On the Application of Postmodernism Film Aesthetics in Cartoon Films

--Taking the Movie "Spider Man: Crossing The Universe" As an Example

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Abstract

The comic film Spider Man: Crossing the Universe, which will be released in June 2023, breaks the traditional mode of the film, and creates a colorful animation world with cartoon style, combining "punk collage", "American comic", "Impressionism watercolor" and other art forms. This kind of Postmodernism artistic style makes the film very distinctive, becoming a distinctive existence in comic films, and also provides new ideas for the development of comic films.

Keywords

Animated Movies; Postmodern Art; Impressionism Watercolor Style; Cyberpunk Style.

1. The Development Status of Comic Movies

Comic films refer to film works adapted from comics, including animation production and live action filming. Its characteristics are: rich imagination in the plot, a complete worldview system, distinct character traits, and strong entertainment. In 1941, the film series "Captain Magic's Adventures" was released, and the manga adaptation into a movie officially kicked off. As of March 2023, the second highest grossing film in global film history, "Avengers 4," is a film adapted from Marvel Comics. Comic films represented by Marvel and DC have been box office guarantees for Hollywood films in recent years. With the continuous development of art and film production technology, Hollywood has adapted more and more comics into movies, using special effects technology to make the visuals more realistic and restore the story and character images of comics as much as possible. However, with the improvement of the audience's aesthetic ability, the conventional storylines, single character relationships, and patterned forms of expression in comic films can no longer meet the audience's aesthetic needs. But some innovative filmmakers are trying to open up new ways of expression for comic films.

The Spider Man: Crossing the Universe, released in June 2023, breaks the adaptation style of traditional comic films, strives to restore the scene and atmosphere in the cartoon in the picture performance, adds the collision between the new and the old in the setting of character relations, and creatively collages and reshapes comic books, animation and Postmodernism art forms, making it a distinctive existence in comic films.

2. The Aesthetic Characteristics of Postmodernism Film in Spider Man: Crossing the Universe

There is no clear definition of Postmodernism in academia. Some people believe that it is a subversion of modernism, while others believe that it is an extension of modernism. Jameson, a famous American sociologist, once said: "Modernism is characterized by Utopian assumptions, while postmodernism is the close combination of culture and industrial production and

commodities." [1] As an art form, film itself has certain characteristics. Postmodernism films introduce some subversive and marginal topics into the theme in an avant-garde and avant-garde manner. Its main characteristics are manifested in breaking traditional creative patterns, using multi element painting styles, and fragmented collage styles. The following will take Spider Man: Crossing the Universe as an example to analyze the application of Postmodernism aesthetics in this film from these characteristics.

2.1.   Disrupting traditional creative methods

The most prominent visual feature of the work "Spider Man: Crossing the Universe" is its "manga style", which is adapted from the manga and brought to the screen. Its core creative concept is to use existing CG technology to first complete basic animation modeling, and then collide different colors, strokes, styles, and materials to create a diverse universe, presenting the audience with "a moving comic." Compared with previous single style animated films, this film breaks traditional rules and borrows the concept of parallel time and space, bringing together various artistic styles in one work, continuously collage and reshape, Create a spider universe like a Kaleidoscope. Secondly, cartoon monologue bubbles, Onomatopoeia, manuscript notes, dialog boxes, text effects and other elements also appear in the film screen. When the commonly used expression techniques in these comics appear on the movie screen, it brings a brand new visual experience to the audience. In addition, the special effects of shuttling through time and space, explosions, sparks, collisions, etc. in the film not only have a comic style treatment, but also use high saturation colors, making the film's visuals very avant-garde. This visual effect breaks the traditional style of film creation and injects new vitality into the development of animated films.

2.2.   The integration of American comic style

The strongest visual feature in this film is "manga like". Comics belong to the two-dimensional static category. Although "Spider Man: The Universe" is a three-dimensional animation, it boldly attempts to abandon tradition and directly combines comics with the work. The most prominent American comic style should be the 1610 Universe where Spider Man Miles is located. The 1610 universe in the film originates from the creators' love for the classic comics of the last century. They present a large number of comic Onomatopoeia words, facial expression lines and cartoon frames, as well as the most sophisticated halftone technology. Halftone originated from the "Bendai dot" technology in Hectograph, which was invented by Benjamin Henri, an illustrator and printer in the 19th century. He used the principle of Optical illusion of the human eye to produce new color effects by arranging the size and spacing of dot images so that they overlap. For a long time, this printing method has greatly reduced the printing cost for color comics, and therefore has become the visual feature of a generation of paper comics. In this film, halftone technology is not only used to restore printing texture, but also creatively used to create depth of field effects. The foreground and background are cleverly distinguished by dots, while providing a "background virtual focus" effect that is different from 3D realism for the film. As a unique style of Miles' universe, the application of halftones can be seen in the scenes of the supermarket where villain spots appear and the school where Miles is located. These bright colors, tough art styles, and full lines are integrated into the American style of animation, showcasing a strong and unique theatrical and dramatic tension.

2.3.   The Application of Watercolor Illustration Style

According to the character settings in "Spider Man: The Universe", Gwen, the female Spider Man of Universe 65, became dull in her personality after her friend's death, deepening her estrangement from her father and unable to confide in her father and reveal the truth. In order to highlight this character's image, the main color design of the 65 universe she is in is taken from Gwen's Spider Man combat uniform, and the large number of color blocks and graphical

processing are derived from the cover of the first volume of the Spider Gwen comic. The picture of the film makes use of the characteristics of watercolor illustration to connect Gwen's mood and environment and show it in the background and environment. Gwen's inner entanglement and struggle just coincide with the characteristics of the hazy Watercolor painting painting. For example, at the beginning of the film, when Gwen and his father became estranged, the scene was divided into distant and close shots with white comic frames, creating a spatial isolation; When the two attempted to reconcile, Gwen rushed from one side of the grid to the other, and the colors of the two were also tinged and fused like drops of watercolor. The fluidity and transparency of watercolor were best annotated; When Gwen hugged his dead friend, the scene was a stagnant red in the mist; When Gwen, wearing a mask, had to face a confrontation with his father, the red color flowed in the background in a flushing manner, resembling the emotions that constantly surged when we were sad; When the father and daughter reconciled, the background remained the same red, but this time it turned into a melted warm color until the color gradually disappeared in the latter half of the film. The halo of watercolor illustrations is well reflected in Universe 65, with colorful colors that allow viewers to enter Gwen's world.

2.4. The collision between ancient art and modern art

According to the plot of Spider Man: Crossing the Universe, the parallel world is disrupted due to special reasons, and organisms from different time and space can shuttle back and forth. The creator uses this plot to overturn traditional cognition, satirize the present with sharp language, and issue the theory of "what is art". In the universe of the film Spider Man Gwen, a vulture from the "Renaissance" appears. It has the texture of parchment, the helmet of the plague doctor, the bubble sleeves of the Middle Ages, and the iconic Steampunk wings of that era. The image of a vulture is derived from Leonardo da Vinci's "Bird Flight Manuscript," and every time he spreads his wings to attack, there is a descriptive "annotated note" next to it. It is worth noting that in this manuscript, Leonardo da Vinci used mirror writing, with all the text written from right to left, which is also shown in great detail in the film. When the vultures walk through the modern Guggenheim Museum, the first thing they see is Jeff Koons's 1988 sculpture A String of Puppies, and the shape of this sculpture is completely copied from a photo taken by photographer Art Rogers in 1985. As a representative of misappropriation art, Kuns' works often come from existing images and objects in reality, and every exhibition and auction is accompanied by a controversy about "what art is". Therefore, after crossing the art gallery, the vulture extensively destroyed contemporary art works, mocking "this is also considered art" and cutting off sculptures designed by Kuns. The film blends and collides cultures by showcasing works of art from different periods and unconventional visual styles.

2.5. The setting of Cyberpunk style

Cyberpunk "was originally a type of science fiction novel that constructed a world of advanced technology in the future, and in the film, the 928 universe showcases this futuristic technological style well. The 928 universe represented by Spider Man 2099 Miguel O'Hara is extremely rational, self-control, and technologically advanced, making it a New York city completely controlled by artificial intelligence. The design inspiration for this world comes from the concept art master Syd Mead, who created the concept art for "Aliens", "Blade Runner", and "Electronic World Warfare", using black as the overall color tone and high saturation colors to create future urban scenes. Syd follows rigorous industrial logic, and in his design drawings, he can always see a large number of reference lines that have not been erased, as if the vehicles on the drawings can really be built in real life. These sharp reference lines are also preserved by the creators in the universe where 2099 is located. The auxiliary lines during the painting process can be clearly seen on Miguel's face, shoulders, wristwatches used to shuttle through the universe, and even the lamps of the 928 universe. The battle between him and Miles on the Railroad speeder is the most representative paragraph of the Cyberpunk aesthetics of the film.

In this scene, all pencil sketches, marker composition drawings, and even handwritten coloring requirements have been retained by the creative team. These powerful sketches, like the broken "fourth wall", are the dialogue between the creator and the audience, declaring the same sincere love for the old art, In the logo screen of the movie title, one can also glimpse these painting details that exist in the 928 universe. These extremely regular lines not only exist as a style in Miguel's universe, but also more or less symbolize his meticulous personality as a leading figure, as well as the shackles brought to him by this world. The setting of 928 universe in Spider Man: Crossing the Universe is consistent with the concept of Cyberpunk style, which has Postmodernism aesthetic characteristics and paves the way for the film's cool style. When Spider Man Miguel shuttles through the future technological world, the audience is deeply attracted by this style and consciously integrates into it.

2.6. The "collage" of punk rock style and mandala style

Habu Hassan, the father of postmodern cinema, believes that 'collage' refers to a mixture of genres. The characteristic of postmodern cinema is the collage of various interesting, classic, satirical, and stylistic scenes, breaking through traditional forms and achieving a new form of expression. In the movie "Spider Man: Crossing the Universe", the creator designs different concepts of parallel time and space, and "collages" different styles and artistic forms to make the plot interesting and vivid. For example, Hobby Brown, the punk Spider Man portrayed in the film, whose visual aesthetics is as easy to identify as his musical style. He resists the system, opposes Consumerism, and opposes stereotyping. Therefore, the "background board" of punk Spider Man is full of aesthetic orientations completely opposite to expensive capitalist copper magazines. The sense of torn hands of cheap newspapers, the cynical sans serif font, and the modern sense of mortality printing and black and white Xerox copying, these Collage filled with the voice of rebellion and anger, have been printed on performance posters, pamphlets and album covers, and have been circulated by generations of young people on the streets of London in the 1970s. In the original cartoon, Hobby Brown was bitten by a spider contaminated with toxic nuclear waste, and the dumpers of those nuclear waste were the powerful President Osborne. From then on, Hobby took his Electric guitar and led the masses to fight against Osborne. This story indeed has a common connection with the spirit of the "punk movement". In addition, this image has also been influenced by contemporary cartoonists Jim Mahfood and Ashley Wood. The aesthetics of punk rock come from the flat, so Hobby Brown is also the character with the lowest frame count and the most 2D feel in the movie.

Another special Spider Man appeared in the Parallel universe, Indian Spider Man Pavetta, is a Spider Man with a "Mandala" color. The 50101 universe he is in is a color "mandala" that extends downward, in contrast to the dynamics of other universes. In this Futurism mixed city formed by the collision of Manhattan and Mumbai, the production team drew inspiration from India's "Indrajal" cartoons in the 1970s. In many scenes, the film uses the printed "overflow", using large color blocks to paint the background with dense lines, Create a multi-level and dense urban architectural complex in India. As a Spider Man who gained superpowers from mystery, Pavita's movements, facial and body painting all come from traditional Indian Taiyam, Yakshakana, and Henna patterns. This style of setting does not create a sense of distance for the audience, but instead brings them closer to each other, allowing them to experience the Indian world of singing and dancing with their bodies.

These diverse styles were pieced together in "Spider Man: The Universe" without any sense of conflict, but with a compact rhythm and a sense of freshness everywhere, giving people visual enjoyment, forming a novel Spider Man universe as a whole. The innovation of this film is, on the one hand, to build a new animation film aesthetics through collage of different Postmodernism artistic styles; On the other hand, through the design of the concept of Parallel universe, the image of Spider Man with different universes and styles is displayed, breaking

through the screen style of previous animation films, so that the audience can understand different artistic forms and cultural backgrounds, and achieve an immersive effect.

3. Reflections on the Creation of Comic Movies

With the development of the Internet, people's cultural needs have begun to show a diversified development trend, and the audience's aesthetic standards and appreciation abilities are also constantly improving. Traditional forms of animated films can no longer meet the current audience's viewing needs. Postmodernism thought provides a new idea for animation film creation. The Postmodernism aesthetics shown in Spider Man: Crossing the Universe breaks through the limitations of traditional film style, promotes plot narration in bold and exaggerated forms of expression, and also gives a refreshing feeling in the presentation of visual effects.

Throughout the development history of animated films, the new styles of films were not achieved overnight, but were accumulated through continuous practice and improvement. So, on the basis of the current development of animated films, we should constantly innovate, integrate new artistic styles, absorb advantages, boldly innovate, break tradition, and create rich and diverse animated films.

Acknowledgements

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