

Deviant Allegory And Gender Heterotopia: The Politics of Characters in 66RPG

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INTRODUCTION

Chinese video game industry has developed very fast since 1990s, in which 66RPG has become an important genre in Chinese video game history because of its unique characteristics. First of all, 66RPG is a game platform, in which female users without any professional digital skills could make visual fictions with the help of a design tool provided by the website, and they also play these games, integrating the roles of game developer and player as the prosumer. Besides, 66RPG also refers to browser games of this community with strong TANBI elements (aka Boy's Love), a term indicating girls' imagination of a romantic relationship between two boys, in which those boys' brotherhood has been decoded as bromance. This paper, citing Chinese video game 66RPG as an example, focuses on game characters, discussing the politics of characters so as to suggest a new approach to game characters, that is, the allegory game critical paradigm.

First of all, three key words, that is, "politics", "characters" and "allegory", should be defined here. As far as politics concerned, it refers to power relations in the perspective of Michel Foucault. According to Foucault, "it is in the relationship between the individual and the institution that we find power operating most clearly."¹ As a set of relations among the society, power should not be seen as a noun, "dominating and imposing its rationality upon the totality of the social body. In fact, there are power relations. They are multiple; they have different forms, they can be in play in family relations, or within an institution, or an administration."² As a kind of cultural text, video games contain power relations as well, representing realistic conflicts among all the individuals, groups and institutions related with game text.

To decode the micro power relations inside video games, game characters would be a perfect start point for researchers to get a panorama of the whole game and the society. According to Jessica Aldred, video game characters are "interactive representatives of the

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player in the game world, fictional entities that serve to advance the story of the game world, and proprietary symbols of the larger game franchise they belong to, their recognition and value maximized through licensed products.”³ It is the characters that link game developers, gamers, game world and game industry. Therefore, game characters could be regarded as the key concept revealing micro power relations about games.

The task to discuss the politics of video game characters indicates going back to the cultural, social and historical context of the specific game in which characters attract scholars' attention. From this point of view, game characters will not be simplified as the avatars of gamers, but be regarded as a kind of allegory. According to Walter Benjamin, cultural texts construct nothing but pseudo historical experience in the age of Capitalism. Only should the cultural products be regarded as the allegory, the authentic experience of human could be revealed so that the complicated power relations among games, society and the identity of games could be uncovered.

This paper advocates an allegory paradigm to analyze video games. By connect video game characters to Chinese popular culture, it reveals that how video game characters shape the illusion and subjectivity of gamers, and to what extent that games have satisfied unconscious desires of players. Citing 66RPG, a Chinese game community and visual fictions, as an example, this paper links the game characters with gender politics in contemporary China. By methodology of cultural studies and sociology, it analyzes the multiple attributes of 66RPG before interpreting TANBI (Boy's Love) characters in the context of Chinese mass culture, especially the rise and popularity of TANBI culture (or Boy's Love culture), then describes this type of video game characters as deviants in a male-dominated industry, and finally uncovers the politics of video game characters as deviants. 66RPG provides its users a deviant heterotopia which in fact is the illusion of social status, constraining users' ability to imagine their social gender identity. In this way, the paper break the silence of female in Chinese game industry, and reveals the genuine situation of female gamers.

OPTIONAL BIO

Jing SUN, a post-doctoral research fellow with research interests of cultural studies, especially video game culture. Her major publications include “Video Game Heroes of Lu Xun: When Lu Xun became an IP” on *The Paper* (Chinese, December 31st, 2016), “Eastward Spread of Western Culture: Has Year One of Chinese Video Game Studies come?” on *China Book Review* (Chinese, Vol 11, 2016) and “How BL culture backfires” on *Global Times* (English, May 9th, 2016).

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¹ Mills, S. *Michel Foucault*. (2003). London and New York: Routledge, p 33.

² Foucault, M. (1988) “Critical theory/intellectual theory”, interview with Gerard Raulet, in L. Kritzman (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977–1984*, London: Routledge, p38.

³ Aldered, J. (2014) “Characters”. In Wolf, M.J., Perron, W. eds. *The Routledge Companion to Video Games*. New York and London: Routledge, p355.