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CHRONOFICTION NARRATIVE OF THE T.I.M.E STORIES BOARD GAME AS A LITERARY EXPERIMENT

Iliuchenko M. O.
Postgraduate Student at the Department of Theory and History of World Literature
Kyiv National Linguistic University
Velyka Vasylkivska str., 73, Kyiv, Ukraine
orcid.org/0009-0009-3621-3917
maariiilutchenco@gmail.com

Key words: *board game, chronofiction, narrative, non-linear temporal structure, postmodernism.*

This article explores the chronofiction narrative of the board game T.I.M.E Stories as a form of literary and philosophical experiment. The game uses temporal constructions and mechanics of replayability to model a non-linear perception of time and problematize the boundaries between subjective memory, history, and reality. Unlike in traditional science fiction, where time travel primarily serves as a plot device, in T.I.M.E Stories time becomes a key structural element, affecting not only the narrative but also the very process of the player's interaction with the game world and their interpretive strategies.
The article examines T.I.M.E Stories through the lens of the philosophy of time and narrative theory, revealing how game structures imitate, challenge, and reshape traditional ways of constructing reality. It argues that the game presents time as a hybrid entity: mechanical (regulated by Time Units that measure in-game actions), experiential (shaped by the players' decisions, memory, and strategizing), and mythological (depicted in the game lore as a symbolic and chaotic force that transcends rational comprehension).
The study focuses on how speculative fiction, cognitive engagement, and philosophical reflection converge in the game's design. It considers how board game mechanics and multi-layered narratives expand the discourse of chronofiction, introducing novel temporal logics and participatory storytelling. Rather than presenting time as a fixed continuum or a controllable tool, T.I.M.E Stories encourages players to explore temporal uncertainty and contradiction. Ultimately, the article proposes that games like T.I.M.E Stories represent a new form of narrative where time functions not only as a plot axis but also as a mechanism of interaction, meaning-making, and reality modeling.

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ХРОНОФАНТАСТИЧНИЙ НАРАТИВ НАСТІЛЬНОЇ ГРИ T.I.M.E STORIES ЯК ЛІТЕРАТУРНИЙ ЕКСПЕРИМЕНТ

Ільюченко М. О.
аспірантка кафедри теорії та історії світової літератури
Київський національний лінгвістичний університет
вул. Велика Васильківська, 73, Київ, Україна
orcid.org/0009-0009-3621-3917
maariiilutchenco@gmail.com

Ключові слова: *настільна гра, хронофантастика, наративи, нелінійна темпоральна структура, постмодернізм.*

У статті досліджено хронофантастичний наратив настільної гри T.I.M.E Stories як форма літературно-філософського експерименту. У грі використовуються темпоральні конструкції та механіка відтворюваності для моделювання нелінійного сприйняття часу й осмислення меж між суб'єктивною пам'яттю, історією та реальністю. На відміну від традиційної наукової фантастики, де подорож у часі здебільшого виконує функцію сюжетного прийому, у T.I.M.E Stories час виступає ключовим структурним елементом, що впливає не лише на наратив, а й на саму взаємодію гравця з ігровим світом та його інтерпретаційні стратегії.
Гру розглянуто крізь призму філософії часу та наративної теорії, з акцентом на те, як ігрові структури імітують, трансформують і проблематизують традиційні способи конструювання реальності. У статті стверджується, що T.I.M.E Stories репрезентує час як гібридну сутність: механічну (регульовану одиницями часу, що відлічують ігрові дії), емпіричну (сформовану рішеннями, пам'яттю й тактикою гравців) та міфологічну (представлену в ігровому лорі як символічна й хаотична сила, що виходить за межі раціонального осягнення).
У центрі уваги – взаємодія спекулятивної вигадки, когнітивної участі та філософської рефлексії в дизайні гри. Розглядається, як механіки настільних ігор та багаторівневі наративи розширюють хронофантастичний дискурс, упроваджуючи нові часові логічні схеми та моделі інтерактивної оповіді. Замість зображення часу як сталого континууму або підконтрольного інструменту T.I.M.E Stories стимулює гравців до дослідження темпоральної невизначеності та суперечностей. У підсумку в статті висунуто тезу, що подібні ігри репрезентують нову форму наративу, в якій час функціонує не лише як сюжетна вісь, а й як засіб взаємодії, смислотворення та моделювання реальності.

Statement of the problem. Contemporary chronofiction goes beyond the classical notions of time as a linear sequence and increasingly adopts non-linear, cyclical and fragmented structures, addressing fundamental identity issues and reality perception. However, traditional literary study predominantly approaches chronofiction as a literature text, neglecting other narration forms, such as board games.

The board game *T.I.M.E Stories* combines elements of science fiction, mythological representations and cognitive theories to present a unique experiment where time loops and mental transmigration become more than just plot elements, but gameplay mechanics that influence the way time and history are perceived, creating a multi-layered chronofiction narrative.

The game approach to creativity requires expanding the analytical toolkit and reconsidering the notions of how artistic works can model alternative worlds.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the chronofictional structure of the board game *T.I.M.E Stories* from the perspective of narrative theory. It aims to investigate how the game's mechanics and narrative framework simulate hybrid entity of time (combination of different theories), challenge linear storytelling conventions, and model new ways of experiencing time in fiction.

Presentation of the main research material. Many board games, especially plot-based ones, contain texts that shape the story, the world, the characters, and the events. In this sense, they have the characteristics of a literary work. They combine

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texts (rules, descriptions, story cards) and mechanics (fields, chips, dice). This combination of literature, visual art, and game design makes their nature hybrid [Руденський Р., Писарчук О., 2023, с.117].

Plot-based board games, that incorporate fragmented narrative, non-linearity, and polyphony, display postmodern novel features. They share a common basic principle: a reader/player becomes a co-author, and the text/game becomes a process rather than a fixed story. Players literally create the plot, making decisions that affect the ending, interpreting images and events in their own way. "[A play]... is a significant function-that is to say, there is some I sense to it. In play there is something "at play" which transcends I the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action <...> the very fact that play has a meaning implies a nonmaterialistic quality in the nature of the thing itself" [Huizinga J., 1955, 1] according to J. Huizinga, one of the first philosophers to conceptualize playing as a fundamental cultural phenomenon, noting that elements of game are represented in literature, art, and even science.

Comparing to traditional texts, board games create their story jointly with players, similar to interactive literature or hypertexts, where the reader is to interpret and reconsider the text, playing with it, as in R. Barthes algorithm of the text play concept [Barthes R., 1977, 162], that anticipated the interactive story idea. U. Eco suggested the concept of an open text allowing multiple interpretations, reminiscent of narrative board game mechanics: "art in general depends on deliberately provoking incomplete experiences – that is, how art deliberately frustrates our expectations in order to arouse our natural craving for completion" [Eco U., 1989, 72]. A. Espen linked games and literature suggesting the ergodic literature concept, where the reader/player is to make an effort to "get through" the text [Espen J. A., 1997, 3].

T.I.M.E Stories is a prime example of a board game functioning as a postmodern text or as an "interactive visual novel" [Arnaudo M.,2018, 222]. It is a cooperative board game of intense storytelling focus. Each scenario is a separate story that becomes a part of a metatext. The plot unfolds gradually through the distinct cards. Moreover, similar to postmodern novels, the order of reading is not fixed: players are able to visit locations in different sequences, skipping parts of the text, rereading and reconsidering. Their decisions lead to variant endings.

Characters to perform by players are agents of the T.I.M.E (Tachyon Insertion in Major Events) organization, which monitors the integrity of timelines. Their task is to travel to different eras and alternate realities to eliminate temporal anomalies.

The concept of the timeline guardians dates back largely to Paul Anderson's "The Time Patrol" [Anderson P., 1994], That laid the foundation for a whole stratum of chronopatrol and history preservation organizations fiction. In the middle of the 20th century, the theories of relativity, the paradoxes of time, and the realization that interference in the past could destroy the present were actively discussed. The Cold War, the arms race, and the fear of uncontrolled technology gave rise to the idea that a rigid control structure was needed behind technological discoveries as powerful as a time machine. The chronopatrol concept was an institutional response to the threat inherent in the very idea of temporal manipulation.

Unlike in traditional chronofiction, the T.I.M.E. agents are not bodily transported through time. Instead, their consciousness is transferred into the respective era inhabitants. Players are constantly balancing between the role of an agent (to complete a mission, to eliminate an anomaly, to report to their superiors) and the role of their receptacle (to consider physical abilities, social status, backstory). The agent transfers his/her consciousness into the receptacle's body, but does not completely displace the original consciousness. It is not a "possession", but rather a symbiosis: the agent gains control over the body, but the residual emotions, fears and mental vulnerabilities of the receptacle remain active. To some extent, the agent and the receptacle share a single consciousness where one dominates, but the other does not disappear. Any stressful situation reinforces the minds rupture, causing the receptacle to respond with panic, hallucinations, or other forms of insanity. The agent is thus compelled to adapt to the broken receptacle, although he/she himself/herself retains his/her sanity.

The idea of mental displacement (relocation of consciousness in time) has a complex and multilayered history, rooted in both science fiction and philosophical speculation about the nature of consciousness and time. R. Descartes invented a dualistic model where consciousness (res cogitans) is separate from the body (res extensa) [Heffernan G., 1990]. At its very core, it is the idea that consciousness can be separated and transferred elsewhere: to another body/place/time. In shamanism, in esotericism, and in a number of philosophical systems, there is the idea that the spirit or consciousness can leave the physical form (e.g., during dreams, trances, or rituals) and travel to other worlds or times. "...the shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld" [Éliade M., 1964, 27]. Unlike spontaneous or involuntary mystical experiences, shamanic trance is intentional and serves a practical purpose (healing, divination, guidance).

Physical displacement in time has always fallen into a number of scientific paradoxes: the grandfather paradox, the energy problem, etc. [Wasserman R., 2018] When consciousness is the only thing transferring, physics has no claims. The philosophical ques-

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tions remain: what is "self" if the consciousness can exist in someone else's body in other period; whether the self is stable or a temporary construct tied to a context, where time is subjective and consciousness flows with experience, as H. Bergson suggested in *Matière et mémoire* [Giroux L., 1973].

In the 21st century, the topic of the limits of individuality has expanded the boundaries of fiction to include the field of cognitive science and neurophilosophy. Modern neurostudies reveals that our sense of self is flexible and easily deceived by attaching to any body that receives sensory feedback. These studies provide the scientific basis for many stories about consciousness transference. Thus, mental displacement is not just a fantasy idea, but part of centuries of philosophical, psychological, and neuroscientific study of the nature of consciousness and time.

Contemporary science fiction incorporates insights from cognitive science and neurophilosophy to explore the fluidity of selfhood, grounding narratives of consciousness transference in empirical studies of body ownership and mental displacement.

At the gameplay level, *T.I.M.E Stories* explicitly features two levels of time:

1. Intra-game time measured in TUs (time units) that are spent in movement and action. This corresponds to time within the narrative.

2. Extra-game time, spent by players discussing, strategizing, rolling dice, and making decisions. It doesn't equal intra-game time: no matter how long players discuss the next move an intra-game round will take a fixed number of TUs.

The time constraint determines the structure of the game and motivates strategic behavior. TU noting creates a "countdown" effect, which adds thriller suspense. The limited time as a resource turns the game into a puzzle: players strategically choose actions to take to achieve the best possible outcome. Moving to a neighboring location takes one to three TUs, depending on the result of a special die roll. "The concealed back of the panorama cards, and the fact that players do not even know which areas will be available in a scenario, ensures that the experience will have a strong sense of progressive discovery" [Arnaudo M.,2018, 222]. Taking a second action in the location or retaking an action takes one TU.

The time is not only a resource, but also a narrative structure. The gameplay is based on the fact that agents (i.e. players) rarely manage to complete a mission in a single attempt. When they fail (time runs out/agents make critical errors), they are sent back to the "starting point" to live through the scenario again, albeit with the accumulated knowledge. The agents' memory is opposed to the memory of the game world, which creates a constant tension between individual subjectivity and objective history. It's a game mechanic based on the timeloop concept. Each new loop allows players to navigate faster, to avoid hazards, to make better decisions. Scenarios contain more content than players can experience in a single cycle. Events, locations and twists are "buried" in different time layers. It is only through repeated runs and conscious manipulation of intra-game time that the entire text can be revealed. This replayability embeds in the gameplay the idea of time as a learning space, where progress is possible only through repetition and accumulation of experience.

T.I.M.E as a control institution is not only a plot element, but also an allusion to the concept of power over history. The organization is not only a narrative center of time management, but also a metatextual structure that sets the boundaries of interpretation for players. The question of narrative ruling over story refers to the postmodernist rejection of the concept of rationality, objectivity and universal truth, as well as authorship problem, seeking a creative primacy between idea, form and creator.

The game raises the question of the nature of "normal" history. The question of who determines which course of events is "proper" and which is an anomaly becomes key in the context of the existence of T.I.M.E as a control institution. The very existence of this organization can be seen as an anomaly, as any interference with the time alters the natural course of events. The agents' constant returns, replaying and changing details make them themselves sources of anomalies, which creates a paradoxical situation where the time control becomes the cause of time disruption.

Anomalies are both a plot device and a philosophical metaphor. They symbolize the fragility of time, the instability of the perception of history. They represent a disruption of the timeline that threatens the integrity of the historical narrative. In the concept of the game, there is the idea that certain esoteric activities are rather unconscious attempts to interact with temporal flows, rather than mere superstition. People without access to time travel technology can accidentally (or intentionally) gain it through these practices. It is the threat to the stability of the timeline.

In the first scenario (1913, Asylum), it is not just the mere fact of an occult ritual that is considered an anomaly, but its consequences. The ritual opens a time rift or lead to the emergence of certain phenomena that shouldn't exist in this age. Although it does not cause a direct disruption, it acts as a cognitive anomaly that can alter the participants' minds to "remember" alternate histories or future events. Patients who think they are T.I.M.E. agents or know too much about temporal operations are a direct consequence of the anomaly. The ritual broke the information field, allowing other people's memories and knowledge to "flow" into the random people's psyches.

In the 20th century culture, psychiatric institutions have often been associated with places where

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the boundary between realities is finer. Patients hear voices, see visions that might be more than mere delusions, but rather fragments of other people's timelines that they have perceived through their damaged psyche. This approach echoes Lovecraftian motifs: madness as a result of contact with the beyond. This is not just an aesthetic, but a reflection of the feeling that time and reality are not solid structures, but eerie fluid incomprehensible masses. Lovecraftian motifs hint that the outer time is a realm inhabited by extratemporal entities. Almost all the scenarios invoke the idea of ancient forces that exist beyond human perception, either asleep or already trying to penetrate reality.

In the game lore, time is a physical dimension superimposed with a layer of mythological chaos that cannot be fully rationalized. This reflects the real evolution of human ideas about time, from myths to physics, and then back to the recognition that science doesn't provide complete answers. The agents believe controlling the timelines, but almost every scenario depicts them encountering an event that doesn't fit into a rational picture. T.I.M.E Stories in general is very fond of this balance: time as a cosmic structure with laws of physics, and time as a mystical substance subject to collective fears, rituals and symbols. It's a legacy of both science fiction and occult theories from the 19th and 20th centuries. This duality can be described as a hybrid entity – a blend of scientific and symbolic models of time. Applying this concept to narratology helps us understand how time in such narratives acts not just as a backdrop, but as a dynamic and paradoxical element of the story.

Conclusion. The *T.I.M.E Stories* board game is a literary experiment where the chronofiction narrative is used as a tool for exploring the nature of time, subjectivity, and narrative. The game illustrates that time is more than a scientific category, but a complex, multi-layered construct involving individual perception and cultural codes. The structure of the game embodies non-linear time as a mechanical condition of the very possibility of narration.

In *T.I.M.E Stories*, time is decomposed into distinct layers, which requires a cyclical return rather than a direct following. Here the philosophy of repetition manifests itself: as in a hermeneutic circle, each new reading expands the interpretation of the text. This makes the game a radical literary form, where the very process of "reading" becomes a way of constructing time.

The prospects for further developments. The analysis of the *T.I.M.E Stories* narrative offers a new perspective on the evolution of the time concept in culture, as well as to forecast the prospects for the development of game literature, which changes the ways of interaction with the text and opens new facets of the perception of reality.

The game component in the chronofiction narrative of *T.I.M.E Stories* opens new research horizons not only in literary studies but also in a broader interdisciplinary context. The development of interactive narrative structures in board and video games requires a detailed study of narrative mechanisms combining repetition, multiple outcomes, and nonlinear perception of time. Analyzing such mechanics will reveal new storytelling patterns. Current neuro- and cognitive- science research indicates that time perception is susceptible to external factors, including game structures and artistic experiments. Further study of such interactions will enable understanding change of human attitude towards the past, present and future, influenced by immersive chronofiction worlds.

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