

A Study Based on Alienation Theory to Analyze Different Modes in Meta-Fictional Games

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Abstract

With the continuous development of the game field, the subdivision of game types is becoming more and more precise. There are also more and more games that draw on some achievements in other fields in their game design. Among them are meta-fiction games based on metafiction. This article will explore whether the combination of a meta-fiction game and a side-scrolling game with a unique visual experience is appropriate. If the side-scrolling game is the external form of the game, then the meta-fiction game is the internal content core of the game. The degree of fit between the external form and the internal core will undoubtedly determine the lower limit and upper limit of the game quality. Based on alienation theory, this article takes several highly rated side-scrolling games on the market as examples to conduct a theoretical analysis on the compatibility of side-scrolling games and metafiction games. The analysis results suggest that compared to first-person games, side-scrolling games with a unique third-person perspective have the best compatibility with meta-games.

Keywords: *Meta-fiction games, the fourth Wall, Side-scrolling Game, alienation effect*

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of the game field, the classification of games has become more and more diverse. Some game classifications are classified according to the core gameplay of the game, such as shooting games and puzzle games. Some game classifications are based on the perspective of the game player, such as first-person and third-person games. Some classifications are based on the core experience of the game, such as horror games. Of course, there are many other classification methods. These countless game types seem to be different categories, but there are also some connections between them. Just as shooters are often combined with first-person and third-person, horror games are often combined with puzzle solving. This article will discuss the combination between side-scrolling games and meta-fictional games. In addition to citing

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alienation theories, we will use some cases to compare and analyze them, and conclude that side scrolling is one of the most appropriate games when combined with meta-fiction games.

2. Meta-fiction Game and Side-Scrolling Game

2.1 Meta-Fiction Game

Meta-fictional games are a genre of games that tell stories based on meta-fictional narratives. This division of game types is based on the narrative characteristics of metafiction. Metafiction refers to works in which the characters in the novel regard the world (the virtual world) in which the characters in the novel live as fiction, or in other words, works that tell fictional stories. It is mainly used to raise questions or cause conflicts between the fictional events in the novel and the reader's reality, so as to arouse the reader's reflection and introspection.

It was William Gass who first proposed the concept of “meta-fictional” in “Fiction and People in Life”. He thinks If a character in a novel finds out that he is a character in a novel, or feels so mistreated that he decides to kill the novelist - in short, whenever the ‘fictional narrative/reality’ relationship is a subject of public discussion , the reader will be moved out of the normal interpretive framework. This theming of the narrative itself can be implicit rather than overt, and a story can then be understood as an allegory about storytelling. Although this concept was only proposed in 1970, novels with meta-fictional characteristics had already appeared as early as the 17th century, such as Don Quixote.

However, an analysis of metafiction reveals that one of the most obvious features of metafiction is that the authors write in the third person, not the first person. This is because the purpose is to allow the reader to read the novel in a relatively independent and calm state, rather than to allow the reader to bring themselves into the story during the reading process. If metafiction is written in the first person, the reader will be immersed in the story. In this state, the reader is the protagonist. When the characters in the story have conversations with the protagonist that have elements of metafiction, the player also The impact is difficult to feel, or the impact felt is weak. In the case of third-person writing, the reader will be in a relatively independent state. The reader clearly realizes that he and the characters in the novel are in two different worlds. In this state, the author uses a series of means to break the second world. Four walls, so that players can feel the impact and then feel the charm of this writing method.

With the emergence of games and the continuous development of the game field, more and more games begin to pay attention to the inner expression of the game, and more and more game developers begin to pay attention to how to tell a good story and bring players Think deeply, not just design games as a way of entertainment. At this time, metafiction, which can make readers deeply think about the relationship between reality and virtuality, has entered the vision of some game developers. Like metafiction, the world created by games is also a virtual world, and players are in the real world, which provides the possibility of combining metafiction with games.

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first-person game ‘Stanley Parable’ and the side-scrolling game ‘Inside’.



Fig 1. ‘Stanley Parable’

2.2 Side-Scrolling Games

Side-scrolling games are a timeless classic in the gaming world, adored by players, as illustrated in Figure 2. Their defining characteristic is the fixed plane viewing angle, allowing players to control characters solely in the up, down, left, and right directions. Unlike contemporary 3D games, side-scrolling games lack the freedom of three-dimensional movement and the ability to explore the game world from all angles. Players play these games as if they were an audience sitting in an auditorium watching the characters perform on the screen. When players play games, they are different from first-person games and VR games that emphasize immersion. They will be in a relatively independent state, and it is difficult for players to bring themselves into the world where the game characters are. Players always know clearly that the real world they live in and the virtual world their game avatar lives in are two completely different worlds. This characteristic is exactly what the alienation effect wants to achieve.



Fig 2. ‘Inside’

3. Alienation Theory

Since metafiction and metafiction games are narrative methods that allow players to think about the relationship between virtuality and reality in the process of watching novels or playing games, it is most appropriate to use alienation theory to analyze it.

The theory of alienation was proposed by Brecht. Its core is to prevent the audience from empathizing with the characters when watching the play, so that the audience will not be immersed in the virtual world on the stage. Instead, through a series of means, the audience can always clearly realize that they are in the real world,

and the world they live in is completely different from the virtual world on the stage, so that the audience can always watch the drama in a relatively rational state. Thus making dramatic criticism and aesthetic criticism. The most commonly used method is to tell the audience by breaking the fourth wall when the audience is immersed in the drama, there is a wall between us, we are in two different worlds, the most classic way is that the actors on the stage suddenly Jump out of theatrical performances to have a dialogue with the audience in the audience. And this method is also the core gameplay in the game Stanley Parable.

4. Case Study of Meta-fiction and Games

Below I will conduct a comparative analysis of three different types of metafiction games, trying to find the game type that is most compatible with metafiction.

4.1 Stanley Parable

This is a story about a man named Stanley. Stanley has been working in a small, airtight room as “Employee 427” in this office building. His job is to press buttons according to instructions on the computer screen. Until one day, no more messages were given on the computer screen. After waiting for a long time, Stanley finally decided to walk out of “Office Room 427”, which he had never left all year round, to see what was going on outside. The Stanley Parable is a first-person game. The player controls a character who can move around the room. At the same time, the player will also hear a narrator chattering in his ear, especially when encountering two doors. At this time, the narrator will ask you to choose one of the doors, but the player can You are free to choose, you do not have to listen to the narrator, and whether you listen to the narrator's instructions or not, the narrator will continue to chatter in your ear after you make your choice. And with choices made again and again, the game will develop towards different endings.

The meta-fictional nature of the game is reflected in the discussion of the game itself. With the different endings of the game, the specific content discussed is different, but there is one core, which is to discuss the contradiction between game designers and players. The content designed by game designers is within a certain range, and they even hope that players will play the game according to the ideas during game design. However, many players often want more freedom in the game. They don't want a narrator telling them what to do, they want to play the game on their own terms. In the game, if the player follows the narrator's instructions every time he makes a choice, the player will escape from the building. The ending is called "Freedom." But is this really freedom? Every choice made by the player is not a free choice, but is made according to the instructions of the narrator. It seems that the character controlled by the player has left the building and gained freedom, but is the player free during the game? And this is the meta-fictional quality of this work.

Different from traditional meta-fiction, meta-fiction mostly achieves the attribute of “meta” by causing the connection between the virtual world in the novel and the real world where the readers live. In general first-person games, because the player is in the first-person perspective, the player cannot clearly recognize the difference between reality and virtuality when playing the game, so the player cannot feel the difference and connection between virtuality and reality. of. But this game is different because it is very boring. Most of the time in the game is spent choosing different doors while listening to the narrator talking non-stop. Therefore, when the player is playing the game, the experience is not the same as the majority. The immersion that first-person games pursue is to play the game in order to see the results behind the choices and the final outcome. In this state, the player will not be immersed in the virtual world of the game, but will be in a relative state. The state of independent thinking is similar to the state under the alienation effect, so players can think in the

game and understand what the game wants to express when the game reaches its ending. But this approach is relatively difficult to replicate.

4.2 Inside

This is a side-scrolling game. The core of the game's story is to control the character to escape from a place. The plot is somewhat similar to *The Stanley Parable*. The game has no dialogue at all, as opposed to the constant chatter of dialogue in *The Stanley Parable*. There are two real climaxes in the story. First, the character controlled by the player destroys the equipment that can control other NPCs in the game and turns into a monster. At this time, when the character controlled by the player reaches a sandbox laboratory, he can discover the laboratory. The sandbox model in the game is exactly the same as the place where the character finally died. It turns out that the character never escaped from there. The second climax is the real reason why this game has the META attribute. When the player controls the character and unplugs the power of the machine that can control other NPCs, the player also loses control of the game character. At this time, the game character is truly Escaped inside. Only then will players be surprised to discover that they are the ones controlling this game world? It turns out that this character has always known that he is just a character in the game. He knows that the player and he are not in the same world, and he knows that the player is controlling him. Later, he took advantage of this and asked the player to help him break away from the player's control. At this moment virtuality and reality are connected.

Different from the previous two games, this game is a third-person horizontal version, and due to the side view of the horizontal version of the game, the distance between the player and the character is further widened. This game experience is completely different from the previous first-person games. It is somewhat similar to the narrative method in metafiction. It is a reading and game experience from a third-person perspective.

4.3 Summary

Although the gameplay and game perspective of these two games are very different, they both allow players to think about the potential meaning of the game content by putting them in a relatively independent alienation effect. It's just that *The Stanley Parable* explores and reflects players in the real world in the virtual world of the game, while *Inside* is more inclined to the traditional meta-fictional expression method, making the virtual world where the game characters live and the player's world. connection with the real world, thus achieving the attributes of "meta-fictional".

Comparatively speaking, the former is more difficult to implement, because the theme is a metaphor throughout the game, and the expression is more obscure, while the "meta-fictional" expression of the latter is often within a short period of time, and of course requires There is a certain amount of story preparation, but compared to the former, the game story conception and overall design will be much easier.

5. Conclusion

Through the case analysis of alienation theory and different types of games, we can see that compared to first-person games, side-scrolling games that enhance the third-person perspective explore the relationship between virtuality and reality and try to develop players. Thinking of the game has a great advantage. This is because the writing perspective of metafiction is the third-person perspective, not the first-person perspective. Secondly, the third-person perspective can make the player always be in a state of rational observers and critics,

rather than the first-person perspective. To experience the game like a game, players will get more immersion in the game. This kind of experience happens to be the opposite of Brecht's alienation theory. Therefore, in summary, side-scrolling games that enhance the third-person perspective are one of the most suitable types of games to be made into metafiction games. In other words, first-person games are suitable for using some meta-fictional techniques in certain sections to make players break away from the immersive experience of the character at a certain moment, but third-person side-scrolling games are more suitable for meta-fiction games.

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