

Reading Interactive Chinese Characters in Playable Media

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INTRODUCTION

This paper introduces a possible direction for analyzing the meaning making process of the Chinese characters, for which contributes an important and integrated part, in different forms of playable media including but not limited to: interactive installation, computer game and interactive advertising application.

Strehovec (2017) borrows Gadamer's idea that the concept of play is essential to understand the presence of arts, which relies on a disinterested to-and-fro movement. Strehovec suggests such movement is similar to how authors of electronic literature constantly reinventing new tactics to modify the nature of literature itself. Since the genre of hypertext fictions is no longer the norm in electronic literature, authors/artists of electronic literature now more often apply the tactics of manipulating and transforming digital texts into an unstable condition for their desired aesthetic goals, the result is the vanishing text "which is only conditionally legible and whose existence is limited to a particular time" (Strehovec 2017).

Based on the concept of Strehovec, this paper wishes to investigate the possible direction for analyzing a specific written script in its digital form, the Chinese characters, including the characters in Chinese (Hanzi), Japanese (Kanji) and Korean (Hanja), and to investigate how we read and make meaning with these characters when they are in a vanishing and/or unstable condition in different form of playable media.

There are existing scholarly works that try to categorize the characters when they are in a condition which no long serves as pure components of a word. In other words, it is either the characters that are designed as such so their lexical meanings could only be interpreted with an unusual way, or their linguistic values simply vanished.

For example, Cosima Bruno (2012) has proposed a typology for analyzing Chinese visual poetry by looking at how a piece makes use of the visual properties of Chinese characters. These three modes are: "the etymo-visual text, the iconotext, and the beyond-lexical text". Bruno's typology focuses on how the visual arrangement of the texts affected the characters to retain as symbolic signs (words) or being transformed into iconic or indexical signs which are related or unrelated with the characters' original linguistic

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meanings. Unlike most of the scholar works on literature and poetry, this typology only refers to the visual properties of the language and neglects the content of the poems. However, it only deals with the characters in static and non-digital condition.

On the other hand Pei-chen Yeh (2011), in her research on Chinese and Japanese calligraphy, has tried to summarize a few characteristics on how different new media and performance artists deal with the characters, namely: removal on the linguistic value, deconstruction & reconstruction through human interaction, and stack.

Yeh's model identifies all kinds of interaction into one situation and places it along with visual characteristics like "stack". While in this paper, I will focus on analyzing the different methods of interacting with Chinese characters in different forms of playable media. Example like Kanji-based PC vertically scrolling shooter *Geki 1.06* (2005), and Tetris-like art game *Character, Character, Character* (2017) will be raised to generalize the possibilities of human-Character interaction in game and playable media, with a focus on the degree of user freedom when interacting with the Characters and how it results in different conditions of textual interpretation. Since language is an essential element in most games but also an issue often being neglected, hopefully my research can contribute to the development of games with possibilities unique to the Chinese context.

OPTIONAL BIO

Yue-Jin Ho is a Senior Lecturer in Creative Arts at the Open University of Hong Kong and currently a PhD candidate in the School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong. He is also an artist, translator and writer. His works often deal with the relations between materiality, writing and history. His works have been selected by international festivals such as the IFVA Hong Kong, Cinetribes Osaka, ZEBRA Poetry Film Festival Berlin and Shanghai Biennale. Currently, his research focuses on Chinese text-based new media arts and visual poetry.

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