

Disney Star Wars, Disney and myth-making

迪士尼 星球大战,迪士尼和神话创造

How one company came to master the business of storytelling

一个公司如何成为兜售故事的商业传奇

FROM a galaxy far, far away to a cinema just down the road: "The Force Awakens", the newest instalment of the Star Wars saga, is inescapable this Christmas. The first Star Wars title since Lucasfilm, the owner of the franchise, was acquired by Disney in 2012 for \$4.1 billion, it represents more than just the revival of a beloved science-fiction series. It is the latest example of the way Disney has prospered over the past decade from a series of shrewd acquisitions (see article). Having bought Pixar, Marvel and Lucasfilm, Disney has skilfully capitalised on their intellectual property—and in so doing, cemented its position as the market leader in the industrialisation of mythology. Its success rests on its mastery of the three elements of modern myth-making: tropes, technology and toys.

从遥远的星际抵达你周边的电影院—《星球大战 7：原力觉醒》这部星战系列的最新影片就在圣诞期间上映，不容错过。早期星战系列电影出自卢卡斯影业名下，该公司在 2012 年被迪士尼以 41 亿美元收购。不仅又让拥趸颇多的科幻系列重回影迷视野，还成为迪士尼公司另一个成功收购案例—在过去十年，迪士尼走了一条通过成功收购而实现蒸蒸日上的发展路径（另见文）。它先后收购了皮克斯，漫威和卢卡斯影业，并巧妙的利用自己的知识产权获益。在这一过程中，迪士尼也巩固了奇幻题材故事产业的领导者地位。它的成功依赖于掌握了现代奇幻电影制作的三大要素：类型化，高科技和相关玩具产品。

From Homer to Han Solo

从荷马到韩·索罗

Start with the tropes. Disney properties, which include everything from "Thor" to "Toy Story", draw on well-worn devices of mythic structure to give their stories cultural resonance. Walt Disney himself had an intuitive grasp of the power of fables. George Lucas, the creator of Star Wars, is an avid student of the work of Joseph Campbell, an American comparative mythologist who outlined the "monomyth" structure in which a hero answers a call, is assisted by a mentor figure, voyages to another world, survives various trials and emerges triumphant. Both film-makers merrily plundered ancient mythology and folklore. The Marvel universe goes even further, directly appropriating chunks of Greco-Roman and Norse mythology. (This makes Disney's enthusiasm for fierce enforcement of intellectual-property laws, and the seemingly perpetual extension of copyright, somewhat ironic.)

先从类型化说起。迪士尼旗下的众多作品，包括《雷神》、《玩具总动员》等等，都采用了老调重弹的神话故事架构来让观众产生文化共鸣。沃特·迪士尼自身非常清楚寓言故事的魅力。星战系列导演乔治·卢卡斯热衷于借鉴约瑟夫·坎贝尔的作品。坎贝尔是一名比较神话学者，他提出了“神话故事原型论”（Monomyth）。即在一个英雄的旅程当中，英雄主角需要完成一个使命，他通常在某个导师的指引下去到另一个世界，历经千难万险最终成功。两大电影制作公司也钟情借用古代神话和民间传说。漫威超级英雄更夸张，直接取材于许多古希腊罗马和中世纪斯堪的纳维亚的神话。（这让一向严格实施版权保护，并不停延长其版权期限的迪士尼公司，看起来多少有些讽刺。）

The internal mechanics of myths may not have changed much over the ages, but the technology used to impart them certainly has. That highlights Disney's second area of expertise. In Homer's day, legends were passed on in the form of dactylic hexameters;

modern myth-makers prefer computer graphics, special effects, 3D projection, surround sound and internet video distribution, among other things. When Disney bought Lucasfilm it did not just acquire the Star Wars franchise; it also gained Industrial Light & Magic, one of the best special-effects houses in the business, whose high-tech wizardry is as vital to Marvel's Avengers films as it is to the Star Wars epics. And when Disney was left behind by the shift to digital animation, it cannily revitalised its own film-making brand by buying Pixar, a firm as pioneering in its field as Walt Disney had been in hand-drawn animation. Moreover, modern myths come in multiple media formats. The Marvel and Star Wars fantasy universes are chronicled in interlocking films, television series, books, graphic novels and video games. Marvel's plans are mapped out until the mid-2020s.

神话故事架构可能未随时间流转变样，但是让其流传开来的技术手段却日新月异。这也是迪士尼公司科技特长的精彩所在。在荷马史诗的年代，英雄故事要用长短格六步格韵体写就；而在现代，计算机绘图，特效，3D，环绕立体声，在线视频转发等等媒介就能够承载这些故事。迪士尼买下卢卡斯影业不仅获得了星球大战系列的版权，还同时把光影魔幻工业（特效行业最佳公司之一）收入囊中，这家公司对星战系列的重要性不亚于它对成就复仇者联盟做出的贡献。动画制作在数字化转型，老牌迪士尼曾一度跟不上脚步，但收购皮克斯使其动画制作重焕生机。毕竟皮克斯在数字动画制作领域的地位堪比当时手绘动画时代的沃特·迪士尼。而且，现代奇幻作品通常采用多平台推广，漫威和星战就陆续出品系列电影、电视剧，图书，漫画和电游。漫威影业要推出的作品续集已经排到了 2020 年。

But these days myths are also expected to take physical form as toys, merchandise and theme-park rides. This is the third myth-making ingredient. Again, Walt Disney led the way, licensing Mickey Mouse and other characters starting in the 1930s, and opening the original Disneyland park in 1955. Mr Lucas took cinema-related merchandise into a new dimension, accepting a pay cut as director in return for all the merchandising rights to Star Wars—a deal that was to earn him billions. Those rights now belong to Disney, and it is making the most of them: sales of “The Force Awakens” merchandise, from toys to clothing, are expected to be worth up to \$5 billion alone in the coming year. In all, more than \$32 billion-worth of Star Wars merchandise has been sold since 1977, according to NPD Group, a market-research firm. Even Harry Potter and James Bond are scruffy-looking nerf-herders by comparison.

但是，目前神话故事也将以实体形式呈现，如玩具、商品和主题公园等形式，这也是神话创作的第三要素。沃特·迪士尼成为了行业中的典范，从二十世纪 30 年代开始，他们为米老鼠以及其他的一些角色申请专利，并于 1955 年开放了最初的迪士尼乐园。卢卡斯将电影相关产品带上了新的维度，作为导演他接受降低薪资以换取所有有关星球大战的商品权——这个协议让他赚了数十亿。这些商品化权现在隶属于迪士尼，并得到了充分利用：从玩具到服装，《原力觉醒》相关商品的预期销售额仅明年一年就能达到 50 亿美元。美国市场调研机构 NPD 集团的调研报告显示，自 1977 年起累计，销售星球大战附加品已带来 320 亿美元的收入。与之相比，甚至连哈利波特和詹姆士邦德看起来都是如此的上不了台面。

Those other franchises are reminders that Disney's approach is not unique. Other studios are doing their best to imitate its approach. But Disney has some of the most valuable properties and exploits them to their fullest potential. It is particularly good at refreshing and repackaging its franchises to encourage adults to revisit their childhood favourites and, in the process, to introduce them to their own children. This was one reason why Pixar, whose films are known for their cross-generational appeal, was such a natural fit. Now the

next generation is being introduced to Star Wars by their nostalgic parents. At the same time, Disney has extended its franchises by adding sub-brands that appeal to particular age groups: children's television series spun off from Star Wars, for example, or darker, more adult tales from the Marvel universe, such as the "Daredevil" and "Jessica Jones" series on.

其他系列电影表明，迪士尼的策略不是唯一的。其他一些影城也竭尽全力地效仿迪士尼的做法。但迪士尼拥有最有价值的资源，并能最大程度开发这些资源，尤其擅长再更新和再包装其产品，以此鼓励成人回忆他们的童年最爱，在此过程中，将喜好介绍给自己的子女。皮克斯擅长制作吸引两代人的电影，这也使得它与迪士尼的合作成为天作之合。现在，怀旧的父母们也将把星球大战传承给下一代。与此同时，迪士尼通过增加吸引特定年龄的子品牌拓宽系列经营权：例如，源于《星球大战》的少儿电视节目，始于漫威宇宙系列的更黑暗、更成人化的故事，比如网飞公司的《超胆侠》和《杰西卡琼斯》等电影。

Do, or do not—there is no try

要么去做，要么放手，没有尝试一说

What explains the power of all this modern-day mythology? There is more to it than archetypal storytelling, clever technology and powerful marketing. In part, it may fill a void left by the decline of religion in a more secular world. But it also provides an expression for today's fears. The original "Star Wars" film, in which a band of plucky rebels defeat a technological superpower, was a none-too-subtle inversion of the Vietnam war. The Marvel universe, originally a product of the cold-war era, has adapted well on screen to a post-9/11 world of surveillance and the conspiratorial mistrust of governments, large corporations and the power of technology. In uncertain times, when governments and military might seem unable to keep people safe or stay honest, audiences take comfort in the idea of superheroes who ride to the rescue. Modern myths also have the power to unify people across generations, social groups and cultures, creating frameworks of shared references even as other forms of media consumption become ever more fragmented.

当代神话故事为何有如此大的魅力？绝不仅仅是原始的讲述故事、灵活的科学技术和强大的营销能力。在某种程度上，这种神话可以弥补当下越来越世俗的世界中宗教地位下降带来的空虚。然而，这也表现出了现代人的恐惧。在最初的电影《星球大战》中，讲述了一个勇敢的反叛者对决强大的科技超能量者，这实际是越南战争的写照。漫威宇宙系列，最初是冷战时代的产物，在后 911 时代，监视无处不在以及人们对政府、大公司和科技力量等的不信任，漫威调整创作，将后 911 时代精彩地呈现于荧幕。在不稳定时期，当政府和军队似乎无法保证民众以及自身绝对忠诚时，民众便只能寄希望于拯救世界的超级英雄。即使在媒体消费的其他形式变得越来越碎片化的时候，当代神话也可以跨越时代、阶层、文化将人们联合起来，创造出一个拥有一些共性的架构。

Ultimately, however, these modern myths are so compelling because they tap primordial human urges—for refuge, redemption and harmony. In this respect they are like social-media platforms, which use technology to industrialise social interaction. Similarly, modern myth-making, reliant though it is on new tools and techniques, is really just pushing the same old buttons in stone-age brains. That is something that Walt Disney understood instinctively—and that the company he founded is now exploiting so proficiently.

然而，究其根源，现代神话的魅力是因为它激发了人们对于庇护、救赎与和谐的原始诉求。在这方面，它们更像是工业化的社交平台，使用技术使得社交产业化。同样地，现代神话创

作加入了新工具和新技术，也不过是旧瓶装新酒。这是沃特·迪士尼领悟到——并正在有效地运用于他所创立的公司。