

Study on the Transmedia Storytelling Practice of “Spider-Man”

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Abstract. From perspective of transmedia storytelling case practice, the derivative creation of “Spider-Man” series films is considered as the main research subject. From the aspects of official creation and fans’ derivative works, the transmedia storytelling practice is summarized as two typical modes: the film-and-game interacting mode usually dominated by the authorities, and the “fans culture” creating works mode mostly participated by fans of films.

Keywords: *transmedia storytelling, “fans culture”, fan works, “Spider-Man”*

1. Introduction

Henry Jenkins(2009) described transmedia storytelling industry practice with seven principles: Extensibility, drillability, unity, diversity, immersion, abstraction, world construction, continuity, subjectivity and user performance. In the transmedia storytelling industry practice, comics and novels are often used as original works to provide the world view and background settings of the whole story so as to construct the world. With strong publicity and high artistic level, films can show all kinds of details and improve the extensibility and drillability. With a long duration and wide dissemination, the TV series can explore the highlights of characters, extend the vitality of the story, and provide the possibility of diversity while maintaining unity. The highly interactive nature of the game can give the player the pleasure of immersive experience, making it truly fully integrated into the whole story. This process reflects continuity and subjectivity, and maximizes immersion and abstraction.

2. Films and Games

Jenkins emphasizes in his book: "There is a strong economic motive behind the transmedia storytelling. Media convergence makes the flow of content across multiple media platforms inevitable. In an era when digital effects and high-resolution game graphics have become mainstream, the game world and the film world have become remarkably similar -- they are reusing the digital resources of the film world. The structure of the modern entertainment industry is designed with a simple concept -- to build and strengthen the entertainment product system." Under the trend of adaptation between films and games, they have become two engines worthy of recognition in the transmedia storytelling convergence trend of the entertainment industry.

As is known to all, the first “Spider-Man” film premiered on May 3, 2002, achieving an unprecedented success. But what few people know is that the game of the same name “Spider-Man: the movie” went on sale on April 15, half a month ahead the film's release. The game producer is Activision, a famous third-party video game producer and publisher in the United States. Before that, an action game named “Spider-Man” had launched on September 17, 2001. Then with the release of the films "Spider-Man 2" and "Spider-Man 3", the company released the Games meanwhile. Even after the end of the old "Spider-Man" series, the game production has not stopped. At an average annual rate, they has successively launched “Spider-Man: Friend or Foe”, “Spider-Man: Web Of Shadows”, “Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions” and “Spider-Man: Edge of Time”. Until 2012, Sony Pictures restarted the "Spider-Man" series with the film "The Amazing Spider-Man”, so Activision released the game of the same name at the same time. After the cooperation with Sony was strengthened, the game was no longer limited to the computer platform, but boarded the PS3 Game Platform developed by Sony. Afterwards, when the shooting plan of "The Amazing Spider-Man” was put aside, Activision seemed to have forgotten the development of the series games. Until July 1, 2017, it released VR game "Spider-Man: Homecoming" to the

market to preheat the release of film. From the game to the movie, and then from the movie to the game, there has been a cycle of 15 years. As Mike Antonucci of the San Jose Mercury News commented: "Transmedia storytelling is not necessarily 'smart storytelling', but it's really 'smart marketing'."

Game development belongs to franchise products of films, and is different from the general sense of derivative (plastic toys authorized to sold by McDonald's, etc.). The reason why it can be regarded as an important part of transmedia storytelling is that it can mobilize players to supplement the film narrative spontaneously. Through the propaganda and introduction of "Spider-Man" series of games, it has always been closely linked to the core concept of "playing Spider-Man". Even in "Spider-Man: Edge of Time", players alternate between the common Spider-man and Spider-man 2099. Here, the concept of Marvel sharing universe is introduced, breaking through the time limit of the movie. The characters are no longer limited to one specific "Spider-Man", instead the game give the audience more information clues, filling in the previous narrative gap of the movie and linking simple linear plots into a network, leading to fully reflecting the continuity and subjectivity of transmedia storytelling. Meanwhile, players are free to choose the development path of the leading role, whether to become a unique savior or degenerate into a demon of annihilation, or even take an unusual anti-hero way. It helps enlarge the empathy effect of audience when watching the movie, and finally reach the point where virtual characters and real experience are combined. In "The Amazing Spider-Man", the players can even explore the story world with high freedom. It can be said that the game narrative pulls the players into the image world defined by the algorithm rules, clearing the boundaries between virtual and reality, so as to immerse them in the story world at all times. In addition, it can mobilize the subjective initiative of the players to a great extent, so that they can enjoy the story by participating in interactive exchanges, games and other ways. The players are allowed to extract the information they want from it and make their own texts. In the process of practice, the immersion and extractability of transmedia storytelling will expand the story world infinitely and inject inexhaustible vitality into the "Spider-Man" series.

3. Films and "Fans Culture"

The development of digital technology will transform the world originally based on photocopy, postal service and face-to-face contact into that of digital network communication. The communication between people becomes open and free while breaking the shackles of physical space, but also produces a more closed and private "circle" relationship. In the Internet Age, the flood tide of participation by the whole people is unstoppable, and the most important part of transmedia storytelling practice is developed in the fandom. Fans consider fandom as an informal community with equality, reciprocity, sociability and diversity. Fans clearly know what they are participating in, and can feel the happiness brought to them by participating in the production and circulation of media content. In this context, understanding, production, incubation and circulation, as potentially meaningful forms of participation, have strong links between them. Therefore, fans create a new story world on the basis of the original story world construction with their own experience and cognition. At this time, fans have the dual identities of text consumers and cultural producers (or textual poachers), and they can transform each other.

It can even be said that with the gradual disappearance of man-machine boundaries, the original identity of passive textual consumers as followers is gradually blurred. The self-identity is no longer constrained by social ethics. People can freely define multiple identities in the network, that is, "the self is separated in all directions". The communication between people becomes the transmission and processing of data. Each person labels himself or herself with various labels, and makes a complex correspondence between multiple abstract symbols and multiple personal identities. In the era of explosive new media information, people's self-identity has also become fragmented. On the Internet, people can diversify their identity at will. Female readers can cross gender and seek recognition in other characters. By sorting out the labels of Spider-Man's creation, we can clearly see the current female "cross gender" identity consciousness. In LOFTER, the largest fans'

transformative works community website in China, Spider-Man ranks sixth in the European and American popular creation list; in the European and American fan works list, Spider-Man's related co-creation labels "Spideypool", " Parksborn ", " Peter Parker/Tony Stark " are ranked seventh, eleventh, fourteenth and fifteenth respectively, with tens of thousands of related creation participation. In the world's largest English fans' transformative works website "Archive of our own(ao3)", Spider-Man's most popular label is also " Spideypool ", with 3272 results. The main content of the derivative texts created by these fans can be summarized as follows: Spider-Man and his male friends or enemies finally develop a story beyond friendship after experiencing various events. The creators are mostly female fans. "The process of reconstructing the pre-text reflects the sense of identity, freedom and carnivalism of the interest-related group of young women. They enjoy the surreal cyberspace, parody the classics and reconstruct the sublime, to create the literature form belonging to the group label." Surprisingly, one of the most frequent labels in the retrieval is "Spider-Man-All Media Types". Here we can see the receiver' unconscious acceptance and conscious use of transmedia storytelling, which shows the success of the "Spider-Man" series of transmedia storytelling practice in the receiver dimension.

4. Conclusion

All in all, spider-man films have made a lot of feedback creations from the perspective of transmedia storytelling practice, which has given the story a new and different development direction after the media narrative expansion. Although these derivative works spread on different media platforms, they all point at the same story world setting, from which emerges rich and diverse development possibilities. In the end, the spider-man films have established a continuous transmedia industry network among films, games, comics and "fan culture", which can not only break the audience's expectation horizon, but also meet the audience's needs.

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