

The Triple Interactive Logic of Interactive Film and Television

Shulin Li¹

¹ Northwest Normal University, Gansu, China

Correspondence: Shulin Li, Northwest Normal University, Gansu, China.

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Abstract

As an emerging form of film and television art, interactive film and television breaks through the one-way communication mode of traditional works, forming three layers of interactive logic. The first layer, the logic of experiential interaction, manifests as the subject's selection of and participation in the object, as well as the object's feedback and incentive to the subject. The second layer, the logic of creative interaction, manifests as the creators' "dialogic" primary creation, the audience's "participatory" secondary creation, and the community's "discursive" tertiary creation. The third layer, the logic of aesthetic interaction, manifests in the aesthetic interaction of "a thousand faces," the aesthetic interaction of "repetitive dynamics," and the aesthetic interaction of "subject empathy." These three layers of interactive logic together constitute a completely new signifying form for interactive film and television art, expanding the narrative methods and expressive space of film and television art.

Keywords: interactive film and television, interactive film game, film and television experience, film and television creation, film and television aesthetics

1. Introduction

In December 2023, a Chinese interactive film and television work titled *Love Is All Around* sold 1.9 million copies and generated 80 million yuan in revenue on Steam, ranking second on that year's domestic game sales chart. This commercial success brought interactive film and television back into the spotlight. As early as 2012, the interactive film-game *The Walking Dead*, developed and published by Telltale Games, caused considerable stir in the industry. The release of *Life Is Strange* in 2015 prompted greater attention to the artistic value of such works. In 2018, *Detroit: Become Human*, developed by Quantic Dream, and Netflix's new interactive drama *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* were launched, truly ushering interactive film and television into the public eye.

Today, what we refer to as interactive film and television comprises two main forms. The first is the "interactive film," defined as "a video form that hands control over the plot's development to the audience (player), adopts a multi-branch textual structure, and creates an interactive viewing experience". (Zhang Dewei, 2020) This type of work is based on a modernized refinement of traditional film viewing methods and, in terms of experience, leans more toward traditional cinema that contains multiple narrative directions. The second is the "interactive film-game," a genre that, "compared with the interactive film, embodies a fuller integration of 'film' and 'game'" (Chen Baijun & Huang Xinyuan, 2024), its experience mode retains the viewing sensation of a traditional film while emphasizing the incorporation of the strengths of games. Fundamentally, these two forms can be seen as two different paths in the production philosophy of interactive film and television, and the interactive film and television explored in this article encompasses both types. Today, with the development of interactive film and television, the boundary between games and films is gradually blurring, and its market acceptance is continuously expanding.

2. "Experiential Interaction": Gamified Film and Television Experience

Compared with traditional film and television, the interactivity of interactive film and television is most

intuitively reflected in its mode of experience. Unlike the one-way reception of the traditional big screen, interactive film and television, in terms of experience, places greater emphasis on the audience's (player's) active participation, active immersion, and active comprehension. In terms of current experience, the two-way interaction between subject and object in interactive film and television is primarily manifested in the subject's ability to select and participate with respect to the object, and on this basis, a "role-playing" experience different from that of traditional cinema is formed. At the same time, the object exerts incentive and feedback effects on the subject, using content such as "moral dilemmas" and "reward mechanisms" to provide rational and emotional regulation and guidance to the subject. The "two-way interaction" of these two mechanisms constitutes the main content of "experiential interaction" in interactive film and television.

2.1 The Subject's Selection of and Participation in the Object

"Selection" is the core of the experiential process of interactive film and television works. "Selection" refers to the audience's (player's) right, during the experience of interactive film and television, to actively choose specific content such as characters, the characters' ways of handling matters, and the direction of the plot's development. For example, in the work *Detroit: Become Human*, the audience (player) can freely choose among multiple characters to experience the narrative from different standpoints and perspectives. At the same time, within the narrative line of a single character, the audience (player) can choose different modes of behavior. Taking the character Connor as an example, as an advanced android, the audience (player) can freely choose whether to obey human commands without limit, even if those commands may deviate from their original intentions or restrict their freedom; or the audience (player) can decisively choose to pursue freedom, though this may entail greater risks. The creators do not provide the audience (player) with any hints during the selection process, and there is no single absolutely correct choice. The audience (player) must, based on their own judgment, continually push the narrative forward, ultimately arriving at an ending of their own creation. Regardless of the outcome, the audience (player) ultimately knows that it was the result of their own choices. This mode of experience not only endows the audience (player) with tremendous experiential freedom but also grants them the right to control the fates of the characters in the film and television work. It not only greatly enhances the audience's (player's) sense of immersion and engrossment, but also endows film and television works with greater possibilities for interpretation.

"Participation" is the key to the experiential process of interactive film and television works. Many such works allow the audience (player) to participate in the concrete actions of the story's development. Take *The Walking Dead* as an example: in the first chapter, when the audience's (player's) vehicle overturns, the work requires the audience (player) to use the controller to smash the window, thereby enabling the character to escape the overturned vehicle; after the character escapes, the audience (player) is required to use the controller to pick up a branch as a weapon. This form of "participation" strengthens the audience's (player's) identification with the characters in the drama, "creating an interactive 'role-playing' environment that allows the audience (player) to experience a sense of reality within a physically engaging interactive environment" (Wenqi Liu, 2023). This experiential form also further blurs the boundary between games and film and television, making it an "interactive film-game" in the practical sense. Beyond "interactive participation" in action, another mode of participation in interactive film and television is dialogic participation. As the primary means of advancing a film and television work's narrative, lines of dialogue are traditionally set in advance by the scriptwriter and director during the creative phase and then delivered by the actors—a process in which the audience (player) effectively has no participation. In interactive film and television, however, creators often provide not just one mode of dialogue but multiple dialogue options corresponding to different personalities. Again taking the first chapter of *The Walking Dead* as an example, when the audience (player) is in the police car at the very beginning of the experience, the police officer continuously converses with the audience (player), who can then select from numerous dialogue options the one that best fits their own personality; the film and television work, in turn, will react differently depending on the dialogue choices made by the audience (player). This experiential mode enhances the sense of immersion in the work and expands the personality dimensions of the protagonist, so that the characters' personalities in the work are no longer fixed. The audience (player) is no longer merely watching the characters in a story but is genuinely playing themselves.

The deepening of the audience's (player's) "selection and participation" in the work enables the realization of "role-playing" in interactive film and television works. In the traditional film and television experience, the audience (player) cannot make any change to the characters in the work in any objective sense and can only passively follow the development of the plot. This mode of experience hinders the audience's (player's) "empathy" toward the film's characters. When watching a film or television work, the audience (player) often brings their own "horizon of expectations," which inclines them more readily to empathize with plot elements that align with their past experiences, preferences, and judgments of good and evil. Conversely, if the characters or plot in the work conflict with the audience's (player's) prior expectations, this may lead to a negative appraisal of the film and thus make empathy difficult. In interactive film and television, however, the

determinative power of this horizon of expectations is severely weakened, because the development of the plot and the characters' judgments are entirely placed in the hands of the audience (player) to decide on their own. The audience (player) seems to be experiencing their own life, thereby finding it easier to generate empathy and forming a "role-playing" type of experience. In the interactive film and television work *You Are My Courage*, the audience (player) can immersively play Bear Grylls in an expedition and can subjectively choose the routes, methods, and decisions. Bear makes during the adventure, fundamentally influencing the entire developmental trajectory of the story. In this sense, the audience (player) is not experiencing a story but rather creating a story. Furthermore, the realization of "role-playing" stems from the popularization of personalized viewing devices. The empathetic effect in traditional film and television originates from the audience's (player's) self-mirroring of the encounters or actions of the characters in the film. This self-mirroring arises more from the audience's (player's) psychological processes—the audience (player) expects and endorses the choices made by the characters on screen. In interactive film and television, however, this empathetic effect originates from the audience's (player's) direct "role-playing." "In 1966, a Czech director made the first interactive film in history, *Kinoautomat*." (Ni Taile, Chen Yingshuang & Wu Jinlong, 2021) In this film, the director creatively used a red-and-blue selection device. Whenever the film reached a critical decision point, the live audience voted through the red-and-blue selector for the direction they most wanted to see, and this mode of selection constituted the earliest "role-playing" experience in interactive cinema. However, the disadvantage of this method was also obvious—no matter the outcome of the vote, the wishes of some portion of the audience would always be ignored. This format can in fact only be regarded as an early experiment in interactive cinema, an attempt at "group-customized plotlines" weighted toward the majority, and was still far from being worthy of the name interactive cinema. With the passage of time, the emergence of modern media such as home PCs, mobile phones, and tablets changed this situation. Compared with the large-scale screenings in cinemas in the early days, modern media are more suited to application in personal spaces. This personal application directly gave rise to the "role-playing" found in today's interactive cinema. Today, the experiential mode of interactive cinema mainly relies on "direct touch" or "external controllers" as the primary operating methods; what is more, with the emergence of all-in-one VR operating devices, eye-tracking control, voice control, and various other modern operating methods continue to appear. The audience (player) no longer needs to sit in a cinema; rather, they engage in personalized film and television appreciation in a private space through personal devices. In this process, their preferences and choices are entirely pure, personalized, and customized, free from the influence of others, which strengthens individualized expression. The audience's (player's) mode of experience is no longer constrained by the outside world but turns to focus purely on the inner self, and the film and television experience shifts from passive to active, thereby finally presenting a complete "role-playing" experience.

2.2 The Object's Incentive and Feedback to the Subject

In interactive film and television, the object's feedback to the subject can be divided into intrinsic feedback and extrinsic feedback. Intrinsic feedback typically acts upon the player's inner world, appealing to the player's emotions and provoking moral reflection and decision-making. Extrinsic feedback, on the other hand, is directly manifested in the form of concrete content following any impact the player has on the filmic world, often consisting primarily of rewards such as items, props, and plot developments.

The "moral dilemma" is one of the primary forms of intrinsic feedback that interactive film and television works provide to the subject. Ever since the art of cinema gradually gained acceptance worldwide, the moral values presented by films have become a much-discussed topic. The moral values conveyed by traditional film and television are constrained by multiple factors, including the creator's personal views, the era, and politics, and these values are determined mainly by factors other than the audience (player). The audience (player) serves merely as a passive recipient, unable to actually influence the values conveyed by the film. By contrast, the emergence of interactive film and television renders this situation no longer fixed. In interactive film and television, every morally charged decision is made and chosen by the audience (player) themselves, and the resulting consequences are likewise tied to the audience's (player's) individual choices. Take the work *Life Is Strange* as an example: at the end, the audience (player) must make a difficult choice between sacrificing the town or risking everything to save it. This kind of "trolley problem" dilemma has become one of the major attractions of interactive film and television. Every decision made by the audience (player) will be subjected to the test of their own conscience.

The introduction of a "reward mechanism" expands the object's extrinsic incentive methods toward the subject in interactive film and television works, greatly enhancing the sense of immersion in the work. The "reward mechanism" originates from video games. In video games, corresponding reward mechanisms are necessary for every action the audience (player) takes in order to drive them to continuously explore proactively and to constantly achieve new accomplishments. During this process, the audience (player) is in an active state, continually seeking the "incentives" they need. In traditional film and television works, this reward mechanism is implicit, depending on whether the film satisfies the audience's (player's) "horizon of expectations"; the

audience (player) passively receives “incentives” during the viewing process, thereby being continuously drawn to the film and gradually empathizing with its plot. In interactive film and television works, the reward mechanism of video games is introduced. Taking *The Walking Dead* as an example, the work establishes an extremely horrifying and terrifying post-apocalyptic scenario from the very beginning. As the audience (player) explores continuously, they will acquire more supplies, befriend more companions, obtain better weapons, and gradually piece together the clues to the world’s collapse. Throughout this process, the audience’s (player’s) emotions constantly fluctuate with the plot’s development, and the numerous “incentives” prompt the audience (player) to keep exploring. The audience (player) feels as though they are actually in the apocalyptic world, rather than merely watching or experiencing a film and television work, thereby generating an immense “empathy” effect.

3. “Creative Interaction”: The Multilateral Creative Process

Another important difference between interactive film and television and traditional film and television lies in their multilateral creative process. The creative process of interactive film and television has undergone considerable change compared to that of traditional film and television. Whereas traditional film and television production is typically initiated by investors or directors and follows a strongly “centralized” creative approach, the creation of interactive cinema more clearly exhibits a “decentralized” character, forming a tripartite mode of interactive creation involving the lead creators, the audience (players), and the community.

3.1 The Creators’ “Dialogic” Primary Creation

When creating, the lead creators of interactive film and television often operate on the basis of multi-party “dialogue.” First, unlike traditional film and television creators, who, during the creative process, tend to follow primarily the will of the director or screenwriter, the creators of interactive film and television must give greater consideration to the audience’s (players’) reception and reactions. The creators need to constantly engage in “dialogue” with an imagined audience (player), anticipating the audience’s (player’s) responses and choices, and based on these predictions, refine the corresponding plot lines. Multiple narrative lines intersect and are arranged together to form a vast narrative web—a narrative mode also known as “arborescent narrative.”

The creative team behind *Detroit: Become Human* remarked in a subsequent interview: “This is a new way of thinking. Imagining that the audience (player) can do something in the story, having space to express themselves, is very interesting, and that is the most important point. Because what we want to do is not to have the audience (player) listen to a story, but to have the audience (player) be in the story—this is a very different thing.” [David Cage: “After *Detroit: Become Human*, We Have New Insights into Interactive Storytelling,” What’s Happening in Mobile Gaming, May 5, 2021.] This reveals the key factor that creators must consider during creation—how to place the audience (player) within the story. This causes the entire film creation process to revolve around the audience (player), engaging in continuous dialogue with the imagined audience (player), thereby constantly optimizing the developmental direction and dynamics of the “arborescent structure.” This creative approach extends the state of the audience’s (player’s) absence characteristic of traditional film creation, shifting cinema thoroughly from “creator-centered” to “audience-centered,” constituting a monumental transformation in film and television creation.

3.2 The Audience’s “Participatory” Secondary Creation

Interactive film and television elevate the “secondary creation” of the work to a position of greater importance. From the perspective of reception aesthetics, the production of an artwork cannot be separated from the reader’s secondary creation, “for it is only through the process of the reader’s mediation that the work enters a continuously changing horizon of experience.” (H. R. Jauss, 1987) In traditional film and television, when the audience (player) aesthetically engages with a work, they undertake secondary creation in their mind based on their own understanding, thereby producing an aesthetic creation derived from and even transcending the work. Interactive film and television, however, materialize this “secondary creation” into reality: through concrete choices about the direction of the story’s development, the audience (player) de facto determines the plot’s course and the fates of the characters, fundamentally influencing the connotations that the story aims to express. For interactive film and television, a complete work must be handed over to the audience (player) for secondary creation before it can truly achieve completeness; otherwise, it is merely an enormous audiovisual repository loaded with countless images and texts. Only when the audience (player) actually participates in the story and strings together the “scattered,” “arborescent” multitude of narrative threads is the interactive film and television work truly completed in the proper sense. Therefore, in interactive film and television, the audience’s (player’s) secondary creation directly determines whether the work is complete. The audience’s (player’s) secondary creation is elevated to a position of equal importance to that of primary creation.

“Repeated experience” is the focus of the audience’s (player’s) secondary creation. Although traditional film and television also possess the value of repeated experience—and one can likewise gain further aesthetic insights

through repeated viewing—ultimately, the repeated experience of traditional film and television is limited to reinterpreting the original text, and is in fact a secondary excavation of content “unnoticed” or “difficult to perceive.” The repeated experience of interactive film and television, by contrast, becomes an integral and necessary part of experiencing the complete work itself. Because the multiple branching and intersecting narrative threads mean that the audience (player) cannot fully experience the entire story in a single playthrough, the audience (player) needs “multiple experiences” and “repeated experiences,” making different choices and following different storylines, in order to see the entire story in its entirety. Take *Detroit: Become Human* as an example: at the very beginning of the film, the audience (player) must select, from multiple optional characters, the one they wish to play. These characters not only have completely different life experiences and ways of handling matters, but the choices they face and the developmental directions of their stories are also entirely different. Only when the audience (player) has fully experienced one character and then, carrying the memories of that experience, immerses themselves in a new character and a new story, viewing the story’s progression from another perspective and engaging in aesthetic interaction from a different standpoint, can they ultimately realize the complete aesthetic interaction of the interactive film and television work. Thus, in interactive cinema, “repeated experience” changes from “optional” to a “necessary” requirement for a complete experience. This not only extends the value connotations of the artwork itself but also embeds the audience’s (player’s) secondary creation into the work itself.

3.3 The Community’s “Discursive” Re-Creation

The community’s “discursive” re-creation has already become one of the distinctive features of interactive cinema. With the global trend toward networking, community culture in recent years has become ever more deeply intertwined with film and television. In the realm of traditional film and television, the broader “film circle” culture centered mainly on major film and television websites and forums is still flourishing, while community culture is rapidly moving toward a trend of “specialization” and “miniaturization.” “Interest-based clustering” (Tong Xiaoxu, 2023) often takes a particular culture or “IP” as its core—such as “Cthulhu Mythos,” “ACGN,” or “Marvel”—and, furthermore, small-scale communities based on specific film and television works are gradually taking shape. Unlike traditional film and television, the community culture of interactive cinema manifests a high degree of “interactivity” on the basis of this miniaturization. Taking *The Walking Dead* as an example, when the work first landed on platforms like Steam, the production team immediately established a presence on the platform. Because *The Walking Dead* was released in the form of multiple episodes and seasons, after the launch of the first episode, the production team actively communicated with the audience (players) and used the many ideas generated by the community as reference for the next installment. In addition to the interactive creation between the audience (players) and the production team, since current interactive film and television works often bear a very high degree of similarity to games, the “mod” (modification and expansion) culture that exists in traditional game communities is equally applicable to interactive film and television. Using *Detroit: Become Human* as an example, the audience (player) can download “mods” shared by other audience members (players) in the community and implant them into the film and television work by technical means, thereby modifying the work itself to better suit the preferences of certain audience segments. For instance, by replacing the model of a certain character, one can experience a “romance” with a different person, or by substituting a character model, one can prevent a beloved character from dying in the plot. This mode of modification and creation, entirely rooted among the audience (players) themselves and realized upon the work itself, constitutes a form of “interactive community creation” and achieves the “decentralization” of film and television creation in the digital cinema era. Consequently, “the traditional aura of the author is gone forever, authority is displaced, and decentralization becomes conspicuous.” (Gao Yuan, 2022) This has become one of the important features of today’s interactive film and television.

4. “Aesthetic Interaction”: Personalized Narrative Presentation

“Aesthetic interaction” is the final link in the interactivity of interactive film and television. In today’s digital age, interactive cinema has redefined the relationship between the audience (player) and the work. Generally speaking, this relationship is manifested in three aspects. First, from the perspective of the subject, the experience of interactive cinema tends more toward a purely personalized “a thousand faces” aesthetic interaction. Second, from the perspective of the object, interactive film and television strengthen the multiple aesthetic values of the object itself, forming a “repetitive dynamic” aesthetic interaction. Third, from the psychological level, interactive film and television enhance the subject’s “empathy,” thereby achieving a higher level of aesthetic self-interaction.

4.1 “A Thousand Faces” Aesthetic Interaction

The “a thousand faces” aesthetic interaction is the most obvious distinction between the aesthetics of interactive film and television and that of traditional cinema. This distinction is primarily reflected in two dimensions: the aesthetic activity itself and the psychological experience. First, in terms of the aesthetic activity itself, the mode

of aesthetic interaction in traditional film and television has mainly taken the form of cinema screenings and collective viewing. This experiential mode is closely tied to the attributes of traditional cinema itself; scholar Shao Meng terms this the “group effect,” meaning that “an individual’s viewing behavior and perception are influenced by the group” (Shao Meng, 2018). Thus, apart from its intrinsic aesthetic value, traditional film and television’s “collective” experiential mode has also become part of its aesthetic experience. By contrast, the aesthetic experience of interactive cinema is a purer, more “individualized” aesthetic activity. The selection mechanism of interactive cinema dictates that it cannot be experienced by multiple people simultaneously, because everyone’s aesthetic preferences, tastes, and moral standards differ. Thus, there is no single choice path that can completely satisfy everyone, and it is impossible for the audience (players) to achieve a “common denominator” through communication. Therefore, interactive cinema is evidently unsuited to collective multi-person viewing. In fact, at the very beginning of interactive cinema, *The Automatic Movie* was screened in large cinema auditoriums; the method used at the time was to give each audience (player) a red and blue selection button, allowing them to choose the direction of the plot according to their own preference. Ultimately, through vote counting, the film’s plot would advance by majority rule (with the minority submitting to the majority). However, it is obvious that this method merely “mechanically” selects the story based on the preferences of the majority, while the experience of the minority is ignored. Therefore, this form of interactive cinema only truly emerged on a large scale today—with the flourishing development of the internet and the convergence of home PCs, mobile phones, and tablets forming a “post-cinema” era of “four-screen integration.” Personalized film and television presentation devices have provided an opportunity for the large-scale production of interactive cinema, becoming one of the driving forces behind the transformation and development of film and television. Second, from the perspective of psychological experience, the aesthetic interaction of interactive cinema exhibits conspicuous “exclusivity” and “privacy.” In his work *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud argued that in childhood, there exists “the manifestation of curiosity and the ‘voyeuristic’ desire,” which “originates from the ‘theft impulse’ towards sex.” (Sigmund Freud, 2004) This kind of privatized impulse plays an equally crucial role in film and television aesthetics. In the aesthetic experience of traditional film and television, the audience (player) “gazes” voyeuristically at the characters on screen (Laura Mulvey, 1975), thereby satisfying their own desires and needs and generating psychological pleasure. This need is even more pronounced in interactive film and television. The main reason is that, compared with traditional film and television, the “sense of shame” in interactive film and television arises not only from the “voyeuristic gaze” at the screen but also from the audience’s (player’s) private inclinations in selecting the content of the work. For example, in the interactive film and television work *Love Is All Around*, there are multiple female leads of different types and styles, and during the experience, the audience (player) may choose to develop a romantic relationship with one of them. Because each audience member’s (player’s) romantic inclinations and preferences differ, and their desires regarding women also vary greatly, different audience members (players) will choose completely different romantic trajectories and story development paths. And all of this is unknown and unwished to be known by others. “Romance,” as a deeply intense private emotion that requires personalized “empathic” projection onto film and television characters, is merely one type among the various personalized needs found in numerous interactive film and television works. From this, one can see interactive film and television’s demand for “privatized” scenarios, which makes it difficult to realize in a collective viewing environment. This private, personalized aesthetic interaction has thus become a significant feature distinguishing interactive film and television from traditional cinema.

4.2 “Repetitive Dynamics” Aesthetic Interaction

The complete experience of interactive film and television is constantly repeated and dynamically changing; therefore, its aesthetic interaction is also presented in the form of “repetitive dynamics.” “Repetitive dynamics” is embodied in the aesthetic activity of interactive film and television. On the one hand, due to the existence of the “arborescent narrative,” a single interactive film and television work often has multiple endings and multiple narrative threads, and each narrative line appears in an intersecting form. This means that the audience (player) cannot see the full picture of the story during the first experience. In fact, current interactive film and television works often exploit this to guide the audience (player) to experience the work multiple times, discovering content hidden behind the story lines from different angles. In *Detroit: Become Human*, the audience (player) can only see a portion of the story within a single story line; the work is divided into the “Markus line,” the “Connor line,” and the “Kara line,” each of which possesses entirely different threads of story development. When the audience (player) subsequently starts a “second playthrough” and joins the story as another character, everything becomes clear. Such script designs compel the audience (player) who wishes to experience the complete plot to undergo “multiple playthroughs” and repeated experiences. Unlike traditional film and television, because the experiential mode of interactive film and television is primarily based on selection and interaction, multiple viewings will not feel as tedious as they do with traditional cinema. On the contrary, the audience (player) may be quite willing to undergo repeated experiences in order to remedy the regrets left from

their first experience. On the other hand, this aesthetic interaction is not merely simple “repetition” but is always situated within a “dynamic” process. Excellent interactive film and television works do not only offer choices at plot nodes, but intersperse choices throughout ordinary actions and dialogues. Moreover, it is often not a single choice that brings about a specific ending, but a multitude of intersecting choices accumulated over a long period that ultimately leads to a certain outcome. As an audience (player), one can never know exactly when one has made a critical choice; one simply chooses according to one’s heart, ultimately arriving at a particular ending. This concealment of “choice nodes” shrouds the work in an aura of uncertainty and keeps it perpetually in a state of “dynamism.” Whenever the audience (player) undertakes a repeated experience, they tend to try an alternative option in some choices about which they were “ambivalent,” only to discover in the end that it was precisely these “ambivalent” and “seemingly inconsequential” choices that led to a tremendous change in the final outcome. This dynamic, uncertainty-laden mode of experience is one of the defining characteristics of interactive film and television.

4.3 “Subjective Empathy” Aesthetic Interaction

Interactive cinema differs from traditional film and television in that its experience is accompanied by the investment of a great deal of subjective thought. In traditional film and television, our judgments of the content and our conjectures about the plot do not affect the content of the film itself; in essence, the audience (player) remains outside the film, waiting for it to deliver one surprise after another. The characteristic of interactive cinema lies in the fact that the audience’s (player’s) real-time judgments and conjectures about the film are directly reflected in the subsequent plot, producing an effect of immediate feedback, and all outcomes are the sole responsibility of the audience (player) themselves. This means that during the experience, the audience (player) must constantly participate in the story, engaging in “deduction,” “analysis,” and “judgment,” choosing with whom to interact, choosing which words to speak and which not to speak, and selecting the options they believe to be correct. The great freedom of aesthetic interaction is accompanied by immense moral and logical pressure; the audience (player) fears the serious consequences that a wrong choice might bring. In the work *Life Is Strange*, a small town may be led to destruction because of the audience’s (player’s) choices, and the lives of countless people may thereby come to an end. The “psychological pressure” faced by the protagonist in the film is concretized through choices and placed upon the audience (player), who must constantly interact with themselves, asking: Are all these choices worthwhile? Is this the right path? This “dynamic,” “internally generated” aesthetic interaction is precisely the greatest allure of interactive cinema. Compared with traditional cinema, the subjective empathic aesthetic experience in “interactive film and television” originates from the audience’s (player’s) ability to change everything. In *Life Is Strange*, when the protagonist returns to the past and changes events that have already occurred, it brings about a tremendous upheaval in present life. Just when the audience (player) believes they have changed the life of their friend Chloe through their unremitting efforts, an even greater crisis follows. Because this consequence is the result of the choices the audience (player) made during the viewing process, they naturally feel that they themselves have caused the misfortunes befalling the characters in the work. The barrier between reality and virtuality is broken, and driven by an immense sense of guilt, the audience (player) will begin to constantly try to make amends for everything they have caused. This kind of subjective empathy based on the power to change is, compared to the empathic effect in traditional film and television, clearly more profound and more deeply moving.

5. Conclusion

As a vanguard in the development of contemporary literature and art, film and television art represents the spiritual needs of the broad masses of the people. Today, film and television art has undergone tremendous changes, whether in its forms of expression, its social status, or the connotations it carries. Throughout the history of film and television development, technology has always been a powerful driving force. “Interactive film and television,” as an entirely new mode of film and television expression that has emerged alongside modern technology, likewise possesses enormous space for growth. For over a century, film and television art has long been unable to break free from the predicament of one-way communication. The emergence of “interactive film and television” has expanded new directions of communication on the basis of traditional one-dimensional indoctrination, offering new possibilities for the all-new development of film and television art. In recent years, interactive film and television have developed rapidly, and different directions of development have begun to emerge. At this juncture where this nascent art form is swiftly rising, it is particularly important to provide theoretical direction and pathway references for the development of interactive film and television. However, it is foreseeable that as its development becomes increasingly diversified and popularized, new problems will also arise. This requires scholars to pay close attention to theoretical research on interactive film and television, to promote its development, to provide practical guidance for its sustained advancement, and to contribute theoretical models to the entire film and television industry.

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