

# *Technology and Reason: an Aesthetic Study of the World View of Steampunk Movies*

Qian Liu

*Television School, Communication University of China, 100024, China*

**Keywords:** Steampunk movie, World view, Aesthetics

**Abstract:** Steampunk movies originally came from literary works, and gradually evolved into a unique style movie through adaptation and fusion. Steampunk movies are full of longing for science and technology and the embodiment of human rational spirit. Analysis of the worldview in its aesthetic characteristics, including postmodernist time-space view, infinite admiration of technology, rebellious speculative spirit, utopia and dystopia, and finally summarized The aesthetic significance of steampunk movies is to reflect the typical characteristics of contemporary literary thoughts.

## 1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, a unique and fantastic art style has emerged. It emerged in the American science fiction world in the 1960s and 1970s. It was not until the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. A science fiction novelist gradually “alienated” into an artistic style, which is steampunk. “Steam” and “Punk”, two cultural elements that are about a century apart, are integrated in the postmodernist aesthetic spirit that has emerged since the 1960s. Steampunk was born in literary works and quickly transferred to movies. It is a cross-media transfer of artistic style. Its main position for entering movies is in science fiction movies, but it does not specifically refer to science fiction movies. Other types of movies have steampunk elements. It can also be called a steampunk style movie, which is a kind of extended and fuzzy, cross-genre style movie.

Steampunk-style movies mostly describe the Queen Victoria era in the 19th century. Therefore, its aerial time and space characteristics give the movie a unique aesthetic. Coupled with the combination of steam industry and punk style, it presents a hybrid charm. Movies usually use classical Bring elements into modern fantasy, and finally combine reality and surrealism, ability and superpower, retro and modern, fantasy and technology, reason and fantasy, fine and rough, classic and rebellious, these elements of different eras and different styles are collaged and blended , Presents a strong sense of incongruity, and brings the audience a unique and meaningful fantasy world with great tension. The aesthetic characteristics of steampunk movies are mainly manifested in the creation of the movie worldview by the creators, and their rebellious and speculative inner spirit highlights the aesthetic propositions of postmodernism.

Steampunk collages the two elements, “steam” and “punk”, which were born more than a hundred years apart, and merges them into a unique style, which is particularly prominent in movies. Steampunk movies have two major visual elements represented by “steam” and “punk”, with the rebellious speculative spirit of “punk”, which embodies the avant-garde aesthetic practice of

postmodernism, and is inextricably linked to “cyberpunk” Links, but different from wasteland movies<sup>[1]</sup> And cyberpunk, steampunk has specific aesthetic characteristics and aesthetic significance.

## 2. Postmodernist View of Time and Space

According to Ihab Hassan, an American who actively promotes postmodernism, the earliest origin of the term “postmodern” can be found in the “Spanish and American Poems” edited and published by F. Onis in 1934. In a sense, postmodernism is not so much a generalization of a theoretical trend of thought with a common essence, but rather a description of various thoughts in a specific time and space full of experiments and adventures.<sup>[2]</sup> The time and space settings of early steampunk movies were mostly defined in the Victorian era of the past 19th century. In that era, advanced and backward coexisted. Some people were in cars, while others were in carriages; magic and science coexist, and manned robots fought. Some people use magic to fight against; a modern metropolis typified by London has appeared, the house has a wooden spire, and the road is covered with cobblestones; imaginative means of transportation, such as planes, airships, cars, trains, ships and Submarines; multiple forms of energy coexist, including coal, oil and wind energy. Electricity has become a new energy source, as well as imagined energy; propellers, gears, pistons and bearings have begun to be used in large quantities in machines and tend to be huge; robots It has also been applied to the army. Later, due to the development of information technology, there are often settings that are not restricted by time and space. Shuttle in the past, present, future, reality and imagination. More creative trends have spontaneously rushed out of the most prominent overhead time and space in steampunk movies. , Imagine the characteristics of the future and history. In the history of the nineteenth century, the real space that can be followed is usually intertwined with scientific imagination and even fantasy magic. Therefore, fictional space-time and real space-time history are formed in parallel.

The British writer Charles Dickens published the novel “A Tale of Two Cities” in 1859, reflecting Paris in 1850 in London before and after the Revolution in the late 18th century. The novel started like this: “That is the most prosperous time, that is the most declining time; that is the time of wisdom and enlightenment, that is the time of chaos and ignorance; that is the time of faith and sincerity, that is the time of suspicion. ; That is the sunny season, that is the season of long nights and darkness; that is the thriving spring, that is the lifeless winter; we have everything before our eyes, we have nothing before our eyes; we all go straight to heaven, we all go straight to Another way-in short, that era and this era are so vivid and vivid, even among its most screaming authority figures, some insist that it can only be used regardless of whether it is good or bad.’ “The most” character expresses its degree.” [[English] Charles Dickens. “A Tale of Two Cities” Translated by Zhang Ling and Zhang Yang, Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2012] The “this era” written by Dickens here is exactly the Victorian era. Its complex and multiple faces can be seen in this text.

During the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), the British Industrial Revolution that began in the middle and late 18th century began with fruitful results. The application of the improved Watt steam engine in 1785 was the most significant achievement of the British Industrial Revolution. This improved steam engine provides a strong power foundation for large-scale industries. By the 1830s, steam engines had been widely used in textiles, metallurgy, transportation and coal mining and other fields, and caused a series of technological innovations. The entire Victorian era was the most prosperous era of the British steam industry. Steam power technology has a powerful force to promote social progress. People's attitude towards machinery has rapidly changed from initial fear to acceptance, and they are highly aware of the benign changes brought about by industrial

development. During this period, a new adjective Victoria-Victorian era was added to English.<sup>[3]</sup>

Adapted from the hot American drama in the 1960s, the movie “Hot Wind Warriors” emptied time at the end of the 20th century. As a classic of “steampunk” movies, it became the most invested film released in 1999 with a huge investment of 180 million. . In works with such a large number of steampunk elements, the bizarre fantasy based on sophisticated machine technology provides the possibility for narrative and provides greater development space for the plot. The story of “Attack from Heaven” was overtaken 100 years ago. It was an ancient empire under the rule of Queen Victoria. At that time, the whole Europe was in chaos, multi-national disputes, army rebellions, and lives were destroyed. The time and space settings of the movie are not only the model of the “Steampunk” movie “Magic + Technology”, but also the combination of the external form of “Steampunk” and the complete narrative logic. “Hugo” not only defines the time and space of story development in Paris, France in the 1930s, but also pays tribute to pioneers such as Verne and Mélière through a design that travels through time and space in the plot, which is consistent in constructing the inner spirit of man and machine. Sex made an attempt.

The animated film’s expression of “steampunk” is also amazing. The works of Japanese director Hayao Miyazaki in different periods such as “Castle in the Sky”, “Spirited Away”, “Nausicaa”, “Porco Rosso”, “Howl’s Moving Castle”, etc., are all fascinating Unique imagination time and space setting. Among them, as a steampunk-style movie, “Howl’s Moving Castle” opens up a fantasy journey of time-space transformation for us. First, the story time is defined in Europe at the end of the 19th century, and it also incorporates the background of the eve of the war. The opening of different castle doors is Different time and space, this definition breaks the universal definition of a single time and space fantasy fantasy in steampunk movies, and opens up the possibility of fantasy that different time and space travel freely through each other.

The overhead setting of time and space, closely fitting postmodernism, is the primary element of the worldview of steampunk movies. By imagining the limitation of time and space, often in the Victorian era of the 19th century, the emphasis was on the prosperity of the British Empire at that time. Everything seems to be at the top of the world's economy, politics, culture, and technology. In that era, everything was possible.

### 3. Infinitely Advocating Science and Technology

In the steam power era before the popularization of electricity, the technological level was far from comparable to modern technology. The logic of the realistic story of this historical period is that steam technology as a new type of technology represents unprecedented progress and hope, but it is also restricted by many conditions. However, steampunk movies start narrative in the way of “imagining history”, and the first thing to break is the narrative logic of reality. Steam power and mechanical transmission are rooted in the scientific and technological realities of the 19th century, but can be realized at the current or future technological level. This is a completely idealized narrative logic that transcends reality, and the expression of this narrative logic is reflected in the infinite exaggeration and infinite worship of science and technology in the film.

The most typical is the infinite exaggeration of science and technology in “Steam Boy”, which imagines technology as an infinitely possible worldview. In the movie, the prosperity and prosperity of the British Empire are unobstructed, where steam technology symbolizes unlimited power, economic power and productivity. People are full of yearning for flying, the deep sea and the unknown world. The steam city with complex facilities and complete functions symbolizes the maximum power of steam. In the eyes of Lei's father, the power of steam is the most powerful scientific force, which can liberate the labor force of all mankind. Science is the ultimate force in reality, and mankind receives unlimited blessings. His concept can be said to represent the central

idea of the power center and chaebol group at that time. And Lei and Grandpa Stephens believe that the full power of steam symbolizes the greatest ability of mankind, and this ability exists for the happiness of mankind. Without a country, there would be no human stability. The infinite exaggeration of the power of the steam engine in the movie is also a typical steampunk worldview.

With this transcendent logic as the starting point of the story, steampunk movies satisfy people's inner desire for retro and nostalgia, and at the same time raise people's expectations for energy imagination. Steam technology is not only a basic technology in the 19th century, but also a fictitious high-end technology with extraordinary power. With this amazing steam technology, combined with unlimited imagination, people don't have to be too serious, just accept it and use it as a belief. In this sense, science and religion are two fundamentally different ways of understanding the world, but they seem to be equal in the world of steampunk movies. Here, steam technology with extraordinary energy is the supreme supreme belief, replacing the ancient religious beliefs and realistic logic in the world.<sup>[4]</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

The movie is full of “Utopia and Dystopia” shaping and controversy. On the one hand, I hope to fully demonstrate the great convenience and infinite possibilities that technology brings to modern civilization. On the other hand, I question the gap between spiritual civilization and material civilization, and worry about being powerful. The science and technology of China will bring disasters, alienate people who are trying to use improper technology to obtain wealth and power, and guide us to reflect on the current reality of society and to observe ourselves. It represents a positive and continuous pursuit of truth. Looking forward to a beautiful and peaceful world and a progressive civilization. In the changes of literary and artistic thought, steampunk movies have embodied some typical characteristics of western modern and contemporary literary thought through film language, with profound cultural connotations.

#### References

- [1] From Baidu Encyclopedia-Wasteland movies are a sub-genre of science fiction movies.
- [2] Wasteland movies are designed to explore the world after civilization is completely destroyed after a huge disaster. These deadly disasters come in various forms, such as nuclear war, plague, alien invasion, robotic uprising, side effects of scientific development, natural disasters, supernatural phenomena, religious trials, etc.
- [3] Lu Guishan. *Chinese Contemporary Trend of Thought in Literature and Art (Third Edition)* . China Renmin University Press, 2014, P144
- [4] Wu Qiuya, Du Hua. *Transcending the Unsurpassable Steam Era--The World View of Steampunk Movies. Contemporary Cinema*, 2019(05):126
- [5] Wu Qiuya, Du Hua. *Transcending the Unsurpassable Steam Era--The World View of Steampunk Movies. Contemporary Cinema*, 2019(05):127