



The Simulated Martial Arts World: The Convergence of Martial Arts and Electronic Games

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Abstract. This paper primarily focuses on the research and discussion of the methods and approaches to integrate traditional martial arts culture with electronic game media. Utilizing various research techniques such as literature review, case analysis, and synthesis, the study applies these findings to the design of a Baihe Quan-themed game. Additionally, the paper introduces Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation to investigate potential issues that may arise when electronic games carry traditional martial arts culture. This theory also serves as a guide for game action design, art direction, and other aspects, aiming to explore the boundary between game-based martial arts and real-life martial arts. Ultimately, the research aims to create an engaging game that effectively conveys traditional martial arts culture through an educational and entertaining approach.

Keywords: Martial Arts, Electronic Games, Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation

1 Introduction

The world of martial arts in the realm of simulation presents a unique and captivating experience. Through the medium of electronic games, there is ample creative space to showcase martial arts moves and techniques, allowing traditional martial arts to display extraordinary splendor in the virtual domain. The amalgamation of martial arts with electronic games creates a fascinating and immersive fusion, bringing the essence of martial arts into the digital realm and providing players with an engaging and dynamic encounter with this ancient art form. The interactive nature of electronic games further enhances the allure of martial arts, enabling players to experience the thrill of executing intricate martial arts moves and strategies, thereby deepening their appreciation and understanding of this time-honored practice. Furthermore, this fusion of martial arts and electronic games has opened up new possibilities for disseminating and preserving traditional martial arts, attracting a broader audience, and ensuring its cultural legacy thrives in the digital age.

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The combination of traditional martial arts with electronic games offers numerous potential advantages. It not only makes martial arts more engaging and entertaining through educational means but also broadens the audience for martial arts culture. For example, the French team Slocap conducted in-depth research on China's traditional martial arts culture and designed the action game "SIFU" based on Guangdong Bai Mei Quan (White Eyebrow Boxing). According to its distributor, Kepler Interactive, "SIFU" has sold over 2 million copies across all platforms, attracting many buyers who had limited knowledge of the Bai Mei Quan culture from southern China. After playing "SIFU," they developed a deep interest in understanding this traditional martial arts culture, showcasing the game's significant role in promoting and spreading traditional martial arts culture. Moreover, electronic games can use virtual reality (VR) technology to provide learners with a more immersive and lifelike experience, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of learning. The development of VR technology has unique effects on the implementation and reenactment of martial arts in games. For instance, in the VR game "Swords and Sorcery," players can choose to use martial arts movements in game.

2 Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, simulation, and implosion in relation to martial arts game design.

2.1 Baudrillard's postmodern theory

Simulacra is a crucial component of Baudrillard's philosophical landscape. In his theoretical framework, simulacra is divided into three different orders: "simulation, production, and simulacrum.[1]" After these three orders, simulacra further advance into a realm of complete fiction and illusion. Simulation is a deconstruction of the traditional feudal order, bringing an end to the era of coercive symbols and allowing symbols to circulate among different social classes. At this stage, there still exists a distinguishable difference between the illusion and reality, the object and its representation. With the rise of the Industrial Revolution, a different stage of simulacra emerged - production. In this stage, the relationship between the original and its copies vanished, replaced by an equivalence relation. Products are no longer considered imitations of originals, and the concept of the prototype is suspended in this order of simulacra through series production. The third stage of simulacra enters the realm of simulation. In today's simulation, the prototype is "murdered," and all referents are "liquefied." There is no longer representation in the traditional epistemological sense. Thus, in simulation, "there is no longer a mirror of being and appearance, nor any coexistence of the real and its concept in the imagination." [2]

2.2 The simulacra of martial arts and the implosive trend of martial arts

The implosion theory was first proposed by the Canadian scholar Marshall McLuhan, and Jean Baudrillard adopted McLuhan's implosion concept in his own thinking. Within the implosive trend, the reverse construction of simulacra space in real life has

always been a key topic of Baudrillard's discussions. The boundaries between falsehood and reality are eliminated, and the medium through which we perceive the world constructs a simulacra realm using virtual symbols. "People have gradually come to accept these virtual symbols as equivalent to reality, even more real than reality itself, thus creating a hyperreal illusion."^[3]

Implosion does not merely remain in the realm of ideas; it directly affects reality and intervenes in the development of martial arts. In the rules set for some martial arts competitions, one can clearly discern the traces of simulacra's reverse construction of reality. Today, this emphasis on symbol differentiation is starting to permeate various martial arts competitions, where symbol differentiation replaces combat functionality as the primary design objective for the rules. For instance, in the "Yi Xing Jiu Zhou" National First Open Xingyi Fist Competition held in Tongshan District, Xuzhou City, the rules specify that participants must use the five elements and twelve forms of Xingyi Fist to showcase the combat characteristics of the style. From the rules of this competition, it is evident that even in martial arts combat competitions that emphasize combat effectiveness, they are now catering to the system of symbol differentiation under the influence of martial arts simulacra.

3 Research on the Gamification of Martial Arts Movements.

3.1 Simulation and Simulacra in Martial Arts

As the title "Simulacra and Simulation" suggests, in Baudrillard's theory, the concepts of simulation and simulacra are closely related. Simulation is the third stage of the development of simulacra and is the stage we are currently experiencing. Ultimately, simulation will be replaced by simulacra. "Simulacra surpass simulation, as it is no longer an imitation of real things but a 're-imitation' of the 'imitation object.' It is an 'image' without origin and without reference."^[4]

For example, in the live broadcast of a UFC mixed martial arts competition in March 2022, Chinese mixed martial artist Song Yadong fought against Brazilian mixed martial artist Marlon Moraes. Each punch thrown by the fighters occurred genuinely in the UFC octagon cage, and the live broadcast presented a mirrored simulation of the real competition. However, in digital games, this mirrored reality is dissolved, and the movements of the characters in the game, while derived from reality, are no longer confined to mere simulation of reality but rather construct a simulacrum of the real world.

3.2 The Simulacra World of Martial Arts Electronic Games

While the stage of simulation still relies on the existence of reality, in the realm of simulacra, reality is completely silenced under the brilliance of virtual symbols. According to Baudrillard, "a significant characteristic of modern society is that what we consume is not primarily objective products or commodities but rather sign-objects

mediated by symbols. This active structure of sign-objects governs and produces our needs and desires, propelling our consumption." [5]

In ancient China, there were two paths for improving martial arts skills based on the concept of "learning from animals." On one hand, martial artists engaged in combat with animals to enhance their combat abilities through practical training. On the other hand, they observed animal behavior and then incorporated it into their martial arts, forming what is known as the "imitative fist system," where animal movements were embodied in the martial techniques [6]. For example, Xing Yi Quan's twelve forms and Baiyuan Tongbi Quan were influenced by this animal-inspired tradition. The integration of artistic exaggeration and the embodiment of animal behavior in Xing Yi Quan construct a simulacra space for martial arts, a hyperreal dream more real than "reality." Here, the essence of martial arts gives way to the differentiation of its symbols, creating a distinct separation of different martial arts styles in the minds of players, ultimately influencing their choices and usage of game characters.

3.3 The hyperreal treatment of martial arts in games.

"Simulation and Simulacra" depicts a new era of culture, and hyperreality is a distinct characteristic of this culture. Based on this cultural feature, even games marketed as realistic do not simply replicate real-life movements; instead, they incorporate artistic processing to highlight the unique aspects of actions. Designers actively create differences in action symbols by absorbing real-life movements, thus achieving a hyperreal experience beyond "reality."

The names, movements, and effects of techniques are crucial elements in the transformation from real-life martial arts to game-based martial arts. Many martial arts games reference existing martial arts techniques and names, becoming key components of symbolizing martial arts actions. With numerous traditional martial arts schools and a wide geographical distribution, each has its own development and origin of techniques. However, there are still shared movements among different schools, making it essential to find representative movements from various martial arts styles for game animation design. For instance, in the character Yuki Akira from "VR Warrior," his martial arts movements are derived from the traditional Chinese martial art of Baguazhang. Moreover, the game's move list adopts the names of martial arts techniques from Baguazhang, such as "Fierce Tiger Climbing the Mountain" and "Iron Mountain Lean." The names and movements of techniques contribute to constructing symbolic representations of different martial arts styles in the game, providing players with memorable points of reference.

4 Conclusions

Electronic games provide a new medium of expression for traditional martial arts, one that possesses a strong interactivity that previous media lacked. As it spreads traditional martial arts, it also brings changes to them. As McLuhan put it, "We shape our tools, and thereafter, our tools shape us." [7] Electronic media have initiated a process of

information implosion, in which the hyperreal takes precedence over reality. Martial arts in the realm of simulation now have the power to construct reality in a reverse manner. People's understanding of martial arts is reshaped, and the rules of real-world martial arts are also altered by the fictional simulations. We should explore more ways of disseminating traditional martial arts through various media, understanding the unique characteristics of gaming media to fully leverage its communicative advantages and rejuvenate traditional martial arts in the new era of media.

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