

Юй Чжэнься

Магистр

КазНУ

Алматы, Казахстан

**МЕЖДУ РЕАЛЬНОСТЬЮ И СИМУЛЯЦИЕЙ: ГИПЕРРЕАЛЬНОСТЬ
ЖАНА БОДРИЙЯРА И КОНСТРУИРОВАНИЕ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОГО
ПРОСТРАНСТВА В КИБЕРПАНК 2077: ФАНТОМНАЯ СВОБОДА**

Аннотация. В данной статье район Догтаун в Киберпанк 2077: Фантомная Свобода рассматривается через призму концепций симулякра и гиперреальности Жана Бодрийяра. Исследование показывает, как данная цифровая игровая среда функционирует в качестве гиперреального межкультурного пространства, в котором элементы различных культур, архитектурных стилей и городских символов синтезируются в целостную, но вымышленную модель мультикультурной реальности. Актуальность исследования обусловлена возрастающей ролью цифровых медиа в формировании современного восприятия межкультурных различий и культурной осведомлённости. Цель статьи заключается в определении того, каким образом Догтаун конструирует гиперреальную версию мультикультурализма и как эта конструкция влияет на понимание межкультурной коммуникации в условиях глобализации. Методология исследования сочетает качественный визуальный и пространственный анализ игровой среды с теоретической интерпретацией, основанной на концепции симуляции Ж. Бодрийяра. Результаты показывают, что Догтаун не репрезентирует аутентичную мультикультурную реальность, а создаёт убедительный цифровой симулякр, формирующий восприятие игроками культурного разнообразия, глобализации и межкультурного взаимодействия. В статье делается вывод о том, что цифровые игровые пространства следует рассматривать как активных агентов производства культурных смыслов и как важные площадки формирования межкультурной осведомлённости в эпоху

гиперреальности.

Ключевые слова: Жан Бодрийяр; Гиперреальность; Симулякр; Межкультурная Коммуникация; Киберпанк 2077: Фантомная Свобода; Цифровое Пространство

Yu Zhenxia

Master

Al-Farabi Kazakh National University

Almaty, Kazakhstan

Between Reality and Simulation: Baudrillard's Hyperreality and Cyberpunk 2077: Phantom Liberty's Construction of Intercultural Space

Abstract. This article examines Dog Town in Cyberpunk 2077: Phantom Liberty through the theoretical framework of Jean Baudrillard's concepts of simulacra and hyperreality. The study explores how this digital game environment functions as a hyperreal intercultural space in which elements of different cultures, architectural styles, and urban symbols are synthesized into a coherent but fictional model of multicultural reality. The relevance of the research lies in the growing role of digital media in shaping contemporary intercultural perception and cultural awareness. The aim of the article is to determine how Dog Town constructs a hyperreal version of multiculturalism and how this construction influences the understanding of intercultural communication in the context of globalization. The methodology combines qualitative visual and spatial analysis of the game environment with a theoretical interpretation based on Baudrillard's concept of simulation. The results show that Dog Town does not represent authentic multicultural reality but produces a persuasive digital simulacrum that shapes players' perceptions of cultural diversity, globalization, and intercultural interaction. The study concludes that digital game spaces should be understood as active agents in the production of cultural meanings and as important sites for the formation of intercultural awareness in the hyperreal age.

Keywords: Jean Baudrillard, Hyperreality, Simulacra, Intercultural Communication, Cyberpunk 2077: Phantom Liberty, Digital Space

Introduction

In the context of globalization and the rapid expansion of digital media, intercultural communication increasingly takes place not only through direct contact between representatives of different cultures but also through virtual environments created by mass culture, digital platforms, and the game industry. Under these conditions, it becomes especially important to examine how digital simulations shape people's understanding of cultural diversity and influence their perception of intercultural interaction.

One of the most productive theoretical frameworks for analyzing this phenomenon is Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra and hyperreality. According to Baudrillard, in postmodern society signs and images no longer merely reflect reality; instead, they function as autonomous systems that replace reality and create a hyperreal space in which the boundary between the authentic and the constructed becomes unstable. In such a condition, cultural experience is increasingly mediated not by direct participation in reality, but by involvement in symbolic and visual models.

Digital game environments are of particular interest in this regard because video games have become one of the major channels through which global audiences encounter foreign cultures, urban imaginaries, and visions of the future. *Cyberpunk 2077: Phantom Liberty*, and especially its Dog Town district, offers a relevant case for examining how a game space can operate as a hyperreal construction in which elements of different cultures, architectural traditions, and urban aesthetics are integrated into a coherent but fictional system that has no direct real-world original.

The relevance of this study lies in the need to understand how such digital spaces participate in the production of cultural meanings and influence the development of intercultural awareness. The research problem emerges from the contradiction between the traditional understanding of intercultural communication as a sphere of authentic cultural contact and the contemporary reality in which a substantial part of cultural knowledge is formed through mediated and simulated environments.

The aim of this article is to analyze Dog Town in *Cyberpunk 2077: Phantom Liberty* through the lens of Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality and to determine how

this virtual environment constructs an intercultural space and shapes the perception of multiculturalism, globalization, and cultural difference. To achieve this aim, the article addresses the following tasks: to outline the main principles of Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and hyperreality; to identify the visual and spatial features of Dog Town as a digital environment; and to examine how this simulation influences the audience's understanding of intercultural communication in the digital age.

The novelty of the study lies in applying Baudrillard's theoretical framework to a contemporary video game as a medium that not only represents culture but also produces hyperreal cultural experience. The practical significance of the article is connected with its potential contribution to media studies, intercultural communication research, cultural studies, and the analysis of digital environments as spaces of symbolic and ideological influence.

Literature Review

Baudrillard's theory of representation and simulation went through several phases of development. In his early work, under the impact of semiotics, he thought that images were symbols that represented reality through structural relationships (signifier-signified). However, he increasingly argued that contemporary media culture has fundamentally altered this relationship. Baudrillard proposed four successive stages of the relationship between images and reality in *Simulacra and Simulation*: First, the image has real substance (standard representation); then it obfuscates and distorts reality (bourgeois representation); the third is that the image conceals the absence of reality (simulation); finally, there is no relation whatsoever between the image and reality (complete simulation, hyperreality).

In this final phase, Baudrillard argues that simulations, characterized by late capitalism and postmodern culture, are no longer representations of anything. These entities are autonomous bodies with internal coherence and a certain degree of independence. The hyper-realistic urban landscape in a digital game is not a replica of the real world but a kind of reality that arises from players' feelings and cognition. There is no longer any difference between the real city and the virtual city in the simulation, and through this process, human beings will acquire knowledge,

perception, and sense of identity of the urban environment.

Baudrillard argues that hyperreality does not represent an escape from reality into fantasy. Hyperreality is not a negation of reality, but rather a kind of existence that has become present in modern times as an important basis for people to understand and face the world. Simulation is no less real than actual existence; On the contrary, it is necessary, feasible and of great social value. For Baudrillard, recognizing that people live in hyperreality is essential to understanding contemporary culture (Baudrillard, 1994).

Intercultural Communication and the Problem of Authentic Representation

Traditional ways of promoting intercultural communication are often that only by experiencing the cultural atmosphere, traditional customs and beliefs firsthand can one truly understand another culture. From this perspective, learning about culture through simulations or representations seems inherently limited, because the authentic voices or practices are missing, replaced by mediated versions shaped by outside perspectives. Whether there is ethnic authenticity in inter-ethnic education can be judged by whether a review of intercultural pedagogy has been carried out.

The framework is unable to explain the development of intercultural awareness under globalization. According to research, the main way children around the world learn about international culture is still through mass media, such as cinema and television, music, games and other social platforms; direct interaction is not their primary means of learning. For many audiences, media representations are not supplements to direct cultural experience but the primary source of cultural knowledge. The distinction between genuine and fabricated cultural experiences becomes blurred through imitation, which is primarily responsible for shaping individuals' perceptions of various cultures.

It means recognizing that in globalized contexts, intercultural communication increasingly occurs through participatory simulations. The relevant question is how media simulations actively constructs and distributes particular versions of culture, and how these constructions influence intercultural understanding.

Cyberpunk culture emerged as a genre with a particular focus on depicting a future

shaped by advanced technology and global capitalism. Its graphic tendencies to merge Eastern and Western motifs, such as neon lights combined with Chinese characters, Japanese firm emblems, Latin American urban cultures, and North American cybernetics, are not accidental; They aim to create images of planetary tomorrows. The foundation of cyberpunk's simulation is based on the fact that, under globalization, capital, technology and culture cross national borders rapidly.

The Dog Town in *Phantom Liberty* enhances this aesthetic project. Although this district is not a true depiction of the metropolis, it has integrated different hyper-realistic styles of global cities. This synthesis is deliberate and aesthetically conscious, because the designers have selected some cultural patterns, colour combinations, architectural styles and spatial arrangement methods to create their own globalized sky. There is neither arbitrariness nor neutrality after that; instead, people have different views on globalization, multiculturalism and the future.

The aesthetics can be understood as a remarkable manifestation of Baudrillard's hyperrealism. The "high-tech, low-life" contradiction central to cyberpunk is not a representation of actual social conditions but a stylized, dramatized simulation that has become influential in shaping how people think about technology and society. Each time young people worldwide come into contact with cyberpunk images through media, cinema and television, or digital games, it is said that they are interacting with fabricated simulations and thus form their own perceptions of reality. This type has become the pattern of visual presentation for technological foresight, and it has had some impact on actual life in architecture planning, art creation and other fields of cultural work.

Materials and Methods

This thesis presents spatial and visual analysis of Dog Town as a hyper-realistic environment in *Cyberpunk 2077: Phantom Liberty*. Based on this game framework, an entire narration simulation can be carried out in a new culture and across different boundaries. The analysis focuses on: identifying how the space synthesizes elements from multiple actual locations into a coherent simulation; examining the internal logic and aesthetic consistency through which the simulation generates its own

reality; analyzing how this hyper-realistic space shapes players' understanding and experience.

The author played the DLC for approximately fifty hours and is familiar with the game's spatial design and cultural semiotics, NPC dialogue samples, and architectural literature. The analysis employs qualitative visual and spatial methods approach to evaluate whether the simulated environment has organized cultural symbols, whether it can evoke an aesthetic experience, and based on this, plan paths and activities for players. The thesis considers Dog Town as a bounded case study of hyperrealism in digital game design, recognizing that this single case cannot support broad generalizations but can illuminate mechanisms by which digital simulations construct and distribute particular versions of culture.

Results and Discussion

Dog Town is an imaginary metropolis and does not correspond to any specific real city. Instead of this, it integrates building elements, social symbols and aesthetic ways from all over the world into one place; such an environment does not exist in reality. Nevertheless, through this integration, it creates a highly realistic metropolis that provides reference for many players to understand what a global, multicultural city is like.

The district's aesthetic organization reveals this hyper-realistic logic. Neon-lit towers stand beside savage corporate skyscrapers. Chinese commercial signs share visual space with Japanese corporate logos and South American street murals. This composition includes components that should coexist in actual metropolises; the simulation has lost its sense of geography and time in explaining why these specific elements cluster together. To maintain consistency in style, it needs to be the same; therefore, this particular colour scheme, cutting-edge industrial surfaces, and a high visual density are features of the cyberpunk aesthetic. The space is organized around aesthetic principles rather than the logic of a real city.

This aesthetic organization is precisely Baudrillard's point about hyperrealism. Hyperreal settings do not represent real multiculturalism; instead, they form an independent system with its own coherence under the norms of art and architecture.

Players can experience a sense of connection and meaning within these spaces even though they are not genuine representations of cultural fusion; it is because the designers have achieved aesthetic equilibrium and space harmony. Baudrillard's theory of specific simulation suggests that there is fabrication without prototypes, and it has its own autonomous existence.

The practical effect is that Dog Town becomes what Baudrillard would call a "hyperrealistic simulacra"—more real in its consistency and impact than actual multicultural cities, which are often more chaotic, contradictory, and aesthetically incongruous. Players who explore Dog Town may develop a sense of what global multicultural futures might feel like that is in some ways more vivid and memorable than exposure to actual multicultural cities. The simulation has generated its own affective and cognitive reality.

Hyperrealism does not exist in isolation; it becomes generative through circulation. When a simulation reaches thirty million players worldwide, such as *Cyberpunk 2077*, it will carry cultural significance. Players have disagreements online over Dog Town, create fan art related to it, and incorporate its style into their own work. Hyper-realistic simulations circulate through social media, streaming platforms, and cultural discourse, becoming part of how millions of people think and imagine a globalized, multicultural future.

It will also help promote the international exchange and spread of Chinese culture. Each time the players encounter some visual symbols of Japanese culture in Dog Town, such as samurai patterns and corporate logos of Arasaka Corporation, etc., it goes beyond merely representing Japan. Through the power of dissemination and repetition, it constructs a highly realistic model of Japanese aesthetics that serves as an authoritative standard for Japanese cultural beauty in the minds of many players. Although this highly realistic Japanese does not correspond to the actual situation of modern-day Japan, it will inevitably influence how members of the global community perceive Japan.

This hyperrealism operates differently across player communities. For Japanese players encountering *Phantom Liberty*, Dog Town's "Japanese" elements might be

understood as recognizable aesthetic references but also as simulations—a stylized, exotic version of Japanese culture. At the same time, for non-Japanese participants, these parts may have opposite effects and appear to carry Japanese cultural traits; thus, the entire environment is in a hyper-realistic state. When there is no basis of culture for reference, the differences between reality and imagination have become recognizable.

Baudrillard thinks that hyperreality usually imitates an even more realistic state at a higher stage. Simulation can be more realistic, vivid and close to reality than actual life. It is set up for the purpose of creating an ideal visual and auditory effect. The dazzling neon lights, complex spaces layouts and aesthetic coherence of Dog Town may appear more realistic—vividly depicting a cosmopolitan future—than the actual cities where cultures collide and merge, which are chaotic and contradictory.

This creates what might be called the “paradox of authenticity” in intercultural communication through simulations. The more skillfully designed the simulation, the more it may feel authentic and representative. Subjects may develop a sense of certainty about many communities through their participation in highly realistic situations and be unable to distinguish between fiction and reality, failing to realize that what they see is not an depiction of real-life social custom but rather fabrication. The visually realized virtual environment has a sense of reality that is comparable to the actual world.

Phantom Liberty has used an unconventional design framework to achieve the aestheticism of realism. Producers in the CDPR beautify cultural diversity, and ethnic symbols have visual beauty, emotional resonance, and meet beauty standards. The artistic refinement makes it more emotionally moving for symbolic marks. Therefore, this kind of “hyperreal cultural literacy” has been produced, that is, adapting to the digital simulated environment of culture rather than experiencing real interaction with traditional culture.

Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality states that traditional views on intercultural interaction emphasize real cultural competence, and thus may not be able to effectively explain how modern people construct their own intercultural identity. If

people increasingly encounter other cultures through digital simulations rather than direct contact, then the current cultivation of cultural awareness needs to learn how to break down and appraise such artificial environments.

This creates both risk and possibility. The risk is that players may regard the emulated culture as genuine culture and therefore form an incorrect understanding in interaction with the highly realistic simulation, without being aware of the complexity of real culture. The possibility is that simulations can serve as a gateway to genuine intercultural engagement. Simulations also reveal some aspects of culture that are not easily observed in daily life, such as the inheritance of art, values and social norms.

The crucial point is that Baudrillard's framework suggests intercultural communication in the context of globalization necessarily operates through hyperreality. Simulations is not an imperfect "mirrors" but explore ways to question how the simulation system shapes and diffuses culture. They should help people understand how interaction occurs in the simulation, grasp the mental state that generates it, and cultivate cultural awareness of what is included or excluded in a particular simulation.

Phantom Liberty operates not merely as entertainment but as an institution generating hyperreal culture. Baudrillard views it from the perspective of the hyperreal field, which is an inherent feature of modern society. Simulations provide a virtual environment for people to observe the phenomena of globalization. Although this idea is not far from reality, it provides a structural Framework for people's lives at present and shapes their imagination of the future direction of the whole world.

This institutional role becomes clearer when considering the game's narrative scope. *Phantom Liberty* does not merely depict a multicultural city; it tells a story of intercultural conflict, cooperation, betrayal, and alliance. It creates an approximate real environment for ordinary people to experience their own visions and problems in the process of international integration and cultural blending. Imitate some interaction methods with ethnic pluralism through the game mechanism or plot selection. Players do not simply regard Dog Town as aesthetic spectacle; they live within it, make

choices within it, and experience consequences of their intercultural engagements. Simulation can not only meet the need for aesthetic enjoyment but also realize prototypical production and serve as a good example of intercultural communication.

Practical Value

For game designers and developers, the framework clarifies how game spaces function as hyperreal constructions that shape cultural understanding. Designers can take these suggestions as references and, based on their production plans, decide which cultural symbols to include in the game and promote. Cultural representation is not only an explanation of things but also constitutes a part of the mechanism for producing and disseminating hyperrealistic culture.

For media studies and communication scholars, the thesis demonstrates the continuing relevance of Baudrillard's theoretical framework for understanding contemporary digital media. Instead of regarding hyperreality as a factor that hinders or estranges people from reality, some scholars may find that the fabricated events have functional values and are used to explore how virtual reality affects intercultural communication in an international environment.

This thesis focuses on a single game and examines how *Phantom Liberty* constructs hyperreal multicultural space. The analysis does not include empirical data on how actual players from different cultural backgrounds interpret and engage with the game's hyperreal culture. The hyper-realistic multiculturalism in this thesis has not yet examined whether different groups of people experience it differently. Substantive subjects in the represented societies, such as Chinese and Japanese players, Latin Americans, etc., may have different understandings of hyper-realized cultural displays when compared to those who do not participate directly. This kind of participation is not yet at the level of current academic research.

In addition, some views of other scholars have also not been considered in this paper. Moreover, Baudrillard's theory has not been thoroughly studied either. Refinement in assessment has already been realized, and it may have continued to improve it at the core level continuously.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Dog Town in *Cyberpunk 2077: Phantom Liberty* can be understood as a hyperreal intercultural space through the lens of Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and hyperreality. Rather than representing any single real-world city or authentically reproducing existing multicultural conditions, Dog Town constructs a coherent digital environment composed of selected architectural forms, cultural symbols, and urban aesthetics drawn from different global contexts. Its significance lies not in its fidelity to reality, but in its ability to function as an autonomous simulation with strong visual, spatial, and emotional persuasiveness. In this sense, the game environment exemplifies how digital media can create hyperreal spaces that do not merely imitate reality, but actively reorganize it into a new cultural model that audiences may perceive as meaningful, immersive, and even more legible than the complexities of actual multicultural life.

The analysis also suggests that contemporary intercultural communication must increasingly be understood within the framework of digitally mediated experience. For many players, virtual environments such as Dog Town are not peripheral to cultural learning but constitute an important site where ideas about globalization, diversity, and cultural difference are first encountered and interpreted. Therefore, video games should be viewed not only as entertainment products but also as cultural mechanisms that shape perception and circulate influential models of intercultural reality. From this perspective, Baudrillard's theory remains highly relevant for examining how simulated environments participate in the production of cultural meaning in the digital age. A critical understanding of such hyperreal constructions is essential if intercultural competence today is to include not only engagement with lived cultures, but also the ability to interpret the simulated cultural worlds through which those cultures are increasingly imagined.

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