

## COMMENTARY

# Technology embodiment and the immersion aesthetics—Comments on the VR reset of “The Legend of Sword and Fairy I”

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## ABSTRACT

Virtual reality departs from and transcends reality, and the VR reset of “The Legend of Sword and Fairy I” aggregates the complete industrial ecology formed by the extended development of old game IP and the VR blue ocean commercial market. From two-dimensional to VR, the digital technology field has shaped the virtual embodied world where traditional culture and modernity are intertwined, and constructed the “Immortal Sword World” that gathers, condenses and reshapes the national complex, cultural consciousness and modern discourse. A series of physical operations enables players to interact with the “Immortal Sword World” in real time and in a natural way. The absolute and unique rules and mechanisms of “The Legend of Sword and Fairy I” VR create a 3D community discourse field with an entire new social system + technical system. The open interactive architecture of “Immortal Sword World” provides a meta-statement for free exploration, ideally presenting the pre-determined sequence of the immersive “Immortal Sword World” and allowing players to open up an imaginary future dreaming space in a step beyond reality.

**Keywords:** The Legend of Sword and Fairy I; VR technology; embodiment; immersion; digital survival

Research on the game meta-universe, the body in virtual experience and its theoretical issues has attracted widespread attention. Shan and Song<sup>[1]</sup> have attributed the core qualities of new media literature and art to “digital artistry”. In different types of interactive experiential activities, technology and body, body and consciousness interact with each other to form “technological somatization” and “consciousness somatization”, and with the increase of the body’s “degree of freedom”, it is continuously enhanced. VR games are one kind of interactive experience activities, which still need to be studied and analyzed in depth. In this paper, we will take The Legend of Sword and Fairy I VR (hereinafter referred to as “Immortal Sword I VR”) as a starting point to summarize the new aesthetic characteristics on the basis of phenomenal criticism. This paper will use technical analysis, aesthetic analysis and comparative study to explore the Chinese style of the game.

As a national IP (intellectual property), “Xian Jian” is a phenomenal game that accompanies players of all ages to remember their youth and growth, and is a significant milestone in the history of Chinese games. 95 version of “The Legend of Sword and Fairy I” (hereinafter referred to as “the original”) is a single-player RPG (role-playing game). In order not to deviate from the integrity of the story, the players follow the

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maker's intention and follow the tacit mode of acceptance in a one-way manner. The difficulty of extending the influence of the classic IP brand, that is, the need to keep up with the times for cross-media adaptation of the reset, the integration of VR and the dual interactivity of contextual games. "VR + mobile-virtual" is the functional language expression of VR technology between the text of Xian Jian game, and the active output content is usually higher than the passive accepted content, resulting in a large number of custom gameplay. Immortal Sword I VR may achieve the transition of the meta-universe across. The player is no longer a participant being carried around, but a subject of the experience, able to achieve a full range of information interaction with the inner meta-universe.

## **1. Technology and the body in the "Immortal Sword Universe"**

In cooperation with immersive world, which has its roots in the gaming field, Immortal Sword I VR standardizes the design of the interaction mode, spatial dynamics and spatial positioning algorithms of the "Immortal Sword World". Before entering the game, players wear a periscope headset and a joystick device to disappear into the immersive terminal. Due to the development of 5G wireless technology, the space of headsets and handling devices is no longer a dangerous spatial pattern of wire entanglement. The full soft pack of 100 square meters or more of large space programs, as well as the VR virtual world are set up with a blue anti-collision network, so that players can avoid the fear of impact caused by psychological stress resistance to achieve maximum freedom of travel. Flusser defines gestures as tools, "calling tools extensions of body parts, and body parts tools of freedom"<sup>[2]</sup>. Immortal Sword I VR achieves the ultimate in posture experience as much as possible. At the stage of development of bare-handed interactive devices, Immortal Sword I VR still uses sensing handles for tracking motion trajectories according to the game adaptation, which greatly considers the player's gesture-motion interaction really experiencing sense. Handle to the player, is the aggregation of input and output, is the handle device and the player's body sense of two-way communication. The handle can bring encounter feedback to the player via vibration, force, and a bare-hand interaction scheme that allows the player to grasp the handheld object in the void of air, which loses its own output channel. The VR headset is not only an external constituent element, but also incarnates as a vibrant built-in organ that acts as a receptor for the full range of sensory experiences, allowing the player to feel the original reset story wholeheartedly. However, the presence of the VR headset and handle will be real-time pressure on the player's body, so that the muscles of the player's head and hands are in an unconsciously tense state, so that people have to be prompted to be in the reality of the VR external world if anything. This sense of distance and alienation cuts down on the technical construction of the "Immortal Sword World" immersion.

The immersive world continues to upgrade its technology, focusing on point-of-view rendering and motion tracking technology to achieve seamless transition between the real world and the virtual world. "separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle"<sup>[3]</sup>. The technology device achieves a separation between the direction of aiming and the direction of observation, just as the separation between the angle of the head and the rotation of the eye in a real environment, enhancing the sense of entry-style realism even further. Today's Immortal Sword I VR focuses on head and hand motion tracking technology, emphasizing accurate identification of aiming direction and movement. In the middle of a VR game, either player character can look down at their whole body. The perception of limb detail allows players to transfer body movements vicariously into the virtual Immortal Sword World to achieve a more realistic incarnation. The individual sensor devices on the handle no longer rely on visual tracking, but will generate reasonable hand movements based on the scene setup with force feedback from the contact object. The improved operability of VR technology allows players to interact with the "Immortal Sword World" in real time and naturally through a series of somatosensory operations, significantly improving the coupling and robustness of human-computer

interaction.

It is not merely the technology and design that allows players to consume their “emotions”. The first scene in which the player enters VR is an encounter with various characters on Immortals Island, and this is when the player chooses their character as their own. Character selection is unique in that it uses proximity to unfold introductions and contacts to open up the immersion system, allowing the player to progressively become the character. Players habitually explore the high-density game information scenes first, and achieve their own shocking emotional experience through the full-sensory observation of the first inversion of doubt. During the sword’s flight, the immersive world space creates realistic flight scenes through the external rotation of the fans, the flight of the birds beside them, and the weightlessness of VR technology. The Immortal Sword I VR inherited several vital battle scenes from the original, but pushed the boundaries of the VR technology to revolutionize the whole field of physical combat. VR fighting breaks the traditional turn-based combat, using real-time kill and body surround type, more realistic experience of fighting. The player’s direction of action and the opponent are no longer on a single axis, and can be raised or side-stepped, with the freedom to choose where to be in relative position. The use of the handle frees up the body posture and brings the player closer to the fight in the physical sense. The handle acts as a grip for the weapon, the cross of the handle for defense, and the swing can achieve any distance to strike an attack. In the VR embodied environment, there is no need to click through keyboard keys to issue a skill, only the touch of a skill or treasure that appears in the visual field to achieve a blood payoff, skill increase, and the release of a sure-kill technique, reducing the cost of body language learning. The skills of “royal sword technique, ten thousand swords technique, heaven sword and wine god” are different from the traditional gladiatorial combat with a sword and a gun, but have more of the peculiar floating feeling that players expect from the immortal sword and immortal technique. The use of the supernatural power of the sure-kill technique gives the player the sense of competence and pleasure of conceited superpowers, breaking through the various limitations of the setting and human body functions.

The absolute and unique rule mechanism of Immortal Sword I VR creates a 3D community discourse field with a new social system + technical system. In the “Immortal Sword World”, there is another existence that is ignored by the cognition and opposed to the consciousness, which is the invisible “dark matter” in our cognitive sense. The player’s physical gestures become encoded as “technical images”<sup>[4]</sup> as the player moves and fights the opponents he encounters. The player enters the judgment box when he enters the red circle emitted by the opponent’s skill, which is the rule mechanism by which the technical system determines that the player has taken damage, indicating that the player is still unable to escape the technical image statute. The CTRA (cooperative teamwork and recycling assistance) is a system-built traction assistant that uses modules to pop up key cue messages in the line of sight, acting as an independent intermediary intertwined with technology and the other. The CTRA acts as a technical plug-in to provide key information and behavioral assistance to the player, while also watching the player’s game behavior in real time. CTRA is a conceptual intervention of the system. At the same time, however, the player can neglect the technical system and choose to play the role of the social system in which he or she is placed, each role being subjectively configured. The system designer and the game player are the subjective co-creators of the game, and the final presentation is a balanced game of dual initiative. The players, the game, and the extensions are embedded in a matrix of actors, all of whom participate in the construction of the “world of immortal sword” as digitally embodied selves in a specific combination of worlds within. Ihde uses the term “dance of subjectivity”<sup>[5]</sup> to describe the subversion of the intentional orientation of design by the multiple sides of technological presence, and the eventual trajectory of the game becomes a tug-of-war between the designer’s breakthrough freedom, the mathematical and physical duality of the digital medium itself, and the player’s sense of

experience.

## 2. Toward an immersive aesthetic

The game's reconstruction revolves around the reshaping of the immortal sword, and the VR panoramic view perfectly presents the pre-determined sequence of the immersive "Immortal Sword World" with an open-ended interactive structure. The "Immortal Sword World" provides a meta-statement that can be freely explored, allowing the player to present the immersive world in spatial self-revelation. Sutherland's "ultimate display" predicts that "the ultimate digital display will be able to use the simulation and synthesis of the senses to construct a world of wonder in a mathematical world that can be lived in or traveled, lived in meaning that the world is accessible to the user, and traveled in meaning that the user can exchange information and energy with the world, and that the end user, in exploring and interacting with the world, will come to appreciate this in exploring and interacting with the world, the end user will experience this alternative world and gain alternative experiences"<sup>[6]</sup>. Immortal Sword I VR allows players to experience co-production in an embodied "Immortal Sword World" built by a digital medium with a full range of interactive gestures. The new ideological universe of the immortal sword, the technical rules of operation of the "Immortal Sword World" and the matrix of actors become spatial elements that interact to generate a freely developing sequence of experience statements, giving a narrative function to the act of interaction for play purposes.

The game opens with a time-traveling chapter, cleverly transforming the procedural content generation of Immortal Sword I VR into a review of the classic fragments of the original work. The game is divided into four thematic sections that construct the immortal sword adventure epic into a worthwhile multi-dimensional narrative space-time system. The content of each section is relatively short, maintaining a balance between fragmented length and narrative integrity, an innovation that takes advantage of both the capabilities of the current VR terminal and the original IP content. Immortal Sword I VR integrates the plot content as a game element with the game's operational behavior, ensuring fluidity of the process and concentration of the player's vision. The game uses the "exhibition line" type structure to completely present the pre-determined sequence, the player space marching toward the order has been arranged, but the details of the capture can move independently. The "exhibition line" type structure eliminates linear or bifurcated developmental linear narrative origin, from flat straight line into the scope of the cyberspace.

VR resets the emotional link to the original story line, motivating the player to be "amorphous and diffuse"<sup>[7]</sup> emotional experience, continuously capturing and reproducing the memories of experiences in the player's mind, and building "shared feelings" based on the memories of experiences. Thus, the VR reset erases the player's unfamiliarity with the story reconstruction and enhances engagement and recognition within the spatio-temporal framework. After choosing their assigned roles, players recreate the content of the Immortal Sword as Xiaoyao Li, Ling'er Zhao, Yueru Lin, and A Nu with the ultimate goal of saving Ling'er Zhao and Yueru Lin. As opposed to the sacrificial plot of the original, the VR version takes returning to the demon tower as the starting point for reversing fate and reconstructing the "Immortal Sword World" in the present tense, breaking the player's psychological avoidance and healing the traumatic memories. The appearance of the ChongLou is to break the spell of sacrifice, alter the ending of the way to achieve the original story set in the unattainable. Time travel fits the original "back to the soul of the immortal dream", this setting maximizes the accommodation of multiple time and space. The Immortal Sword I VR plot is short and concise, existing as a game plug-in to weaken the game's storytelling. From the introduction of the origin of the story at the beginning of the game to before and after the engagement of each scene, the plot advances the progress of the game, completes the accumulation of player emotions, enhances full immersion,

and exists as a kind of post-engagement vicarious reward.

Immortal Sword I VR creates a “Immortal Sword World” mimetic space and virtual community, “the formation of virtual communities for online gaming is associated with two interrelated principal features: image-based simulation of reality with an embedding spatiotemporal sense of environment and avatar (e.g., computer-generated human bodies) mediated subjectification of game users (subject)”<sup>[8]</sup>. The reality of the immersive world space is transformed by VR gaming technology into the “Immortal Sword World”. The real space of the immersive world is transformed by technology into a place of virtual symbolic presence in the “world of the sword”, losing the sense of human identity as a “place”. In the digital embodiment dimension, the player incorporates himself into the immortal sword space and becomes a product of the machine’s programming. The player is embedded and immersed in a digital sea, and as a component of the game has the humanity of the technology, becoming a new subject for the transient combination of VR technology and people. The players themselves are the practical subjects of VR space experience and mobility space, and they are transformed into individuals in the immortal sword space, holding immortal weapons in the “Immortal Sword World” to fulfill the mission of saving the people and breaking the spell of death. The “Immortal Sword World” gives players a sense of presence in time and space, which makes the virtual space of the immortal sword a continuous existence independent of the practical subject. The dynamic relationship between the player’s body and space gives the virtual space an autonomous interpretative meaning to be recognized, and the physical external space thus immersed becomes a homogeneous “non-place” that is annihilated without material symbolic meaning.

The “Immortal Sword World” is a product of the free combination of the immortal sword program and the player’s world of thought, where the player opens up an imaginary dream space of the future in a step beyond the real. “It is not just the consumption of the work (small story), nor the worldview behind it (big narrative), nor the setting of the story or the characters, but the deeper part”<sup>[9]</sup>. Through the game life of “Immortal Sword World”, the player realizes the reorganization of his own lifestyle, steps out of the barriers of the real world and the comfort zone of banalization, and escapes from reality to achieve the liberation of the subject. Although Immortal Sword I VR can be a shared field for multiplayer interaction, the special experience in the “I” dimension belongs to the individual, and the cultural writing of immortal sword heroism eventually becomes a memory in a private way. Therefore, personal survival tends to become a deeper private domain, and decoding diffuses into a personalized digital survival.

### **3. The “Chinese style” of Immortal Sword World**

The original makes full use of the geographical location to construct unique imagery: Yuhang, Xianling Island, Suzhou, Yangzhou, Shu Mountain, Miaojiang and other scenery distinct game scenes are displayed on a large scale to bring players different feelings. The design of the height difference in the VR version makes the scene hierarchical, with a mountain, a stream, a tree, a dynamic visual change to highlight the temperament and bones that flow beneath the 5000-year-old. The first scene after the temple of Nuwa is set against the backdrop of Yuanming Tao’s peach blossom source, a beautiful and fantastical sacred land of immortal mountains like a poetic scroll, which also extends the original peach blossom village blend. The peach groves and streams fully demonstrate the historical lineage of peach blossom source, representing the pure land and giving the player deep emotional resonance. Pure land’s mysterious culture can inspire the player’s purest inner feelings, leaving them feeling relaxed and warm, with a greater desire to explore when they are in a world of simplicity and beauty. Scenes such as the dark and gloomy red locked demon tower and the Armageddon flood are severely tense, drawing on the inner quality and essence of traditional architectural scenes. After flying through clouds and immortal mountains, the head-up display reveals the

magnificent and impressive tower of the lockdown demon, covered in red light. The demon-locked tower in mortal Kombat I was built by emperor Liang Wu and was given by the gods to block demons with a boundary and demonizing water. The demon-sealing tower, as well as the tower where Tianwang Li holds Linglong pagoda, and Shu Mountain are also highly rich in Taoist colors. The nine-story, four-angled pavilion-style brick tower, topped by five chains attached to the sides of the boulder, has an air of solemn sternness. After entering the Lock Tower, skip through a maze of spatial dislocations and personalities such as demons who have read famous books by immortals, and go straight to the level where the seven-star dragon pillar is located.

The scene elements and character modeling are refined to give a great sense of immersion, allowing the player to experience the eastern charm intensely. The game's attacks take full advantage of the classical elements of the attributes of gold, wood, water, fire, and earth, giving players a first-hand feel for the role of attributes. The game's use of snow demons, wushu, sword, fire, thunder, wind, mountain, and Bacchus moves, flexible use of natural elements, is truly Chinese. The VR version follows the style of the original costume, but the costume refinement and detail are considerably improved over the pixel grid, better showcasing the charm of the ethnic style. Ling'er Zhao and Yueru's Lin outerwear were highly close to Ming dynasty style, with decorative cheongsam-style collars embellished on the top and pants only on the bottom, a modern adaptation of the fairy, with the dress color changed to white, blue and purple for the extra fairy. When playing as the locked demon tower in A Nu's body, you can clearly see the details of the white Hmong costume, with the lapels but no buttons, and the upper jacket with tight half-sleeve smocked short. Xiaoyao Li wore a simple-sleeved jacket with the kind of belt common to song civilians, under which he wore closed-crotch simple trousers that joined at the waist, and a chivalrous shawl with modern touches. The character's sash is svelte and the top is short, more in line with the northern riding nomads' habiliments, reflecting modern nationalism. Character modeling is extremely three-dimensional and refined, no longer a DOS version of a pixelated image, and each character is presented with danfeng eyes and eyebrows, and gelatinous skin, more in line with the player's expectations for a character with a national style aesthetic. The game's strong and distinctive cross-era and cultural setting elements, modelled on costume design, can go deep with a sense of physicality and highlight the personality of the characters.

The original relies on a new medium of imaginative space, providing an imagined world of Chinese immortal sword. The poems and songs of the Immortal Sword game are rich in cultural connotations and sentiments, and reflect the sentiments of the creators in pursuing, perceiving, and passing on traditional Chinese culture in the contemporary era. Nearly 100 game BGM variations are made according to the scenes, such as "butterfly love" soundtrack is full of mourning, multiple variations appear in scenes such as the butterfly change in colorful clothes, Xiaoyao Li reminiscing about the past life of Yueru. In the butterfly change is the timely sound of "butterfly love" strongly shaped the image of the butterfly demoness Caiyi to save her lover Jin Yuan Liu and sacrifice. Immortal Sword I VR follows the original BGM and is optimized for multimodal sound rendering. Panoramic sound effects change the traditional one-way transmission of audio and can be better combined with visual feedback while reducing quantization noise. The music of "happy and free" is played at the beginning when the temple of Nuwa is transformed to the scene of immortal spirit island, with a lively and cheerful melody, suggesting a happy ending of VR; "cloud valley and crane peak" is the soundtrack for the flight of the sword, with the exciting and leisurely feeling of soaring clouds and overlooking the world; "against the sky", "war danger" and "wind rising" appear in different battles, in harmony with the intense and fierce struggle; "winning order" appears with the treasure chest when the battle is won. The strong pace allows players to experience the thrill of victory instantly. The game music played by Xiao, Sheng, Flute, Hulusi, Erhu, Pipa, Guzheng, etc., the attribute panel of the scrolls

in cloud pattern, and the semi-literary character dialogues are all reproduced to restore the traditional culture. The words of the witch queen of fairy spirit island appear in hot gold font: “victory and defeat are commonplace, warriors please start over”, which both closely follows the theme of the VR version and links to the plot of the original warrior’s re-entry. The story of the original combines poetry to render the characters and the story, with evocative rhymes, back and forth counterpoint, and a neat structure that reveals the charm of classical Chinese culture. For example, the poetry when the wine sword Xian appears is quite similar to Li Bai’s, “the sword rides on the wind, eliminating demons in the world. With wine I am happy, without it I am mad. A drink to exhaust the river, and then the sun and moon. A thousand glasses of drunkenness can not fall, only I wine sword Xian.”

The digital technology field shapes the virtual embodied world where traditional culture and modernity are intertwined, and constructs the “Immortal Sword World” that gathers, condenses and reshapes the national complex, cultural consciousness and modern discourse. The construction of Chinese-style symbols can not only enrich the new worldview of “Immortal Sword World” and make the aesthetic quality of the game go deeper, but also the unique cultural context can build a cultural viewpoint that carries the national temperament and evokes emotional projection.

## Author contributions

Methodology, XL; investigation, HH; resources, XL; writing—original draft preparation, HH; writing—review and editing, XL; supervision, XL; project administration, XL; funding acquisition, XL. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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