - of - control interpretive boundaries. With the continuous expansion of the "Mitsein" interpretive realm, how to define and maintain the boundaries of otome game interpretations to ensure that the infinitely expanding meanings still have value has become an urgent problem to be solved.

The "Public" Dimension: Interpretive Construction under Rational Principles

In the research context of otome games, Zhang Jiang proposed that social interpretations, after going through a process of "washing and filtering", will eventually produce rational and clear public interpretations. This process promotes the hermeneutic cycle to expand from the dialogue between an individual and a text to the communication space among people, others, and society, realizing a transformation from an individual - experience - based cycle to a multi - directionally complex cycle. The interpretive space of otome games also needs to construct a rational public interpretive space through "washing and filtering" to avoid arbitrariness in interpretations. Taking Light and Night as an example, the construction of its rational public interpretive space involves multiple key aspects.

Individual interpretation is the foundation for constructing the public interpretive space and is restricted by various factors such as human sociality, the Mitsein of Dasein, collective experience, and national memory. For example, the third - anniversary theme of Light and Night, "Treading on Clouds to Journey to the West, Meeting Through All Ages", draws inspiration from Journey to the West. Players, based on their "pre - understanding" of this cultural tradition, will form expectation horizons such as "patriotic feelings and universal love" when interpreting this theme. This non - conscious and unconscious pre - understanding integrates the cultural, historical, and social norms in the interpreter's cognitive framework, demonstrating the public basis of individual interpretations.

When individual interpretations enter the public space, individuals express their will and opinions and strive for the recognition of others. With the role of public rationality, interpretations can reach a common understanding and finally form a basic consensus. How to extract rational public interpretive discourses from the complex and diverse individual interpretations is the key to constructing a rational public interpretive space.

On the one hand, the game text world has "inner transcendence", which limits the boundaries of game text interpretations. Public interpretations need to abide by the identity of game text interpretations. When fan works deviate excessively from the original work's settings, it will trigger "OOC" (Out Of Character) criticism from players. At the same time, public interpretations should endow the "events" in the game with a "meta - ontological" status, interpret those events that subvert the existing order and restart a new world, experience the events rather than just go through them, and thus construct an imagined practical behavior.

On the other hand, in the construction of the public interpretive space of otome games, following public rationality is crucial. In the aesthetic interpretation of otome games in the form of "fan narrative", some creators, in order to attract attention, make male characters engage in "yaoi" behavior. This violates the original intention of otome games to satisfy female players' romantic love experiences, undermines character settings and emotional logics, disrupts the normal communication based on game texts, and damages the orderliness of the public interpretive space. Game text narratives also cannot deviate from public rationality.

At the same time, public rationality is not static. The public rationality in public interpretations is a dynamic consensus generated in practice. Public interpretations have reflectivity and historicity. Horizontally, they are reflected in the mutual supplementation with individual interpretations, and vertically, they are reflected in continuous revision with historical progress. In the 2022 Qixi Festival limited - edition card plot "Gathering Scent in the Neon Night" of Light and Night, the male character Charlie Su, when facing a hidden camera, not only did not call the police but regarded it as a romantic interest between lovers and even wanted to buy the secretly - filmed video. This seriously violated the understanding of healthy romantic relationships and moral and legal norms. This deviation from public rationality triggered player resistance, and finally,

the game developers modified the plot, reflecting the regulation of public rationality on game texts and players' supervision of game texts.

Otome games, through diverse online platforms and rich offline activities, narrow the gap between game texts and players' lives, promoting the transformation of public rationality into practical levels. The promotional activities organized by the official side of Light and Night, such as the public - service video with Shanghai Traffic Police on traffic safety, the special linkage for World Book Day, and the special plan to assist rural revitalization, have played a positive role in guiding players to integrate public rationality into their real - life thinking. At the same time, the supplementation and enrichment of fan narratives in the public interpretive space enable un - contextualized norms to be practiced in more situations. Players, based on their understanding of the game and their own values, create fan works and re - create on the basis of following public rationality. This is also an embodiment of "interpretive consciousness", which enriches and develops public rationality in diverse practices.

In conclusion, the construction of the rational public interpretive space of the otome game Light and Night needs to start from individual interpretations, go through a process of refinement and transformation into public interpretations, rely on the interpretive consciousness of interpreters based on following the prescriptiveness of texts and public rationality, and implement public rationality through practice, so as to construct a healthy and orderly public interpretive space.

Conclusion

Otome games are cultural products of the digital - intelligent era, with rich and diverse interpretive spaces. From the individual imagination and immersive interaction of players at the "Dasein" level, to the collision of multiple discourses among players at the "Mitsein" level, and then to the construction of a rational interpretive space at the "public" level, these three parts progress in a step - by - step manner and influence each other. In the future, with technological progress and changes in players' demands, the narratives and interpretations of otome games will continue to be updated. We should continuously pay attention to their development, deeply study how to balance the relationship between the individual and the public, and between the virtual and the real based on public rationality, ensuring that otome games can not only meet players' emotional needs but also promote positive and healthy cultural exchanges and dissemination, so as to enable the interpretive spaces of otome games to develop better.

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